NEGOTIATION AND SURVIVAL AT THE JUNCTURE OF TWO
INSTITUTIONALIZED FIELDS

by

BARRETT JAY TAYLOR

(Under the Direction of Sheila Slaughter)

ABSTRACT

Evangelical Christian colleges sit at the intersection of two different and often conflicting institutionalized fields. While their faith commitments demand fidelity to religious principles, their role as academic organizations compels acknowledgment of concepts such as academic freedom. Previous social scientific research explains these colleges as the result of purposeful efforts by individual administrators or ministers. This study instead draws on neo-institutional theory to highlight the ways in which these colleges reflect the dominant, if conflicting, norms of their cultural environments. Further, it utilizes scholarship in higher education finance and the critical theory of Pierre Bourdieu to conceptualize these colleges as reliant on material resources rather than simply concerned with beliefs and ideas. These theories illuminate qualitative data from three case studies. Findings indicate that simple readings of neo-institutional theory can prove reductionist, but that more nuanced approaches coupled with Bourdieu’s work highlight the ways in which cultural practices shape the material resources to which a college has access, even as material resources assume cultural meaning.

INDEX WORDS: Colleges, Evangelicalism, Organizational theory, Pierre Bourdieu
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Evangelical Christian colleges face different, and often competing, demands from their status as both educational and religious organizations. On the one hand, professionalized expectations of faculty work, credentials, and administrative processes characterize higher education. These discourses carry their own internal logics. Thus, for example, the bulk of the American professoriate views academic freedom as a concept protecting individual faculty members from censure on tasks related to their scholarly activities (American Association of University Professors, 1940). On the other hand, denominations, foundations, and other bodies generally elect to support a college in the expectation that the campus will adhere closely to the teachings of a particular faith tradition. Religious bodies tend to expect fidelity to the tradition even when its teachings conflict with widespread academic practice. Academic freedom, in this view, often indicates the freedom of a college to require statements of faith or limitations on research topics that restrict the liberties of individual faculty members (Bramhall & Ahrens, 2002; McConnell, 1990). As the example of academic freedom suggests, evangelical Christian

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1 In Urofsky v Gilmore, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld these writers’ view that academic freedom is an institutional right rather than an individual right (Slaughter, forthcoming). Legally, then, Bramhall and Ahrens (2002) and McConnell (1990) prove correct. In this proposal, however, I concern myself with evangelical Christian colleges’ interactions with the secular academy, not with the federal judiciary. As a result, I concern myself with the way that faculty members view academic freedom rather than the legal status of that concept. The prevailing opinion of most faculty members appears to accord with the traditional AAUP definition rather than with the ruling in Urofsky v
colleges face substantial challenges insofar as they attempt to inhabit both educational and religious realms. I refer to the manner in which a college responds to these two potentially conflicting imperatives as the “problem of integration.”

Because evangelical Christian colleges face the problem of integration virtually by definition, almost all scholarship on these organizations addresses this dilemma. I review this research in the first chapter of this dissertation. While most scholars acknowledge the widespread prevalence of the problem of integration, however, comparatively few accounts emphasize the material dimension of evangelical Christian colleges. Yet these schools, like all organizations, require funds and credentialed labor in order to maintain their operations.

An emphasis on material resources calls attention to the reality that evangelical Christian colleges face the challenge posed by the problem of integration from different positions. Colleges differ dramatically in their financial resources. Some campuses draw from a wide range of revenue sources beyond tuition, and use these funds to provide lavish subsidies to their students. Others rely almost exclusively upon tuition revenues to cover operating expenses (Winston, 2004). This disparity in assets may be increasing. Some colleges use substantial surpluses to build endowment reserves, while others struggle to meet annual outlays. As a result, the gap between wealthy private colleges and their resource-poor peers grows over time (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2003). This frank discussion of finances may seem alien to a consideration of Christian belief and education, yet it also reflects the reality of evangelical organization building in the second half of the 20th century. Early 20th century evangelicals generally claimed that God would

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Gilmore. Academic freedom, in Slaughter’s (1994) words, continues to number among “widely accepted professional norms” for the professoriate (p. 59).
provide financial support in answer to their prayers. During the postwar decades, however, evangelical colleges, publishing houses, and mission agencies aggressively emphasized revenue generation. In Hamilton’s (2000) phrase, late 20th century evangelicals often “have shown less interest in proving God’s existence through their fund-raising strategies than in growing their ministries” by securing adequate financial backing (p. 107). In other words, insofar as money and skilled labor prove necessary for the propagation of the evangelical message, material resources constitute a crucial dimension of evangelical Christian colleges. I refer to the wide variance in the material resources commanded by one college relative to its peers as the “problem of stratification.”

Because evangelical Christian colleges articulate an explicitly religious mission rather than simply a charge of organizational survival, however, the differences among evangelical Christian colleges are not simply fiscal. Evangelicalism is a diverse, transdenominational religious movement that encompasses Protestants from a variety of theological and denominational backgrounds (Smith, 2000). Accordingly, evangelical Christian colleges demonstrate notable diversity in their religious dimensions. A college whose tradition is grounded in Reformation-era theology, for example, might look quite different than one that emphasizes behavioral strictures, dispensational thought, and Biblicism (Carpenter, 2000). The former can appeal to what Friedland and Alford (1991) termed a “symbolic resource” that is recognized in secular higher education because many colleges and universities study the Reformation as a historical phenomenon. The latter, by contrast, invokes a religious dimension that is solely the province of a particular
element of evangelicalism. Stratification therefore assumes both a cultural dimension in addition to its material guise.

Purpose and significance

The perils of ignoring material and symbolic stratification prove profound. Several works of recent scholarship have studied the problem of integration without explicit attention to within-group variance in monetary wealth, skilled labor, and beliefs and practices (e.g., Benne, 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008; Ream & Glanzer, 2007; Schuman, 2010). These volumes typically call for researchers to recognize the prevalence and influence of believers generally, and of evangelical Christians in particular, within the broader landscape of higher education. This line of analysis generally casts evangelical Christian colleges as active agents that chart uncommon courses. As a result, such accounts generally make little effort to understand the effects of stratification upon individual colleges’ efforts to integrate their religious and educational dimensions. In other words, emphasis upon the agency of individual organizations tends to under-state the role of the social structures, economic relations, and cultural contexts in which these organizations operate. Ignoring the effects of stratification tends to yield explanations that assume a simple relationship between agency and outcomes. In such accounts a particular group of colleges “keep faith” (Benne, 2001) or “see the light” (Schuman, 2010) despite great pressures to secularize. These colleges then prosper because they have committed themselves to a belief system held dear by many individuals. In this formulation, faculty members demand to work at such schools, and students desire to attend them.
The tendency to elevate individual agency while minimizing the role of structure and context reflects the prevalence of rational choice theory ("RCT") in contemporary social scientific research on religion. The RCT approach to religion, as articulated by exponents such as Stark and Finke (2000), utilizes the concepts of neoclassical economics to explain religious behavior. RCT casts individual decision-making as the foundational activities from which social patterns emerge. Belief becomes a choice. For example, individuals elect to become members of “strict” churches because these groups’ behavioral standards minimize the influence of “free riders,” or individuals who participate in church activities without contributing to the organization (Iannacone, 1998). Religion assumes the role of a commodity, individual actors assume causal roles, and context recedes into the background. Even works that do not cite neoclassical theory explicitly tend to reproduce RCT’s assumptions tacitly when they ignore the problem of stratification. Such inattention elevates the causal role of individual choices by minimizing the influence of context and structure.

While I draw extensively upon prior studies of evangelical Christian colleges, I argue that such analyses prove both conceptually impoverished and inadequate to qualitative evidence. These inadequacies stem directly from tacit reliance on RCT, an approach that minimizes the environments in which organizations operate. Instead, I suggest, a study of evangelical Christian colleges should ground itself simultaneously in the problem of integration, which foregrounds the agency of evangelical Christian colleges, and stratification, which emphasizes the context in which these colleges operate. To illuminate and guide my arguments, I draw upon neo-institutional approach to organizations and Pierre Bourdieu’s critical work. These two distinct bodies of theory
emphasize cultural and material context as explanatory factors that limit, inform, and channel the choices made by individual faculty members, deans, and administrators.

Because my account emerges from organizational and social theory rather than from the study of religion *qua* religion, I argue that this account makes two contributions to existing scholarship. First, I suggest that this account deepens understanding of evangelical Christian colleges by foregrounding the material dimensions of these organizations that are often neglected by other scholars. Such an analysis highlights some ways in which evangelical Christian colleges are very much like their secular and mainline peers. More provocatively, I suggest, it also indicates the important symbolic and cultural dimensions that material resources can assume in these contexts.

Second, because this study’s frame of reference is general social theory rather than its subject matter *per se*, I suggest that this account contributes to the broader enterprise of organizational studies in higher education. This level of significance indicates that material resources not only assume cultural roles at evangelical Christian colleges but, in different though patterned ways, at other educational organizations as well. Such generalizability can only emerge through consistent reference to existing bodies of social theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003). Accordingly, throughout the account, I argue against RCT’s approach to organizations as mere aggregations of instrumental actors, and advance a neo-institutional understanding of organizations as collective bodies situated in fields defined by particular cultural practices and material constraints. Simultaneously, however, I contend that the classic neo-institutional program proves too deterministic to account for the richness of observed qualitative data. Materiality as well as cultural practices shape organizations, and individual actors make
strategic choices within defined cultural and material horizons. In order to interpret these observations, I refine basic neo-institutional concepts with more recent insights from “micro-foundational” neo-institutional theory and from Bourdieu’s critical understanding of social fields and practice.

The reader may respond skeptically that my account tells us little about the theories that I employ because the colleges that I have chosen to study are by definition unusual. My reply to this charge is twofold. First, I contend that these colleges are unusual by degree rather than by kind. A great many researchers understand educational organizations as bodies defined by normative cultural practices rather than by the pursuit of technical efficiency (e.g., Brint & Karabel, 1991, 1989; Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988; Gamson, 1997; Meyer, 1977; Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1981; Tolbert, 1985). Evangelical Christian colleges may seem more cultural and less technical than most insofar as they respond to the cultural imperatives of the domains of religion and education. Yet neo-institutional theory provides ample reason to believe that such cases are of extreme interest because they are likely to offer dynamic representations of institutional patterns than otherwise might pass unnoticed (DiMaggio, 1998; Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Second, I argue that the use of unusual cases is a time-honored methodological approach (Creswell, 2007). Extreme cases prove likely to illuminate patterns shared by many members of a field (Foucault, 1977/1984). Indeed, such an assumption underlies many classic texts of higher education research, whether acknowledged explicitly, as in Burton Clark’s (1992) *The Distinctive College*, or implicitly, as in the numerous studies of the small numbers of AAU members or selective liberal arts colleges.
Theoretically and methodologically, then, the study of unusual cases constitutes a valid subject from which to construct understandings of broader patterns in US higher education. Indeed, such cases may help to refine central concepts from theory precisely because of their unusual qualities. In the following pages I seek to convince a skeptical reader that refinements of several central principles of organizational analysis emerge from what might appear to be *sui generis* cases.

**Overview and research questions**

This dissertation reports findings from a multiple case study research project that explores the problems of integration and stratification at three evangelical Christian colleges. I propose to examine the ways in which stratification, indicating different levels of cultural and material resources, informs three colleges’ responses to the problem of integration. Specifically, I posit three research questions:

1. How do three different evangelical Christian colleges attempt to integrate their religious and academic operations?

2. How does each college’s different level of symbolic resources, meaning theological heritage or organizational history, affect its operations?

3. How does each college’s different level of material resources, meaning money, tuition-paying students, and credentialed faculty labor, affect its operations?

In the first chapter of this dissertation report, I summarize prior theory and research on evangelical Christian colleges. This section provides definition of ambiguous terms such as “evangelical,” and traces the problems of integration and stratification in greater detail. By way of summary, it suggests that social theories that pay specific attention to cultural
and financial contexts provide greater insight into the conditions of evangelical Christian colleges than do theories that solely consider individual characteristics.

The second chapter of this dissertation report summarizes the two theories that I employ to frame research questions and illuminate findings. I begin with neo-institutional theory, which casts organizations as social bodies the respond to dominant cultural patterns. Neo-institutional theory highlights the ways in which conflicting imperatives from two distinct domains of society – education and religion – may produce tensions at evangelical Christian colleges. As such, this theory proves useful for understanding the problem of integration at these colleges.

In addition to neo-institutional theory, I present Pierre Bourdieu’s critical understanding of organizations as social bodies positioned at the intersection of cultural and material patterns. Bourdieu thus proves useful for illuminating the problem of stratification because his work explicitly recognizes the role that an organization’s relative social position may play in explaining activities at that organization. This emphasis upon relative position proves essential to the understanding of symbolic and material stratification that I advance throughout this report.

The third chapter of this dissertation report summarizes research methods employed to address the project’s research questions. I provide brief backgrounds on each of the three cases at which I conducted research, and summarize the number and type of qualitative data sources on which I drew. I also present safeguards taken to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings.

Chapters four, five, and six report findings from each of the three different cases at which I conducted research. My decision to report findings on a case-by-case basis
reflects my desire to present richer qualitative detail in the consideration of each case. Such an approach implicitly neglects cross-case comparison, however, in favor of consideration of the case itself. In order to address this concern, I have organized the three chapters as similarly as possible. I begin by presenting a brief and representative symbol of the case, and elaborate upon this symbol as a means of illuminating the organization’s particular qualities. I then present campus officials’ responses to the problem of integration and stratification.

This dissertation report concludes with a discussion of the implications of my findings for theory and for future research. Because I present findings on a case-by-case basis, I devote a substantial proportion of my concluding chapter to a restatement of case study findings. With these details in mind, I then consider the problems of integration and stratification across cases, and conclude by suggesting that a rich analysis of sampled colleges must consider both the symbolic connotations of certain sources of money and labor, and the material dimension of particular beliefs and ideas. I acknowledge and seek to address several limits of the study’s design, and offer ideas for a program of future research based upon this research project.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter summarizes previous theory and research that bears upon the research area of evangelical Christian colleges. I begin with a consideration of the “problem of integration,” which addresses the difficulties inherent in reconciling a symbolic culture built upon faith in religious propositions with a symbolic culture that tends to base valid knowledge upon evidentiary and peer-review standards. Much of the scholarship that I employ in this section comes from historical sources and from the sociology of culture and religion. Such sources prove readily available because the likelihood of conflicting symbolic domains receives wide acknowledgment in studies of evangelical Christian colleges.

The second section of this chapter draws upon research that proves more particular to the study of higher education. These sources illuminate the problem of stratification by indicating that evangelical Christian colleges not only must address the possibilities of cultural conflict, but also must secure adequate bases of material resources. As such, the majority of these sources utilizes financial or economic analysis, and may deal with the topic of evangelical Christian colleges only indirectly. Nonetheless, because evangelical Christian colleges are by definition colleges, I suggest that these concepts apply to a rigorous analysis of these organizations.
The problem of integration

In this section, I explore what I have termed “the problem of integration,” by which I indicate the set of difficulties implied by the coexistence of religious and educational demands within a single organization. I begin by considering what the term “evangelical Christian” means to sociologists and church historians. This exploration reveals evangelical Christians as committed simultaneously to Protestant orthodoxy and to engagement with the non-evangelical world. I suggest that these twin imperatives make the problem of integration virtually inevitable for evangelical Christians.

I then consider scholarship that is specific to evangelical Christian higher education. These works outline two concrete areas – the pursuit of credentialed faculty labor and tuition-paying students – in which the problem of integration may pose difficulties for collegiate operations. Because of their salience in previous research, these two particular difficulties appear in the research questions that frame my analysis.

Defining “evangelical Christians” and “evangelical Christian colleges”

During the closing decades of the 19th century, a broad coalition of American Protestants minimized longstanding doctrinal differences while accentuating broad points of agreement, such as the authority of Christian scripture and the duty to improve American society. These points of agreement often stretched across denominations, creating an “evangelical consensus” across most of American Protestantism (Schroedel & Brint, 2009). Evangelicalism marshaled broad support, measured both in the sheer number of its adherents and in the wealth and influence of some proponents. From this base, the movement substantially shaped American society. Indeed, the historian George
Marsden (1994, 1991a) referred to this broad evangelical alliance as a *de facto* “Protestant establishment” that governed much of the nation’s public life in the second half of the 19th century. During the Civil War, for example, preachers across a variety of Protestant denominations shaped parishioners’ views of conflict and peace (Stout, 2006). Evangelists such as Henry Ward Beecher became as renowned for their positions on abolition, Reconstruction, and evolution as for their theological refinement (Applegate, 2006). Although the evangelical consensus shaped many aspects of American public life, the position of evangelical Protestantism proved particularly strong at American colleges and universities. Indeed, religious authorities generally gained influence on these campuses in the decades after 1850 (Marsden, 1994; Potts, 1971).

Even as the “evangelical consensus” reached its apex, however, the movement’s influence faced challenges. The consensus exerted its greatest influence in education; accordingly, it also faced its greatest challenges on college and university campuses. Perhaps the most celebrated of these challenges emerged in the decades following Charles Darwin’s publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin’s model of evolution through natural selection questioned the explanation for the origins of life and matter that evangelicals derived from the first and third chapters of the book of Genesis. Simultaneously, the book symbolized the emergence of research and scholarship as hallmarks of collegiate and, especially, university education. Accordingly, archaeology, philology, and other academic investigations of antique sources quickly produced the same robust theories about the origins of Christian scripture that Darwin had gleaned from the fossil record. By the late 19th century the so-called “higher criticism” of the
Bible had replaced formal exegesis with the scrutiny of historical sources, etymological roots, and the archaeological record (Martin, 2008; Reuben, 1996; Winterer, 2002).

The evangelical Protestants who governed much of the academy generally responded to these challenges in one of two ways. Many evangelicals, often designated as “modernists,” engaged in the development of “natural theology” or other devices intended to reconcile religious orthodoxy with the sudden proliferation in academic knowledge (Marsden, 1994; Reuben, 1996). Others, however, contended that scholarly research contributed nothing but trouble to Christianity. These evangelicals styled themselves “fundamentalists” after a series of tracts, The Fundamentals, published from 1910 through 1915. These documents clarified principles such as scriptural inerrancy and the historical factuality of miracles that placed the movement directly at odds with Darwinian science and the higher criticism of the Bible (Marsden, 1980, 1977).

While fundamentalism represented a movement within evangelicalism, it also bore marks of the influence of other cultural forces. By continually emphasizing the knowability of right doctrine and the obligation to correct conduct, for example, fundamentalism evidenced the effects of the 19th century holiness movement (Brereton, 1990; Marsden, 1991a, 1991b, 1977). This belief in the possibility of human perfectibility made the fundamentals non-negotiable points of doctrine. Accordingly, fundamentalists responded to modernism by attempting to eradicate it from the Protestant denominations, colleges, and universities. By the middle of the 1920s, however, fundamentalism faced defeat on these fronts. The mainline denominations had fallen securely into the modernists’ hands (Marsden, 1980), and more than a dozen states had rejected anti-evolution legislation (Larson, 2003). Stung by these defeats, fundamentalists entered their
“separatist” phase, in which believers withdrew from public life to focus on personal rectitude in advance of the anticipated end of time (Dalhouse, 1996; Marsden, 1980).

The principle of separatism impelled fundamentalists to construct an independent body of institutions. These publishing houses, mission boards, and other organizations sought to preserve the fundamentalist message from the taint of modernism (Carpenter, 1997; Dalhouse, 1996; Marsden, 1987). One sampled case, which I refer to by the pseudonym Sewall College, dates its establishment to this time period. Its official documents hearken explicitly to conflicts over evolutionary biology between fundamentalist Christians and the majority of secular academics.

Among the many formal organizations associated with fundamentalist Christianity, Bible institutes and Bible colleges proved particularly significant for the codification and sustenance of fundamentalism as a social movement (Carpenter, 1980; Marsden, 1991a). These institutions tended to emphasize practical training, especially for overseas missionaries, rather than academic offerings. Programs generally required little prior training and typically lasted a maximum of two years (Ringenberg, 2006). Bible institutes also tended to be extremely small and extremely cash-poor organizations, nurturing what Brereton (1990) termed a “culture of scarcity” for schools that rarely secured regional accreditation, often required no formal education for admitted students, and relied heavily upon faculty members with a variety of sub-doctoral credentials. As I discuss more fully in chapters three and five, one of the sampled cases in this research project, Green Valley College, emerged from the Bible institute tradition.

By the early 1940s, a group of fundamentalists had become restless under the constraints of separatism. Fundamentalists such as Harold Ockenga and Carl F. Henry
viewed separatism as a repudiation of evangelicalism’s commitment to transform American public life. In an overt appeal to the Protestant establishment of the late 19th century, Ockenga and his allies termed themselves “neo-evangelicals” to signal their commitment both to the fundamentals of the faith and to a renewed entry into the public sphere. Ockenga’s group made its decisive break from the separatists in 1942. Because the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches (“ACCC”) demanded separatism of all affiliated individuals and organizations, this group organized itself as the National Association of Evangelicals, or “NAE” (Dalhouse, 1996; Marsden, 1987).

Over the second half of the 20th century, most evangelical Christians held fast to the NAE’s dual commitment to the fundamentals and to anti-separatism. This dual commitment prompted the sociologist Christian Smith (1998; Woodberry & Smith, 1998) to characterize the evangelical movement as “engaged orthodoxy.” This principle gave evangelical schools such as Fuller Theological Seminary a dramatically different shape than the Bible institutes. Where fundamentalists withdrew from the broader academy, Fuller faculty members such as E.J. Carnell sought to engage mainline scholars in debates over Christian faith and scholarship. Further, in keeping with the principle of “engagement,” these colleges and seminaries tended to offer courses and, later, departments in the academic disciplines (Marsden, 1987). One sampled case, Credo College, emerged from this movement. Although Reformed church officials established Credo in the decades prior to the establishment of the NAE, the College changed
locations and governance structures during the middle of the 20th century in part to reflect changes in US evangelicalism.  

Contemporary evangelicalism as a social movement

Although fundamentalism and evangelicalism continued to exist side-by-side in the decades after 1942, the two movements experienced widely different fortunes. The early 21st century found the fundamentalist ACCC (2010) home to approximately the same number of member denominations as had been the case in the 1940s. Each of these denominations represented a relatively small body of separatists Protestants. In other words, fundamentalist Protestantism, at least by this measure, demonstrated limited growth over a period of nearly seven decades. Evangelicalism, by contrast, grew dramatically beginning in the late 1970s (NAE, 2010).

As indicated by the two movements’ attitudes toward individuals of other faiths, the principle of separatism accounted for much of these differential growth rates. These differences become apparent through a consideration of evangelicals’ relationship to US politics. Evangelicals’ commitment to engagement with the broader world led to the adoption of strategic alliances with Mormons, Roman Catholics, and other non-evangelical groups in New Right organizations such as the “Moral Majority” (Zald & McCarthy, 1982). Through these alliance, evangelicalism came to constitute a powerful force in American political life (Lindsay, 2007). Evangelical belief proved a better predictor than gender or socioeconomic status of voting patterns in US presidential elections from 1960-1992 (Brooks & Manza, 1997). Evangelicals, particularly

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2 I have removed the book used as a reference for this sentence because its inclusion would reveal the identity of the pseudonymous “Credo College.”
evangelical women, therefore emerged as a powerful political force capable of influencing existing interests to reflect their own concerns (Moreton, 2009). On balance, then, political alliances both facilitated conversions to evangelicalism and granted evangelicals visibility and influence as members of the broader movement of social and political conservatism (Schroedel & Brint, 2009).

While this broad alliance with conservative politics characterized much of evangelical Protestantism since 1980, the movement remained far from monolithic. Evangelicals differ notably from one another in their attitudes toward social and political issues such as race relations (Edgel & Tranby, 2007; Smith, 2000). For example, a variety of “culturalist” evangelicals rallied to neo-Calvinist understandings of social life and argued that political change proved less important than the maintenance of distinctive educational infrastructure that provided academic instruction filtered through an evangelical Christian worldview. These neo-Calvinists effectively argued that engagement with the world through theology proved more important than transforming political institutions to reflect the group’s moral or social attitudes (Marsden, 1997). In sharp doctrinal contrast, “ultra-fundamentalists” such as Bob Jones, II viewed political alliances not as secondary to educational pursuits, but as compromises of orthodoxy. Political alliance, in this account, became problematic because Jones and his colleagues believed that Christians should separate themselves from all non-fundamentalists even when the two individuals shared similar viewpoints (Dalhouse, 1996). Accordingly, these “double-separatists” denounced the Moral Majority even as many leaders of the Moral Majority termed themselves fundamentalists, disdaining the term “evangelical” as evidence of doctrinal laxity (Marsden, 1991b).
The ongoing debate over separatism reshaped the way that many conservative Protestants thought about themselves and their beliefs. By the 1990s, many former fundamentalists considered themselves evangelicals. Accordingly, many Bible institutes came to identify themselves with evangelicalism (Hamilton, 2000). Yet evangelicalism did not grow solely by winning former fundamentalists to its ranks. The movement also drew converts from the modernist camp. In the first decade of the 21st century, more Americans identified themselves as evangelical Protestants than as members of any other religious tradition (Pew Center, 2008s). These growing numbers meant that evangelicals had secured representation among the nation’s political, cultural, and educational elites (Lindsay, 2007).

Growth brought turmoil alongside public influence. As a transdenominational movement, evangelicalism had demonstrated a great deal of theological and doctrinal diversity since the late 19th century. This diversity became even more pronounced as the movement grew by drawing converts from distinct religious traditions. On the one hand, many former fundamentalists now identified themselves as evangelicals. These individuals often retained fundamentalistic beliefs in the perfectibility of individuals, the ability to predict the coming end of the earth through dispensational theology, and Biblical inerrancy (Marsden, 1991b). Other evangelicals, particularly those associated with the movement’s “cosmopolitan” elite, adopted the more intellectualized approaches characteristic of the Dutch Reformed theologian-statesman Abraham Kuyper (Lindsay, 2007; Marsden, 1987). In schematic terms, then, some evangelicals demonstrate a quasi-fundamentalist “Biblicism” that often advances dispensationalism and a Holiness
approach to right living, while others prefer a far more abstracted and theological approach (Carpenter, 2000).³

As a result of these infusions of new adherents, evangelicalism displayed a tremendous range of theological and denominational differences at the dawn of the 21st century. This within-movement diversity can render evangelicalism virtually impossible to characterize (Eskridge & Noll, 2000). Evangelicals demonstrate a range of beliefs about worship structures, political activity, and social issues such as race and racism. Contemporary evangelicals therefore may share little besides their agreement on Biblical authority, or orthodoxy, and the importance of voluntary adult conversion. Beliefs and practices on political, social, and educational issues differ widely within this broad agreement (Edgel & Tranby, 2007; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Smith, 2000, 1998). Even the meaning of “Biblical authority” may be contested, as some espouse inerrancy in historical details while others proclaim that the Bible is authoritative only in spiritual matters (Marsden, 1991b, 1987). For these reasons, this dissertation project explicitly foregrounds variance in beliefs and practices – which I term “symbolic resources” – in its second research question.

Despite these variations in beliefs and practices, evangelicalism remains a relatively coherent movement. This coherence reflects two facets of contemporary

³ Of note, not all evangelicals fit readily within these two poles. Some evangelicals represent influences entirely alien to the fundamentalist-evangelical conflicts of the 1940s. For example, members of the churches of Christ attempt to ground their congregations in the principles of the New Testament church. Because these Christians generally view congregational autonomy as one such principle, members of the churches of Christ only rarely identified themselves with fundamentalism or evangelicalism in first two-thirds of the 20th century (Harrell, 2000). By the end of that century, however, many members of the churches of Christ considered themselves to be evangelicals (Balmer, 2006; Hughes, 1991).
evangelicalism. First, evangelicals dearly hold the few beliefs that they share. The conviction that evangelicals represent a disadvantaged group in the contemporary United States stands prominently among these shared beliefs. To be sure, evangelical scholars such as Carpenter (2000) often dispute the validity of this claim by noting that evangelicals enjoy political, legal, and financial advantages in the United States found in virtually no other country. The tenet of evangelical marginalization persists despite this evidence, however, and this sense of being an “embattled” group provides evangelicalism with a stronger sense of solidarity than its within-group diversity might at first suggest (Schroedel & Brint, 2009; Smith, 2000, 1998).

Second, evangelicals generally emphasize practical tenets rather than theological abstractions. Admittedly, evangelical elites in the realms of education and culture often take theological refinement very seriously. On balance, however, “rank and file” evangelicals dispense with such systematization in favor of a more practical orientation (Lindsay, 2007; Smith, 2000). This pragmatism de-emphasizes doctrinal differences within the diverse movement because individual believers, in Hamilton’s (2000) phrase, “tend to regard denominational particularities as personal preferences that are more or less irrelevant” (p. 111). Thus, while any discussion of evangelicalism must always keep an eye on the movement’s diversity of doctrinal or theological positions, it remains appropriate to refer to evangelicalism as a single movement.

*Evangelical Christian colleges and the problem of integration*

Evangelical Christian higher education largely parallels the evangelical movement itself. The term “evangelical” denotes a high level of respect for Biblical authority,
individual conversion, and practical tenets of worship and practice. Beyond these principles, however, “evangelical” encompasses a wide range of individual beliefs and practices (Smith, 2000). Just so, evangelical higher education incorporates several different kinds of schools.

Bible colleges tend to perpetuate the principles of the fundamentalist movement with which their establishment coincided. These schools primarily train students for ministry or mission, reflecting the urgency brought on by dispensational theology’s view of the impending end of the earth. Bible colleges also tend to espouse a distinct form of evangelicalism, often emphasizing right conduct and behavioral strictures in accordance with the influence of the Holiness movement (Ringenberg, 2006). With the notable exception of Moody Bible Institute, Bible colleges rarely achieved large enrollments or stable financial structures (Brereton, 1990). Despite their limited financial resources, however, many of these schools survived into the 21st century. Indeed, the Association for Biblical Higher Education (2010c), or “ABHE,” recognized more than 100 institutional members in 2010.

In some contrast to the Bible colleges, a second group of schools rally themselves to the standard of “Christian liberal arts” education (Hamilton, 2000; Mannoia, 2000). Whereas Bible colleges tend to emphasize education for ministry, schools in the Christian liberal arts tradition provide instruction in academic and pre-professional fields as would secular liberal arts colleges. Whereas most liberal arts colleges foreground academic instruction, however, Christian liberal arts colleges intentionally present academic context through the lens of Christian belief. This orientation retains an evangelical commitment to orthodoxy, yet it de-emphasizes the impulses toward urgency and
perfectability found in dispensational and Holiness theologies, respectively. As a result, Christian liberal arts colleges tend to be associated with the less fundamentalistic elements of evangelicalism. Instead, these schools tend to emphasize the intellectualized forms of evangelicalism that could provide the theological lens that their pedagogy demands (Marsden, 1998; Stackhouse, 2000). The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (2011), or “CCCU,” recognized 113 institutional members in 2011.

While evangelicalism remains a diverse movement, it nonetheless constitutes a single tradition. Thus, evangelical Christian colleges share some similarities despite their many differences. Smith (1998) employed the term “evangelicalism” to refer to a transdenominational movement that emphasized a few core tenets of orthodox belief, enjoined members to engage with the broader world, and tolerated a wide range of differences within the parameters of those two principles. These tenets imply that the relationship of evangelicals to higher education will be far more problematic than was the case for fundamentalists or modernists. The impetus to engagement indicates that evangelicals will not separate themselves from higher education, as did the fundamentalists. At the same time, the insistence upon points of orthodoxy may produce conflict with academic principles that modernists avoided. In other words, evangelical Christian colleges face acutely what I have termed “the problem of integration.”

Conflicts over the integration of religious belief and common academic practices often result in the ascendance of one sphere over another. In an example drawn from health care organizations rather than colleges, Swartz (1998) found that clergy representation among hospital trustees declined as hospitals professionalized their staffs by emphasizing the hiring of credentialed physicians and nurses. In other words, the
ascendance of a culture defined by the norms of professional medicine generally resulted in a decline in the culture of religious belief and practice. Evangelical Christian colleges explicitly seek to avoid this outcome by insisting on existence in both religious and educational spheres.

In this sub-section, I consider the possible effects of the ongoing challenge of integrating evangelical faith and academic work. I emphasize faculty work and student life as two areas in which the problem of integration may affect college operations.

Faculty. Faculty work provides one clear lens through which to view potential conflicts between evangelical and academic commitments. The value of this lens is not surprising given the role of research, graduate training, and professionalization in the disruption of the 19th century Protestant establishment. As a reflection of these changes, faculty members since the late 19th century have exercised control both over their own work and over the evaluation of their peers (Marsden, 1994; Parker, Beaty, Mencken, & Lyon, 2007; Reuben, 1996). To be sure, factors other than religious commitment threaten the professional perquisites that faculty enjoy in organizational governance. Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) traced the rise of “contingent faculty” who often are untenured and have little role in organizational governance. Increasing emphasis upon management technologies and entrepreneurial funding models further undermined this view of faculty work as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) Despite divergence between normative concepts and complex realities, however, the portrait of faculty work as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge certified by peer review remains entrenched as an ideal of American academic life (Carpenter, 1998; Parker, Beaty,
Mencken, & Lyon, 2007; Slaughter, 1994). In other words, this image of faculty work holds normative sway in the field of higher education.

Faculty work at evangelical Christian colleges often differs notably from this ideal type. For example, evangelical Christian colleges may employ far different tenure and promotion policies than do secular schools. The majority of colleges and universities decide promotion based upon scholarly productivity, teaching ability, and public service conducted. Schools such as Calvin College and Wheaton College, by contrast, often require evidence of spiritual growth, the submission of “faith and learning” statements, or other markers of religious advancement in addition to demonstration of achievements in teaching, learning, and service (Benne, 2001).

Differing models of academic freedom further differentiate evangelical Christian colleges from their secular peers. Conventional understandings of professionalization generally presume that academic freedom protects faculty speech on topics related to their disciplines (Slaughter, 1994). As codified by the Association of American University Professors (1940), this organizational principle proclaims academic professionals’ independence from administrative interference. Colleges that express evangelical Christian identities often view academic freedom differently. Evangelical Christian colleges often cast academic freedom as a principle that protects colleges’ and universities’ discretion in censuring individual faculty members who may transgress the religious codes. In direct contrast to the AAUP interpretation of the concept, then, advocates of this model often invoke academic freedom when requiring faculty members to sign professions of faith or behavioral oaths. In other words, rather than protecting individual faculty members from administrative or trustee interference, academic
freedom in this account defends the organization and its religious dimension from individuals who challenge that dimension (Bramhall & Ahrens, 2002; Ingram, 1986; McConnell, 1990).

Perhaps not surprisingly, trustees generally prove more amenable to governing a college in accordance with religious imperatives than do faculty (Ingram & King, 1995). Yet not all faculty members react unfavorably to such policies. Faculty members who share a school’s religious commitment prove far more likely to accept extra-normative models of academic freedom than do faculty members who espouse different religious orientations (Lyon, Beaty, Parker, & Mencken, 2005). As such, many conservative Protestant colleges actively seek to hire faculty members whose religious commitments substantially parallel those of the college itself (Ingram, 1996; Kirkemo, 1997). This strategy indicates that hiring practices constitute a crucial dimension of faculty life and work at evangelical Christian colleges.

Different evangelical Christian colleges face different challenges when making hiring decisions. These differences stem in part from the diversity of American evangelicalism. The search for coreligionists may prove relatively straightforward for colleges whose religious identity resides within a denominational structure. The Dutch Reformed tradition, for example, stands as a denomination that generally identifies itself with evangelicalism. Further, this denomination prioritizes education from the elementary through collegiate levels (Hamilton, 2000). Given these two realities, Reformed schools such as Calvin College may use both church affiliation and a candidate’s time as a pupil in a Reformed school as evidence that a candidate is suitably qualified for an appointment
at the school (Benne, 2001). Among sampled cases, Credo College fits within this pattern of denominationally-affiliated evangelical Christian college.

By contrast, many other evangelical Christian colleges represent a transdenominational movement rather than a specific denominational body. Such identification makes the identification of suitable candidates for faculty positions a challenge for many other schools. Any individual Presbyterian, for example, might or might not espouse an evangelical view of that tradition. Schools whose position in the evangelical tradition does not include a strong denominational tie therefore may rely heavily upon interstitial organizations such as Christian disciplinary associations, accrediting bodies, and membership organizations to identify promising candidates for faculty positions. Among sampled colleges, Sewall College espouses a nondenominational identity, while Green Valley College’s denominational charter explicitly welcomes evangelicals from other denominational traditions.

Evangelical Christian colleges face a second challenge when attempting to hire faculty members. Graduate school training tends to give pride of place to research, leading many faculty members to find “elite,” research-based careers to be the most rewarding (Hermanowicz, 2005, 1998). As the foregoing discussion of tenure policies and views of academic freedom made clear, however, evangelical Christian colleges generally prioritize religious commitments more highly than academic commitments such as research. Further, because such colleges are colleges rather than universities, they generally de-emphasize research relative to academic tasks such as instruction and service. This juxtaposition of priorities suggests another difficulty that evangelical Christian colleges may face in identifying, hiring, and retaining faculty members. Even
credentialed faculty members who are evangelicals may view schools that de-emphasize research as less prestigious than research appointments. Indeed, Mixon, Lyon, and Beaty (2004) found that research universities that articulated a Christian commitment in their mission statements often paid a “prestige penalty” in the form of higher mean salaries, net of other factors, than did secular schools. Coupled with the difficulty of identifying which candidates espouse suitable positions, the juxtaposition of research-based training and teaching-based work duties suggests that the hiring of suitable faculty members stands as a formidable challenge facing most evangelical Christian colleges.

Students. The student conduct policies of evangelical Christian colleges also differ markedly from those of most colleges and universities. The majority of secular and mainline student affairs offices allow students to conduct themselves with minimal oversight from college staff (Thelin, 2003). By contrast, virtually all evangelical Christian colleges place behavioral restrictions upon student conduct. For example, many such schools require regular attendance at chapel services (Hughes, 1997; Ingram, 1986; Kirkemo, 1997). Some schools also provide extensive extracurricular offerings shaped by the college’s religious commitments (Benne, 2001; Wells, 2002). This tendency to govern student conduct places evangelical Christian colleges at odds with their secular peers. Of equal concern, students’ preference for independence in their social lives indicates that restrictions on student conduct may depress demand for a particular college (Astin, 1998).

Evangelical Christian colleges’ religious commitments affect students’ academic lives as well as their extracurricular pursuits. The great majority of evangelical colleges and universities require students to pursue dedicated coursework in religion alongside
traditional academic offerings (Flory, 2002; Ingram, 1986; Mixon, Lyon, & Beaty, 2004). The form that these courses take often varies in accordance with a college’s position within evangelicalism. Some schools emphasize abstract theological concerns while others foreground Biblical literacy or Christian living (Benne, 2001; Hughes, 1997; Wolfe, 2000). These diverse forms often stem from a college’s denominational heritage. Differences in the form of religious instruction thereby reinforce the importance of a conceptual understanding of evangelicalism’s transdenominational heterogeneity to a robust study of the movement. Regardless of their particular form, however, required religion courses, like religious restrictions on student conduct, may serve to minimize student demand for evangelical Christian colleges because the majority of students espouse interest in college or university education chiefly as preparation for a particular occupation (Astin, 1998). Such students may perceive little value in compulsory chapel attendance or required religion courses.

Both behavioral strictures and required religion courses may limit the number of students who express interest in attending an evangelical Christian college. The transdenominational nature of evangelicalism further constrains evangelical Christian colleges’ ability to enroll large numbers of students. Much as proved to be the case with faculty members, identification with a movement rather than a denomination can make it difficult for colleges to identify which students would prove amenable to pursuing their educations at the college. Only a few evangelical Christian colleges can fill entering classes from a single denomination. Messiah College, for example, draws a comparatively small proportion of its undergraduates from the Brethren in Christ, the College’s sponsoring denomination (Jacobsen, 1997). Such schools then face the
difficulty of signaling their religious commitments to students who may share a common commitment to evangelicalism while hailing from a different denomination. As in the case of faculty hiring, the transdenominational nature of evangelicalism foregrounds stratification along denominational lines, as indicated in the project’s second research question.

The problem of stratification

As illustrated by the pivotal role played by Darwinism and the higher criticism of the Bible, conflict between evangelicalism and secular higher education often has centered upon the role of research. This enterprise is distributed asymmetrically across the landscape of contemporary American higher education. Elite natural scientists tend to view research as their primary task. These faculty members prove significantly less likely to be religiously observant than are other Americans (Ecklund, Park, & Veliz, 2008). Faculty members at teaching-focused colleges, by contrast, engage almost exclusively in instruction. These faculty members may demonstrate little difference in religious observation than do citizens who work in non-academic spheres (Gross & Simmons, 2008). This contrast suggests that organizational form – and the different expectations of faculty work inherent in different forms – may be of great significance for a study of evangelical Christian colleges. In other words, because faculty members at research universities engage in very different tasks than do faculty members at teaching-focused colleges, a study of evangelical Christian higher education should exercise great caution when considering colleges and universities alongside one another.
Scholars who ignore this heterogeneity of forms may find it difficult to draw implications from their findings. For example, Benne’s (2001) *Quality with Soul* posited an intriguing contrast between the curricula of Calvin College and Baylor University. Calvin, which Benne described as “integrationist,” sought to include theological content in every discipline. Baylor, by contrast, adhered to a “value-added” approach in which designated religion classes coexisted alongside courses that made little reference to specifically religious content. Benne suggested that this difference emanated from the two schools’ different denominational and theological heritages. Yet such differences may also result in part from the two schools’ different organizational forms. All other things being equal, it is not surprising that a liberal arts college such as Calvin placed a greater emphasis on undergraduate teaching than did a multi-purpose university. Baylor’s faculty members may have taught in a “value-added” manner not because of the school’s Southern Baptist affiliation, but because they spent a larger proportion of their time on research than did their peers at Calvin, and so gave less heed to their teaching duties than did Calvin’s faculty members.

Given the danger inherent in considering baccalaureate colleges (“BCs”) and universities alongside one another, I restrict this study to evangelical Christian colleges that emphasize undergraduate instruction. This decision allows for greater precision in refining findings than would considering multi-purpose universities alongside teaching based colleges.

The precise identification of organizational forms proves particularly important for a consideration of the problem of stratification. This occurs because universities, as multi-purpose institutions, have access to a wide range of revenue sources and expend
revenues on many different activities. BCs, by contrast, tend to emphasize a single activity – instruction – and to conduct related activities, such as student activities and small-scale research projects, as complements to that activity. As such, BCs tend to depend far more heavily upon single streams of resources than do universities. These colleges tend to rely heavily upon tuition for their revenues, and upon teaching faculty members for their labor (Desroches & Wellman, 2011; Toutkoushian, 2001; Wellman, Desroches, & Linehan, 2008).

This section explores the problem of material stratification, by which I indicate the wide dispersion of colleges as measured by their financial and human resources. The next sub-section briefly surveys the finances of BCs. This review suggests that most BCs rely heavily on tuition revenues, and that this dependence on a single activity often serves to increase differences in the levels of resources to which individual colleges have access. In other words, I suggest that stratification must be conceptualized along material lines as well as along the symbolic axis discussed in the previous section. It is this consideration of material as well as symbolic differences, I argue, that distinguishes this dissertation project from previous studies such as Benne’s (2001) work. The second sub-section considers the implications that financial stratification may have for college operations, and thus illuminates more fully the context in which I pose my third research question.

*Finances, tuition dependence, and general subsidies*

Colleges and universities assume a wide range of organizational forms, and these forms in turn shape the revenue sources on which individual organizations depend. Large multi-purpose institutions may derive income from many different sources, including
grants, contracts, licenses, and public appropriations. Small private colleges, by contrast, can access relatively few revenue sources. Most private BCs depend overwhelmingly upon tuition revenues (Desroches & Wellman, 2011; Toutkoushian, 2001; Weisbrod, Asch, & Ballou, 2008; Wellman, Desroches, & Linehan, 2008). Evangelical Christian colleges prove no exception to this general rule. While a few such schools maintain large endowments, the average evangelical Christian colleges derived almost three-quarters of its annual operating income from tuition receipts in the 1990s (Hamilton, 2000). This heavy level of reliance on tuition prompted Burkinshaw (2000) to observe:

> the ability to recruit sufficient numbers of students able to pay tuition and fees sufficiently high to meet most of the expenses is the single most important factor in the financial health of most such [evangelical Christian] colleges (p. 275-276).

To be sure, reliance upon a single revenue stream does not necessarily imply institutional poverty. Any individual college’s flow of tuition receipts may be robust. Indeed, Schuman (2010) noted that many evangelical Christian colleges experienced rapid enrollment growth in the 1990s and 2000s, and so collected robust tuition receipts as their campuses swelled. Such growth may provide for ample tuition revenues for any individual organization at any particular time.

No matter how robust the tuition revenue stream may be, however, dependence upon a single revenue-generating activity places an organization in a perilous position. Colleges generate tuition revenue by placing students in classrooms. Changes in student demand or a failure to hire adequately credentialed faculty labor may disrupt this revenue stream suddenly. The most salient characteristic of a BC’s finance is not that college’s
wealth or poverty, then, but the financial instability inherent in reliance upon a single revenue-generating activity.

A brief consideration of the general financial model employed by most colleges illustrates these perils in greater detail. Most firms in most industries produce goods at a particular cost. The firms then sell these goods for a price that exceeds that cost. The difference between the sale price and the cost of production constitutes the firm’s profit for the transaction. Colleges and universities do not follow this pricing model. Instead, most higher education organizations vend their services to undergraduate students at a price that is lower than the cost of instruction. That is, virtually all not-for-profit colleges and universities charge tuition prices that are insufficient to cover the costs of educating a student. Colleges rely upon revenues other than tuition to compensate for the gap between the cost of educating a student and the tuition price that the student actually pays. A college’s reliance upon tuition as its primary revenue source necessarily limits that school’s ability to subsidize the gap between tuition prices and educational costs (Paulsen & Toutkoushian, 2006; Winston, 1999).

Of course, colleges vary widely in the tuition revenues that they charge to students. Yet, as Winston (2004) and Winston and Zimmerman (2004) discovered, colleges and universities differ even more dramatically in their ability to marshal revenues from other sources to cover the gap between tuition prices and educational costs. Winston termed these awards “general subsidies” because they benefited every student who attended the college or university. Students on a single campus might share the benefits of these subsidies approximately equally.
Notably, however, no equality obtained between students at different colleges and universities. Some schools provide lavish general subsidies while others make only modest contributions in addition to tuition revenues. Private colleges and universities demonstrate particularly wide dispersion. Winston (2004) found that the top decile of private colleges and universities provided general subsidies of almost $24,000, a figure that exceeded these schools’ average tuition charges of approximately $15,000. In other words, students who attended these elite campuses received greater financial benefits from non-tuition revenue sources than they contributed in the form of tuition receipts. Colleges and universities in the bottom decile inverted this pattern. These resource-poor schools charged students approximately $10,000 but offered a general subsidy of only $3,000.\(^4\)

Further, while stratification has long been a feature of American higher education, Winston (2004) found that stratification had increased over the first half of the 1990s. This discovery parallels the work of many other scholars. Ehrenberg and Smith (2003), for example, found that colleges and universities spend revenues raised through private gifts in different ways. For both colleges and universities, larger endowment holdings predicted increased savings. That is, schools that already maintained large capital reserves were more likely than their peers to save funds raised through gifts. Schools with smaller endowments, by contrast, proved more likely to spend gift revenues on current operating expenses. As they have continued over time, these differential savings rates have exacerbated existing inequalities. One group accumulates wealth and advantage while the other merely demonstrates a robust cash flow.

\(^4\) Winston reported all figures in 1996-97 dollars (p. 334-335).
Financial stratification is especially pronounced among private BCs. Astin and Lee (1971), for example, classified small private colleges into a small group of elite schools and a large body of “invisible colleges” that struggled to remain in operation. Karabel and Astin (1975) elaborated upon this theme to suggest that stratification between schools, rather than polarization of groups within a school, constituted the most salient division in American higher education. More recent scholarship has only reinforced this reality of small private colleges. In his book *Liberal Arts Colleges*, Breneman (1994) suggested that the financial outlook for the “invisible colleges” was so dire that few liberal arts colleges would survive until the end of the 20th century. This grim portrait results in large part from these colleges’ tuition dependence. BCs that attract large numbers of applicants for undergraduate admission generally prosper because these organizations can rely upon robust tuition streams. Colleges that struggle to fill their classrooms, however, often struggle to remain solvent (McPherson & Schapiro, 1999).

**Tuition pricing and discounting**

In the practice of “tuition discounting,” BCs demonstrate a particularly potent mechanism by which to increase stratification (Winston, 2004). This term refers to the practice of providing students with “scholarships” as an incentive to enroll at a particular college. Because BCs glean almost all of their revenues from tuition receipts, other sources generally do not offset these awards. Instead, these scholarships represent unfunded offers of student aid, meaning that they effectively constitute price discounts. A college that discounts its price generally forswears those dollars because it enjoys no other source of revenue from which it could replace them.
Tuition discounting has increased financial stratification because the practice is not evenly distributed. Well-resourced colleges generally have more student applicants than they have the capacity to enroll (Weisbrod, Asch, & Ballou, 2008). As such, these elite schools have no need to discount their tuition price; they could easily fill an entering class with students who are able to pay the full tuition price. The financial outlook for such schools is relatively bright. However, few BCs attract such substantial numbers of applicants for admission. Resource-poor colleges are far more likely than their affluent peers to have excess capacity. When a college has excess capacity, it may enroll an additional student without substantially increasing its expenditures. Even if the tuition payments made by the additional student are small, they represent “profit” because they increase revenue without a correlate increase in expenditures. Schools with excess capacity therefore face the temptation to discount their tuition prices in an effort to entice students to fill these empty seats (Redd, 2000).

Ironically, however, colleges with existing capacity also are likely to be tuition-dependent because student demand and other markers of institutional wealth and quality tend to covary with one another (Porter & Toutkoushian, 2006). As a result, BCs that deeply discount their tuition prices voluntarily reduce their primary source of revenue. In the meantime, their more well-resourced peers operate at capacity while charging most students the full sticker price. By this mechanism, tuition discounting exacerbates stratification (Breneman, Doti, & Lapovsky, 2001; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998).
Although he clearly worried about the effects of declining revenues on liberal arts colleges, Breneman (1994) did not necessarily expect a rash of closures before century’s end. Instead, he suggested that small private colleges would slowly abandon liberal arts disciplines in favor of vocational and pre-professional programs. Subsequent empirical research indicated that these concerns proved well founded. Kraatz and Zajac (1996) found that fiscal necessity had forced many small private colleges to engage in “illegitimate organizational change” by adopting vocational offerings. These colleges, Kraatz and Zajac hypothesized, could not interest sufficient numbers of students in liberal arts offerings. Because these schools were tuition dependent, they also could not survive without attracting substantial numbers of students. Under these constraints, many colleges inaugurated new vocational programs even as they proclaimed themselves to be “liberal arts colleges” in their mission statements (Dellucchi, 1997; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Other schools changed their names from “colleges” to “universities,” also indicating an attempt to attract tuition-paying students (Morphew, 2002). In other words, dependence upon a single revenue stream, tuition, may shape a school’s activities dramatically.

Evangelical Christian colleges, as discussed in the previous section, may find that their religious commitments present complications in the identification, recruitment, and retention of tuition-paying students and a faculty labor force. Baccalaureate colleges’ tuition dependence accentuates these difficulties. An inability to recruit large numbers of tuition-paying students or to hire credentialed teaching faculty would not simply disrupt
one of many revenue sources. Rather, such interruptions would threaten the college’s most significant revenue-generating activity.

A second theme of BC finance also merits more explicit consideration. While Kraatz and Zajac’s (1996) findings may hold true for small private colleges in aggregate, this group of organizations is sharply stratified. Different colleges face the challenge of tuition dependence with vastly different levels of financial resources. Levels of resources, in other words, have consequences for the colleges’ responses to external pressures. Both Delucchi (1997) and Kushner (1999) found that selective colleges – that is, schools that attracted more applicants for admission than they could enroll – were less likely to adopt vocational offerings than were less well-resourced peers. Accumulated advantage, in other words, provides a kind of insulation that limits the effects of resource pressures on a particular college.

Levels of material resources also covary substantially with the form of evangelicalism espoused by individual believers. This covariance becomes of interest because the material resources identified in the previous section – credentialed faculty labor and tuition-paying students – are themselves individual persons. In his study of American congregations, Chaves (2004) found that economic class often influenced the shape of worship practices. Congregations of affluent members tended to place “more emphasis on form and discipline” than did those comprised mainly of lower-income worshippers (p. 142). Citing Pierre Bourdieu, Chaves argued that this finding suggested that economic class and cultural forms may be tightly linked in American Christianity. Lindsay (2007) supported this finding, noting that the entry of evangelical Christians into the nation’s cultural, educational, and political elite has effectively divided evangelical...
leadership into “cosmopolitans” and “movement” elites. Both groups, given their status as elites, tend to prosper materially. Nonetheless, the two groups differ in important cultural ways. Cosmopolitans tend to signify their class position in cultural forms that are recognizable to the non-evangelical communities, whereas movement elites tend to express themselves solely in the language of evangelicalism.

Summary

The previous research and theory summarized in this chapter indicate several important topics for a study of evangelical Christian colleges. First, because contemporary evangelical Christianity emerged in response to the separatism of mid-20th century fundamentalists, prior literature suggests the importance of considering the consequences both of orthodox belief and of engagement with the non-orthodox social world. This constitutes the background for the project’s focus on the “problem of integration,” which indicates the difficulties of holding two distinct and often conflicting normative structures – those that dominate secular higher education and those that characterize orthodox Protestant belief – in a single organization.

Second, prior research indicates that evangelical Protestants vary widely from one another. As intimated in this section, this within-group variation influenced my selection of sampled cases. Yet different theological and doctrinal positions also may indicate important differences from one evangelical college to another in their responses to the common problem of integration. I recognize this possibility in my second research question, which explores the diversity of symbolic cultures among evangelical Christian colleges.
Finally, prior research on college finances indicates that baccalaureate colleges tend to rely upon a single revenue stream, tuition, which in turn creates reliance upon tuition-paying students and credentialed faculty laborers. Scholarship also indicates that colleges vary widely in their ability to command these resources, and that variance has increased over time as advantaged colleges have accumulated further advantage. These patterns of finance indicate that collegiate education is a highly stratified field when measured by material means such as financial and human resources. My third research question therefore explores the consequences of material stratification for the operations of sampled colleges.

While prior research helps to frame these questions, it does not provide an adequate framework through which to interpret data and their implications for practice and future scholarship. For this reason, the next chapter highlights the two social theories on which I draw to frame this research project. Each of these theories emphasizes both cultural/symbolic and material factors, yet each ascribes a different role to these domains. Neo-institutional generally grants causal priority to cultural factors, while Bourdieu tends to privilege material concerns. As I discuss more fully in the following chapter, I consider these two theories jointly to develop a richer understanding of the ways in which officials at evangelical Christian colleges interact with their cultural and material environments.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The project that I have outlined in the introductory chapter requires theoretical lenses suitable for bringing the problems of integration and stratification into sharper relief. In order to demonstrate the significance of this study beyond any intrinsic interest that its subject matter may hold, I must illustrate connections between this subject matter and important theoretical constructs. Further, following the lead of the historian and social theorist William Sewell (2005, 1992), I contend that such theories must provide insight into both symbolic and material domains. That is, a theory adequate to the challenge of addressing both the problem of integration and that of stratification must posit colleges as organizations that operate in specific material and cultural contexts.

The necessity of conceptualizing evangelical Christian colleges along a material axis seems self-evident. Like all organizations these schools require material resources such as money and credentialed labor in order to remain operational. The manner in which they secure these resources, and the activities that these resources allow them to conduct, therefore stand as core tenets of any adequate portrait of these colleges. With Sewell (2005, 1992), however, I contend that simply considering these schools in light of their material needs yields an inadequate portrait of their complex workings. Evangelical Christian colleges, after all, explicitly espouse particular religious values. These values presumably shape the options that the college officials perceive as available to them. A
full portrait of evangelical Christian colleges therefore must illuminate the nature of these values alongside consideration of the colleges’ material dimensions.

These two lines of argument suggest that this project requires a “conjunctural” model in which explanation traces the interaction of the material and symbolic domains. Evangelical Christian colleges, in other words, seem likely to pursue material resources in keeping with a certain set of values, yet can continue to espouse those values only in so far as they secure adequate supplies of money and labor. The cultural and material domains seem likely to prove inextricably linked to one another. Only a theory or set of theories that adequately frame both material and cultural domains can adequately explain evangelical Christian colleges.

In this chapter, I consider three bodies of theory that might prove adequate to this task. I begin by considering Rational Choice Theory (RCT), a body of thought that applies the concepts of neoclassical economics to social and cultural topics. This mode of analysis gained near-hegemonic status in the social scientific study of religion in the 1990s. By emphasizing individual calculation and utility maximization, RCT casts organizations as nimble responders to individuals’ demands. Cultural and material factors become incidental by-products rather than independent factors that explain other phenomena. I do not employ rational choice theory in my analysis. However, because this body of thought has achieved a measure of dominance in social scientific accounts of religious phenomena, consideration of its insights and limitations highlights the contributions made by the two theories that follow.

After my consideration of RCT, I present two bodies of thought that, implicitly or explicitly, critique the neoclassical model of instrumental rationality found in RCT.
institutional theory posits that human cognition reflects layers of cultural and cognitive filters rather than the unbounded plane of calculation posited by RCT. In other words, neo-institutional theory criticizes RCT for ignoring the limited horizon of possibilities that shape the reasoning of individuals who work in organizations. Most neo-institutional theorists insist that these very cultural factors constitute the primary mechanisms by which to explain social and organizational life.

Finally, I consider the critical theory of Pierre Bourdieu. As DiMaggio (1988) noted, neo-institutional theory and Bourdieu’s sociology share many features in common. Both bodies of thought emphasize the close ties between culture and material factors such as money and labor. Yet, where neo-institutional theory tends to emphasize the role of culture in shaping material circumstances, Bourdieu tends to explain cultural phenomena in material terms. This shift in emphasis yields different and, I suggest, complimentary insights on the nature of evangelical Christian colleges.

I conclude this chapter by considering the manner in which these two theories relate both to one another and to the research questions posed in this project. This discussion anticipates the findings chapters that follow. Those chapters in turn take up these theoretical points in a manner intended to facilitate a more general discussion of the relationship between evangelical Christian belief and the dominant normative structures of US higher education.
Rational choice theory

Beyond secularization

Virtually since its inception, social scientific research on the topic of religion has presumed the inevitable pairing of modernization and secularization. Foundational texts by Max Weber (1922/1993), Emile Durkheim (1915/1965), and Peter Berger (1967) all posited that religion would fade into irrelevance as modern science developed its own explanations of human origins and conduct. Empirical evidence, however, proved at odds with these theoretic formulations. Far from fading away, religious practice continued to flourish, particularly in the United States (Schroedel & Brint, 2009). Indeed, in the U.S. one particularly influential form of religious practice, evangelical Protestantism, seemed to thrive not in spite of the scientific establishment, but at least in part due to its resistance to many of the core principles of science and secular modernity (Larson, 2003; Marsden, 1991, 1977).

Evangelical Christians gained influence in American public life throughout the 1980s, leading sociologists such as James Davidson Hunter (1991) to proclaim the existence of a “culture war” in the United States. This account, and others like it, called the assumptions of inevitable secularization into question. The United States both existed as a modern nation state and included a large minority of individuals whose religious practice stood at the center of their lives. Modernization had not brought about secularization. Despite the lack of evidence of a “war” between feuding social factions (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1998), the uneasy coexistence of religiously observant and non-observant groups within a single society has received support from numerous subsequent research projects (Schroedel & Brint, 2009). Secularization had not occurred.
The social scientific study of religion clearly required a new conceptual apparatus with which to make sense of the dynamism evidenced by religion in the late 20th century.

R. Stephen Warner (1993), writing in response to this perceived need, sought to identify the elements of an emerging “new paradigm.” This alleged paradigm contained a diffuse array of contradictory scholarship united primarily by an intention to overturn the assumption of secularization. To be sure, the new paradigm was not simply reducible to market models of religion (Chaves & Gorski, 2001). Nonetheless, as Warner himself noted, explanations drawing from rational choice theory (or “RCT”) constituted a large element of the new paradigm. These explanations emerged as the dominant model by which social scientists explained religion during the 1980s and 1990s (Smilde, 2007). Although I do not employ RCT explicitly in my analysis, then, I briefly summarize this body of theory as a background against which to understand the critiques and insights contributed by subsequent theoretical models.

The supply-side model of religious choice

Advocates of RCT employed neoclassical economic concepts to explain religious practices. Invoking a supply-side model, theorists generally posited that pluralism promoted rather than stifled religious vitality (Stark & Finke, 2000). A regulated and/or monopolistic marketplace, by contrast, promoted religious indifference. These propositions drew upon the logic of neoclassical economics, with its assertion that competition encouraged organizations to respond to the demands of individual consumers. In this tradition, Finke and Stark’s (2005) The Churcging of America provided both a theoretical and empirical review of the religious history of the US. While
the narrative of secularization predicted the decline of religious belief, Finke and Stark demonstrated that the share of the US population holding church membership had increased steadily since the 17th century. Further, they argued, movements such as Methodism prospered when they were small, new sects that responded nimbly to individuals’ needs. These same churches began to decline when their focus shifted to organizational perpetuation through the creation and maintenance of trained clergy, formal schools, and denominational infrastructure.

The association of pluralism with belief constituted one of RCT’s most important breaks with the secularization hypothesis. Classic secularization theorists such as Berger (1967) associated the presence of competing explanations with the declining plausibility of any one of these narratives. If non-Christian religions and agnostic science offered alternative accounts of the origin of life found in evangelical Protestantism, secularization theorists reasoned, how could large numbers of individuals continue to believe in evangelicalism as fervently as had forebears who had lived in a more homogenous world? RCT turned this formulation on its head by asserting that pluralism engendered competition and entrepreneurialism. In this account, scientific accounts of the origins of life did not imperial evangelical accounts; they simply made evangelicals more creative and resourceful in their efforts to propagate their own beliefs. Competitive forces thereby revitalized religion.

Insights gleaned from RCT prompted a number of swift conceptual and empirical breakthroughs, including a sweeping reinterpretation of the United States as becoming progressively more religious (Finke & Stark, 2005), the strength of “strict” churches’ handling of “free riders” (Iannacone, 1998), the proposition of a formal model that
purported to explain the spread of Christianity in the ancient world (Stark, 1996), and the role of state suppression of religion in the fall of the Soviet Union (Froese, 2008). These empirical breakthroughs indicate the power that RCT demonstrated to dethrone the secularization hypothesis. Where the emergence of evangelicalism as a powerful political and cultural force confounded classic sociological theories of modernization, RCT seemed to offer a ready explanation for this phenomenon.

**Critiques of RCT**

Despite these substantial improvements over the secularization hypothesis, RCT itself faces many limitations. For example, the theory’s assertion that religious pluralism promotes vitality received a conclusive methodological rebuke from Olson (1999).⁵ Chaves and Gorski (2001) provided additional empirical critique, marshaling substantial evidence that choice only explains religious practice in certain cultural contents.⁶

Of greater relevance for this chapter, RCT has faced a number of theoretical and conceptual challenges in addition to these methodological critiques. First, the market

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⁵ Interestingly, Olson later repudiated his own finding. Writing with two coauthors, Olson later concluded that all research that used the Hefindahl index of competitiveness – a body of research that included Olson (1999) – failed to distinguish their findings from results reached randomly (Voas, Crockett, and Olson, 2002).

⁶ Their review of dozens of scholarly articles examining the nexus of pluralism and religious participation found that the market model explained phenomena in some times and places, but did not hold true as a general explanation of religion. Of course, many compelling bodies of social theory make claims that are explicitly dependent upon context. Such empirical refinement, then, does not *a priori* deprive a social theory of its explanatory power. This rebuke proved particularly condemnatory for RCT, however, because advocates such as Stark (1996) generally employed a formal logic of hypothesis testing that claimed to yield a general model of human conduct under virtually all conditions. In other words, the empirical failings of RCT invalidated this body of theory on its own terms. RCT purported to be a general model but market mechanisms in fact emerged as a reflection of other social forces rather than a causal agent.
model offers an ahistorical explanatory mechanism. To be sure, RCT posits a model whose particular content may change to reflect contextual concerns. Yet the basic workings of this model tend to be fixed; context exists as something to be explained away rather than interpreted. By assuming no change over time and context, RCT emerges as laden with assumptions about the essence of human nature. Few social scientists or historians embrace such an ahistorical approach (e.g., Mishler, 1979; Smith, 2003).

By ignoring temporal and contextual dimensions of social life, proponents of RCT advance a theoretical model that proves inadequate to the study of evangelical Christian colleges. For example, RCT casts individual choice as the causal mechanism of social life in all times and circumstances. This orientation severely undervalues the historic role of formal organizations. Indeed, evangelicalism has relied upon formal organizations such as mission boards, publishing houses, and, especially, Bible institutes. While individual evangelists and believers certainly have operated within these broader social structures, these formal organizations have served both to standardize and to espouse evangelical messages (Carpenter, 1980; Marsden, 1991b). Understanding the changing role of these organizations proves vital to an understanding of changes in American evangelicalism and US higher education.

For example, where RCT posits the individual as the fundamental unit of social analysis, students of evangelicalism tend to emphasize the networks and contexts through which beliefs have been transmitted. Indeed, historians such as Marsden (1994, 1991a, 1980) and Carpenter (1980) have tended to explain fundamentalism and evangelicalism as social movements. In other words, what an advocate of RCT views as a rash of individual decisions in fact may represent shifting constellations of structures and
resources. Because empirical work suggests the importance of these formal structures, an adequate conceptual model must foreground and explain them. RCT, however, continues to posit formal organizations, social movements, and other elements of social context as the mere by-product of individual activity. This emphasis on individual choice has failed to account for the prominence of formal organizations and social movements in the historical record.

Second, RCT tends to conceptualize social relationships as commodities. Religious belief thereby emerges as a kind of good that can be transported into other social settings rather than as a relationship whose meaning is conditional upon its context. This view, which RCT derives from microeconomic theory, has substantial consequences for RCT’s conceptualization of religious life. Advocates of RCT tend to contrast religious participation with indifference (Edgel, 2006; Porterfield, 2008). This binary categorization reflects RCT’s commitment to casting religion as a commodity. Individuals either purchase or do not purchase this commodity, so that the only meaningful values that this variable can assume are participation or indifference.

Commodification and binary categorization fails to account for the within-group diversity that characterizes a religious movement such as American evangelicalism. For example, Iannacone’s (1998) influential formulation distinguished between “strict” and non-strict churches rather than considering the content or social consequences of individual belief systems. As such, Iannacone failed to conceptualize different religious traditions. Indeed, as Edgel (2006) noted, the particular definition of “strictness” employed by RCT advocates proves inadequate to comprehend ardently held leftist religious beliefs. Rather than acknowledging the cultural particularities of his topic and
analytic categories, Iannacone (1998) instead assumed fungibility, the economic concept that goods of a certain type may be substituted for one another. Strict churches in fact may be quite different from one another, as evidenced by the tremendous heterogeneity of beliefs held by American evangelicals (Smith, 2000). A simple dichotomy between “religion” and “indifference” proves inadequate to conceptualize these differences.

In a third and perhaps most severe critique, Riesebrodt (2008) drew from the notion of “lived religion” to argue that RCT over-emphasized cognition and calculation by individual actors. This emphasis came at the expense of daily life, practice, and “liturgy.” Nelson’s (1997) critique went even further, suggesting that RCT elevated an historical contingency – the utility-maximizing model of subjectivity characteristic of post-Enlightenment Protestantism – to an acontextual ideal. In other words, for Nelson the RCT explanation privileged as universal a form of subjectivity that was in fact laced with cultural assumptions. Riesebrodt and Nelson suggest that the particularities of human life, not dispassionate calculations, constitute the essence of religion.

This critique, like those that have preceded it, proves more consistent with empirical evidence than does the RCT model. After all, colleges and universities differ dramatically with regard to their financial resources (Winston, 2004). As much as any individual school might like to pursue a particular course of action, its material wealth constrains its ability to chart that course. A college with a strained operating budget cannot easily implement an extensive and expensive program of student development activities, no matter how ardently its religious convictions suggest that it must do so in order to minister to students’ extra-academic needs.
The critiques summarized above profoundly temper the claims of RCT’s more exuberant advocates. Simultaneously, they outline a series of propositions that an alternative theory must be able to accommodate. A more adequate theory should account for the historical and cultural context in which organizations operate. Such a theory also should recognize the possibility of within-group variance in evangelicalism, such that binary distinctions between “strict” and “apathetic” groups facilitate a range of gradations. Finally, such a theory must acknowledge that, even if the RCT image of unfettered cognition did obtain, scarce material resources would constrain the practical consequences of instrumental rationality for at least some actors.

Somewhat surprisingly, none of the critiques to emerge from the sociology of religion has offered a genuine alternative to RCT. For this reason, I turn to organizational sociology, which provides a framework through which to understand evangelical Christian colleges qua colleges. I begin with classic texts of neo-institutional theory, which address the first shortcoming of RCT by explicitly emphasizing the role of

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7 Martin Riebrodt’s (2008) emphasis on “liturgy” and lived practice appear promising, but his explicit formulation of these thoughts has yet to appear in print. Tantalizingly, however, this theory appears in a single English-language publication. The simple lack of available text prevents Riebrodt’s model from adequately grounding this study. Christian Smith (2008, 2003) also has proposed an alternative to RCT. Drawing on the neo-functionalist social theory and the philosophy of Charles Taylor (2007), Smith evokes the concept of “moral orders” to explain religion. In Smith’s formulation, different believers exhibit the different presuppositions, or orders, that they inherit from culture. This model foregrounds time- and place-variant cultural contexts while explaining the diverse forms of evangelicalism and other religious traditions. These constitute substantial advantages when compared with the ahistorical and acontextual mechanisms employed by advocates of RCT. Yet Smith’s formulation rests on an even more cognitive explanatory mechanism than does RCT. The concept of “moral order” leaves little room for the practical concerns of daily life such as budgetary constraints or competing demands on faculty time. While it might provide an adequate basis to conceptualize highly cognitive activities such as faculty work and curriculum development, Smith’s explanation proves inadequate to the task of studying the full scope of activities at evangelical Christian colleges.
historical and cultural conditions in organizational life. Because classic neo-institutional
texts sometimes yield to deterministic and simplistic interpretations, however, I
supplement these sources with recent insights from “micro-foundational” and “demand-
side” approaches to neo-institutional theory. These texts explain the ways in which
individual faculty members and administrators can make practical choices within defined
cultural constraints, and so addresses the second shortcoming of RCT. Finally, I consider
Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of practice, which casts evangelical Christian colleges as
organizations that exist in culturally and materially stratified social space. By so doing,
Bourdieu’s work addresses the third limitation of RCT.

Classic neo-institutional theory

Many foundational studies of higher education organizations operated with
assumptions not unlike those made by neoclassical economists. Organizations, in these
views, primarily stood as a set of formal structures and hierarchical relationships. Such a
view might cast a college or university as a “professional bureaucracy,” in which a set of
self-governing academics banded together to defray the costs of facilities, support staff,
and other operating expenditures (Clark, 1963). The most successful organizations, in this
account, proved to be those that most ably addressed the technical problems associated
with providing these support services inexpensively and rapidly.

As subsequent generations of scholars built upon these accounts, many
researchers began to question fundamental assumptions about the nature of organizations.
The view of organizations as instrumental structures designed to procure resources
efficiently elicited particular scrutiny from a group of scholars who came to call
themselves “neo-institutional” theorists. These individuals drew upon a diverse array of social scientific texts and approaches, which in turn leant substantial variety to neo-institutional accounts (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Despite these differences, however, neo-institutional theorists stood with virtual unanimity behind the conviction that technical models of organizations do not explain collective life in all fields of social activity. To be sure, the instrumental pursuit of self-interest by individual actors might explain assembly line production because such organizations employ clearly defined best practices in the pursuit of a tangible goal. However, organizations that undertake unclear production processes in the pursuit of uncertain goals lack such external defined benchmarks of success. Officials in such organizations instead may conduct themselves in accordance with cultural patterns – habits, norms, or professional codes – rather than in the calculated pursuit of efficient or effective operations. This insight inverted the assumptions of classic organizational studies. Colleges and universities no longer were closed systems to be scrutinized for their (in)efficiencies, but were simultaneously shaping and shaped by their environments (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, 1983; Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

As its name implies, neo-institutional theory posits that social institutions are the primary environmental factor to which organizations respond. Friedland and Alford (1991) defined an institution as a set of “supraorganizational patterns of organizing social life rooted in shared norms” (p. 242). Because institutions broadly characterize a social unit, they may be invisible to the casual observer. Virtually anyone can identify a particular college or church, but defining the institutions of “education” or “religion” may prove a rather more daunting task. Theorists generally refer to the invisibility of
institutions as “taken-for-grantedness.” Individuals and organizations do not perceive their actions as shaped by cultural practices. Instead, they assume that these practices reflect the way that society ought to be ordered. Through their invisibility, institutions demonstrate the capacity for self-perpetuation (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Jepperson, 1991; Zucker, 1977).

At its core, then, neo-institutional theory emphasizes normativity. Institutions, in other words, provide “scripts” for social actors. Like lines on a page, institutions may constrain activities by prescribing certain actions in these scripts. In this dimension institutions are self-perpetuating and taken-for-granted. Yet institutions also provide a background against which individual actors may improvise by providing a repository of cultural resources upon which individual actors can draw. While institutions enable agency, they also constrain it. Actors may borrow institutionalized symbols and tropes, but may experience a decline in resources if they venture too far from normatively sanctioned forms (Edgel, 2006; Ellingson, 2007; Jepperson, 1991). Organizational analysis therefore must pay attention to the ways in which organizational officials comply with, transgress, or seek to transform existing norms.

Lofty concepts of institutionally defined norms may appear to be far removed from the daily realities of organizational life. However, neo-institutional theorists reject this apparent dichotomy by asserting that the broad workings of culture and the mundane activities of the organization demonstrate intimate connections with one another. The organization, in this theoretical tradition, cannot be separated from its environment (Jepperson, 1991; Jepperson & Meyer, 1991). This highlights an interesting and, I believe, important paradox in classic approaches to neo-institutional theory. Conceived as
an attempt to explain the behavior of organizations that face uncertain, changing environments, neo-institutional theory reveals an abiding interest in stability.

The connection between these two levels of social life runs through human cognition. The cognitive frameworks carried by individual actors tell that actor what activities may be considered “natural” or legitimate (Meyer, 1977; Zucker, 1977). These cognitive frameworks often extend among a group of actors within an organizational field despite the absence of rules or policies that formalize these paths of action (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981). In other words, organizational action may have little to do either with the pursuit of efficiency or with regulatory compliance. Instead, organizations may follow the patterns laid out by cognitive frameworks. It becomes more important to seem efficient than to be efficient (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

This internalized desire to appear legitimate means that institutions assume both material and symbolic dimensions. Materially, institutions organize and allocate money, credentials, and career opportunities by deeming some social actions as normal and others as aberrant. In the symbolic domain, institutions shape the range of concepts that are available to individual actors (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Meyer, 1977). These material and symbolic dimensions shape the horizons that individuals and organizations can imagine. As such, rather than the unfettered utility maximization the the classic view of organizations assumes, neo-institutionalism echoes the Carnegie School’s notion of “practical rationality” or “bounded rationality,” terms suggesting that individual actors make choices within particular contexts (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).
Application to this study

Because classic neo-institutional theory explicitly foregrounds the important role of cultural and historical context, this body of thought addresses one of the fundamental shortcomings of RCT. Neo-institutional theory emphasizes the intimate connection between organization and environment. Further, neo-institutional theorists seek to illuminate patterns in these contexts. That is, to these scholars, cultural habits are not simply accidents for which analysis must account, but are important phenomena that merit illumination. After all, a set of cultural practices that exist in relationship to one another constitute an institution (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

In addition to theorizing cultural patterns, classic neo-institutional theory also offers a template by which to understand the consequences of social norms for organizational life. Classic texts stress the extent to which organizations in institutionalized fields abandon the pursuit of technical efficiency in favor of compliance with what their officials believe others in the environment expect of them (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer, 1977).

This framework becomes particularly powerful for the study of evangelical Christian colleges because such organizations exist at the intersection of two social institutions. Classic neo-institutional theory, in other words, proves essential for the understanding of the problem of integration. As illuminated in the previous chapter, two domains – evangelical religion and the dominant norms of secular higher education – prove likely to conflict with one another over topics such as academic freedom, promotion and tenure standards, curriculum design, and student life. Classic neo-institutional theory provides a mechanism by which to understand these conflicts as the
result of larger cultural forces rather than the by-product of choices made by heroic or aberrant individuals.

Finally, classic neo-institutional theory calls particular attention to cases at which two or more institutions intersect one another. Such cases illuminate the ways in which social actors determine power and meaning, for they represent cases in which social norms themselves become unclear (DiMaggio, 1998; Friedland & Alford, 1991). In other words, the collision of one set of social norms with another leaves individuals with little certainty about which set of norms should govern conduct in a particular situation. Topics such as evangelical Christian colleges thereby become of central importance for the exploration and refinement of core neo-institutional concepts. Simultaneously, such projects serve to restrain the more enthusiastic claims of RCT and its adherents by emphasizing the ways in which evangelical Christian colleges do not simply represent individual cases that have “kept faithful” to their traditions, but manifest the consequences of broader social forces.

Limitations

Despite its many strengths, and particularly its usefulness for the study of the problem of integration, classic neo-institutional texts do not prove wholly adequate to the challenge of studying evangelical Christian colleges. This limitation reflects the inability of these classic texts to respond to the second and third challenges levied at RCT. Classic neo-institutional texts address concerns about ahistorical and acontextual studies, but provide little insight into qualitative change between binary extremes, and say nothing about the role of noncognitive processes such as material constraints.
With regard to the former of these limitations, classic neo-institutional theory itself often assumes homogeneity on the part of organizations in a field. Much of this tendency stems from DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) classic text “The ‘Iron Cage’ Revisited,” which identified three channels through which this tendency toward formal homogeneity, termed “isomorphism,” might occur. Studies of higher education that employ neo-institutional theory often rely heavily on isomorphism as an explanatory device. Such an approach proves appropriate for phenomena that are largely cultural in nature, such as changing “college” to “university” in a name (Morphew, 2002). Yet this single-minded focus on cultural explanations may prove overly reductive for higher education considered more broadly.

DiMaggio (1988) himself recognized this possibility only a few years after contributing to the “Iron Cage.” In his terms, early neo-institutional theory emphasized sameness and taken-for-grantedness so fully that it often understated the role of actors and conflict. What I have termed the “classic” texts, in other words, left little room for the complexities of social life, as they generally failed to account for the processes of institutionalization, deinstitutionalization, and conflict between institutions. Accordingly, these sources left little room in which the choices of individual actors could shape or transform social institutions. Put more forcefully and formally, classic neo-institutional theory lends itself to deterministic interpretations in which existing social structures inform all activity and prohibit virtually all change (Scott, 1995; Scott & Davis, 2007).

To address this concern, I turn to more recent scholarship in the neo-institutional tradition. These authors have heeded DiMaggio’s (1988) critiques by emphasizing the ways in which practical action by individuals and organizations both perpetuate and
change institutions. After reviewing these contributions, I also consider whether these sources address the third shortcoming of RCT by adequately theorizing the role of material stratification on cultural practices and processes.

“Demand-side” and microfoundational neo-institutional theories

As noted in the previous sub-section, the classic texts of neo-institutional theory can lend themselves to deterministic interpretations. Such an orientation reduces individuals and organizations to largely passive status. Unseen institutions act and shape things, while individuals and organizations merely manifest the effects of these subterranean actions. Such an orientation might trivialize the very subject matter that it seeks to highlight by reducing individual organizations to secondary, or dependent, status. Further, such an approach explains long periods of stability, but offers little to the study of dynamic processes and organizations (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Scott & Davis, 2007). Yet neo-institutional theory suggests that evangelical Christian colleges – as organizations that sit at the intersection of two institutionalized fields – prove particularly likely to exhibit dynamic qualities (DiMaggio, 1998; Friedland & Alford, 1991).

In its recent iteration, however, neo-institutional theory has produced scholarship that seeks to retain the tradition’s emphasis on broad cultural patterns while allowing greater latitude for within-group diversity. For example, theorists that I have aggregated under the heading “demand-side” neo-institutionalists emphasize an often-neglected element of DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) formulation. These accounts stress the role of material opportunities and constraints in shaping the cultural patterns to which organizations will adhere. Such insights prove particularly important at evangelical
Christian colleges, as these organizations face different and often conflicting imperatives from the intersecting institutions of religion and education (DiMaggio, 1998). The demand-side approach suggests that, all else equal, organizational officials may prefer the normative structures associated with greater material resources.

“Demand-side” neo-institutional theory helps to understand that organizational officials may prefer one set of norms to another under certain conditions. However, these texts do not illuminate the ways in which individual administrators, deans, or faculty members make their decisions. Further, this approach – like virtually all neo-institutional accounts – ignores the question of how institutions are formed re-formed. Powell and Colyvas (2008) seek to address these oversights by stressing the role of individuals, organizations, and other “microfoundational” transmitters of institutions. These theorists cast actors not as the mere effects of broad institutional processes, but as the agents whose activities produce, refine, and transmit institutions. Their work thereby suggests ways in which responses to problems can become institutionalized, allowing complex work to be managed readily.

“Demand-side” approaches and their application to this study

I have coined the term “demand-side” approaches to neo-institutional theory to encompass several disparate scholarly works that emphasize the material constraints placed upon compliance with normative demands. In their study of the historical roots of two-year colleges, Brint and Karabel (1991, 1989) provide one formulation of this approach. Their findings indicate that administrators at two-year colleges, who were themselves graduates of established colleges and universities, sought to prepare students
for transfer into four-year schools. Yet such transfers became increasingly rare over time because established colleges and universities enjoyed tremendous advantages in identifying and recruiting students, faculty members, and other resources. Simultaneously, business leaders increased pressure for workforce training in an effort to develop a larger pool of skilled laborers from which to draw their personnel. This set of material constraints – the entrenched position of existing education providers and the demands of business leaders – ultimately shaped two-year colleges more profoundly than did existing educational norms. Even though two-year college leaders sought to position their organizations as sources of transfer into four-year schools, two-year colleges primarily became sites of vocational training because this suited the demands of established providers and business officials.

Brint and Karbel’s (1991, 1989) emphasis on the ways in which material resources constrain compliance with normative structures may seem localized to two-year colleges. Yet, in a study of four-year private colleges, Kraatz and Zajac (1996) discovered surprisingly similar results. These authors conclude that sampled colleges increasingly adopted professional programs such as education and nursing degrees in an attempt to increase their tuition revenues. Such decisions constitute “illegitimate organizational change” because they transgress the institutionalized norms of higher education, such as the preference for liberal arts programs relative to vocational offerings.

Taken together, these “demand side” approaches to neo-institutional theory suggest that a college’s ability to comply with normative constructs substantially reflects that college’s material resources. At first blush, such an interpretation seems to echo resource dependency theory. This body of thought emphasizes the ways in which
organizational officials scan the environment in search of resources and develop structures and practices designed to optimize pursuit of those resources (Froelich, 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Weisbrod, 1998).

Yet “demand-side” neo-institutional theory, as I use the term here, differs in an important respect from resource dependency approaches. Where resource dependency suggests that organizational officials scan their environment in search of resources, this understanding of neo-institutional theory suggests that officials scan only the institutionalized field. That is, officials at two-year and small private colleges did not pursue activities unrelated to education in an attempt to secure resources; they merely adapted existing practices within the institutionalized field in response to the demands of resource providers. The “demand-side” approach therefore relaxes the determinism latent in the classic texts, but does not abandon the assumption that cultural norms holds sway in institutionalized fields.

This understanding of the relationship between normative demands and material resources proves particularly useful for the study of evangelical Christian colleges. As indicated in the section on classic neo-institutional theory, these organizations face normative demands from two distinct institutionalized fields. The demand-side approach to neo-institutional theory emphasizes that these organizations also secure resources from two distinct spheres. As officials at a college respond to the problem of integration, they might prefer the normative constructs of the field that provides the college with the larger share of its resources. That is, if the college derives most of its revenues from preparing tuition-paying students to attend medical school, its curriculum might engage relatively thoroughly with concepts from evolutionary biology. By contrast, if the college derives
most of its revenues from church subsidies and tuition payments aimed at preparing students for overseas missionary activity, it may simply dismiss evolutionary biology in favor of stressing topics with which religious bodies would prove more comfortable.

**Microfoundational approaches and their application to this study**

Later variants of neo-institutional theory offer humbler, more contingent explanatory mechanisms in place of the deterministic, airtight qualities often presumed when studies focus exclusively on isomorphic processes. Sewell (1992) terms these cognitive constraints “cultural schema,” while Jepperson (1991) prefers the term “scripts.” In either case, the argument rests upon the same essential points. Institutions shape the realm of possibilities available to organizational officials as they made strategic choices. Officials choose from among the available scripts rather than inventing new possibilities wholesale. However, these available scripts may be reorganized in surprising or innovative ways. Organizations therefore change when their officials make choices, even though these officials simultaneously follow institutionalized logics.

These complex processes occur because individuals who work in organizations apply the set of cultural tools provided by social institutions to address practical, on-the-ground problems. This approach to neo-institutional theory is often styled “microfoundational” due to its emphasis on micro-level actors and decisions (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Thus, for example, church ministers simultaneously face pressures that are common to almost all ministers – that is, the bounded symbolic economy of religion as an institution – and must address concerns that are particular to their local congregations. Many ministers therefore rearrange the taken-
for-granted scripts provided by religion, writ broadly, in an attempt to make sense of the perceived problems of their particular context (Edgell, 2006; Ellingson, 2007; see also Emerson & Smith, 2000; Smith, 2000, 1998).

While ministers exhibit this kind of practical agency in churches, agency becomes particularly apparent when two or more institutionalized logics intersect in a single organization. In such cases, organizational officials have no clear script for how best to respond to a complex problem. For example, officials at Stanford University in the 1970s and 1980s could have made novel discoveries freely accessible, in keeping with educational norms of public access to information, or could have sought to commoditize and commercialize these discoveries, in keeping with marketplace logics. The intersection of these two institutions – education and market – left officials with no clear recourse. Accordingly, campus administrators and scientists developed their own responses to these challenges by drawing elements from the scripts of both institutionalized fields (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

In addition to highlighting the importance of individual actors, particularly in organizations that sit at the intersection of two institutions, microfoundational approaches indicate the ways in which cultural practices become institutionalized. What begins as a novel response to a complex problem may become a routinized, taken-for-granted solution that spreads across many organizations in a single field. For example, during the 1980s Minnesota Public Broadcasting engaged in a variety of commercial activities intended to supplement funds secured from the state and from private donations. This strategy represented a new development in the field of broadcasting insofar as it combined elements from the norms of public support with those drawn from marketplace
logics. Over time, however, this once-novel means of negotiating the intersection of these two institutions became commonplace as many nonprofit organizations developed retail operations that traded on the artistic cache of the sponsoring body (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

The microfoundational approach to neo-institutional theory makes two important contributions to this study. First, in an echo of the “demand-side” approach, this lens suggests that the decisions of individual officials can shape organizational activities in important ways. By so doing, it avoids the pitfall – common to RCT and to the classic neo-institutional texts – of assuming relative homogeneity of organizations within a field. In other words, these approaches provide a mechanism by which to theorize the diversity of forms of evangelicalism, which I explore in this project’s second research question.

Second, the microfoundational approach highlights the role of individuals in forging paths to institutionalization. This proves particularly important for the analysis of within-group symbolic diversity. Officials at some colleges may develop a response to the problem of integration that proves effective on their campuses. This response may become routinized and taken-for-granted, as retail operations did at Minnesota Public Broadcasting, and so may allow deans, faculty members, and administrators to pursue other activities rather than persistently addressing the problem of integration. At other colleges, by contrast, the response to the problem of integration may attain partial or non-institutionalized status. Officials at such schools may address related difficulties on a local, case-by-case basis, and so may divert a considerable amount of time and resources that could be spent on other activities.
Limitations

The microfoundational and “demand-side” approaches to neo-institutional theory help to address one of the primary shortcomings of classic neo-institutional texts. In these more recent iterations of the theory, within-group variation and qualitative change exist as meaningful manifestations of institutionalized patterns. That is, institutionalization does not imply homogeneity, only that actors in institutionalized fields face similar opportunities and constraints. Those actors then can marshal different, even creative, responses to those similar circumstances. The “demand-side” approach suggests that organizational officials may prefer normative structures associated with material resources, while the microfoundational approach indicates that organizations whose officials construct and institutionalize a response to complex problems are more likely to prosper than are those with less routinized responses.

While these advances help to address one of neo-institutional theory’s primary deficiencies, they fail to respond wholly to the challenges facing this theory. Neo-institutional theory, whether in its classic or more recent iterations, remains at its root a cognitive explanatory device of the sort imagined by Meyer and his colleagues (Meyer, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In other words, neo-institutional theory still explains organizational life by the culturally informed limits on what individual actors think. Neo-institutional accounts rely almost exclusively on taken-for-granted mental constructs to explain organizational behavior (Scott, 1995; Scott & Davis, 2007). Even in its “demand-side” iteration, such a theory undervalues the role of material circumstances and other non-cognitive influences on organizational life.
Accordingly, these recent formulations of neo-institutional theory make valuable contributions without wholly addressing the problems facing RCT. Materiality, insofar as it is considered at all, remains a secondary concern relative to existing cognitive structures and cultural patterns. Recent neo-institutional theories merely change the nature of the cultural constraints on cognition. I therefore turn to Pierre Bourdieu’s critical theories in order to understand more fully the material constraints against which organizational officials seek to navigate institutionalized fields.

Pierre Bourdieu’s critical theory

At first glance, Bourdieu’s theories may seem to be an odd fit for an organization-level study of the intersection of evangelical Christianity and higher education. This appearance of incommensurability arises in part because scholars of higher education tend to invoke Bourdieu to explain the behavior of individuals rather than organizations. McDonough (1997, 1996; McDonough & Calderone, 2006) provides the most prominent example of this approach. In her accounts, students are imbued with class status based on their families’ level of material wealth and cultural practices. This class status travels with them throughout life, and tends to channel students into colleges or universities that are likely to cement their class status.

While there is much to value in this approach, nothing in Bourdieu’s writing mandates such a focus on individuals. Indeed, Bourdieu (1993a) himself explicitly grounds his analysis in educational organizations and their regulation of credentials. Organizations constitute crucial nodes in the educational system because they allocate opportunities, credentials, and material resources to individuals. An exploration of what
Bourdieu indicates by the term “class” further highlights the appropriateness of applying his work to the study of organizations. Bourdieu (1990) uses that term not in the Marxian sense, in which it tends to indicate objectively existing social structures, but in an attempt to connote proximity in social space. Members of a class are not a priori proletarians or capitalists, in other words, but are individuals who shared experiences, referents, and networks. Status, for Bourdieu, proves relational rather than absolute. Certain attributes or goods may connote great value in one setting, but prove of limited value in another. Taken together, these two elements on Bourdieu’s thought support the contention of the sociologists Emirbayer and Johnson (2008). These authors conclude that Bourdieu’s work makes substantial contributions to organizational theory, but that many of these insights remain under-utilized in qualitative and quantitative studies.

For Bourdieu, then, organizations represent an important unit of analysis even if his theory is rarely applied in these ways. Organizations provide the physical spaces in which the social spaces known as “classes” manifest themselves. In other words, Bourdieu’s work suggests that an adequate understanding of the relationships between status, material resources, and cultural practices demands an understanding of the organizational sites in which these relationships are formed and evaluated. I begin this section by elaborating further on the contributions that Bourdieu’s work makes to organizational analysis. I then consider the applications of his work for this specific project, and conclude with a review of the limitations of his theory.
Overview

Pierre Bourdieu’s works emphasize the centrality of practice as an explanatory mechanism. This focus on practice reduces the emphasis on reflection that characterizes more cognitive or cultural explanations of social life. Indeed, in *Toward a Theory of Practice* Bourdieu (1977a) characterizes social life via the “economy of logic.” As its name implies, the economy of logic maintains that social life tends to proceed with the minimum possible level of reflection upon its origins, structure, and perpetuation. This principle holds that, while symbolic systems may demand consistent logic, daily life often ignores such abstract refinement. Unless provoked by crisis or inescapable contradiction, individual agents generally ignore symbolic abstractions. Instead, daily life proceeds in accord with *de facto* realities.

For Bourdieu, then, individual agents practice reflection “economically,” relying upon formal logic only when forced to do so. Cultural practice and intellectual activity, in other words, recede into the background, while material factors come to the fore. Indeed, as I will explore more fully throughout this subsection, Bourdieu (1993a) relies upon materiality to explain culture: culture “does not take place in the ethereal realm of ideas,” but in “the balance of forces between social agents who have entirely real interests in the different possibilities available to them” (p. 34). Bourdieu thereby responds adequately to a criticism that I have levied both at RCT and at neo-institutional theories; namely, that these models adopt excessively cognitive approaches.

Bourdieu casts stratification foremost among the realities that shape daily life (Johnson, 1993). Of course, social groups may be stratified along many different lines. In keeping with the “economy of logic,” however, Bourdieu casts symbolic systems as a
secondary mechanism of differentiating society. Indeed, Bourdieu (1993b) regarded his contemporary Michel Foucault, despite the latter’s avowed interest in the study of power, as excessively invested in the analysis of discourse and symbols. Individual actors, in Bourdieu’s account, simply do not reflect upon cultural norms or instrumental strategies very often. Instead, for Bourdieu the primary division among social groups occurs along economic lines. Accordingly, materiality becomes the primary dimension along which to understand social action and organizational life.

The primary causal role that Bourdieu grants to materiality becomes apparent in his appraisal of the monetary value of cultural products. In Bourdieu’s (1993b) formulation, paintings and poems attain economic value not on their own merits, but through the work of a “cultural businessman,” a term that he applies to gallery owners, literary agents, and other managers (p. 76). This individual shows other businesspeople how to interpret works and, by extension, which works are of value. In other words, cultural products and practices do not assume economic value until economically powerful actors endow them with this value. The power to appraise and to confer value rests with those who control economic capital, not with those who attain positions of cultural prestige.

Bourdieu’s influential writings on the place of education in society also illustrate the primary causal role that he attributes to material wealth and economic class. On its face, education offers training and credentials to any qualified individual regardless of their class position. In reality, however, the benefits of education “can be received and acquired only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions” characteristic of the affluent classes (Bourdieu, 1977b, p 494). The benefits of education, in other words,
are not readily apparent. Instead, they must be “decoded.” Only individuals from upper classes receive the code necessary to decipher these benefits (Bourdieu, 1984). Education may symbolize opportunity, but, for Bourdieu, schools primarily serve to reproduce existing material relations.

To be sure, Bourdieu’s emphasis on practice and the economy of logic foregrounds material factors as an explanation of social life. Yet Bourdieu also leaves a substantial role for culture. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) articulated this role as simultaneously arbitrary and necessary. In its arbitrariness, culture could assume any form with no deleterious effects upon the broader society. Once a form is selected, however, it becomes necessary because it reflects underlying economic relations. Through repetition, these cultural forms solidify into a *habitus*, or durable training through which individual agents internalize the cultural practices tied to the existing economic order. Culture thereby becomes reproductive and legitimating. In its reproductive capacity, culture habituates individuals to the existing economic order by preparing them for their place in that order. In its legitimating capacity, culture provides an explanation for the existence of that order. For Bourdieu, in other words, any division between a “materialist” or a “cultural” explanation of society is false. Any study of culture necessarily partakes of materialism, for cultural forms – as demonstrated by the role of the *habitus* in legitimating and reproducing economic relationships – exhibit material consequences (Bourdieu, 1984).

Admittedly, this explanation of the role of culture can be quite abstract. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, by contrast, is refreshingly concrete. In its articulation of the concept of “taste,” this volume provides Bourdieu’s
most illuminating view of the relationship between material and cultural factors in social life. In an extensive study of cultural practices in 1970s France, Bourdieu patiently documents the association between position in the laboring classes and enthusiasm for aesthetically simple pursuits, on the one hand, and location in the bourgeois classes and a desire for refined cultural products, on the other. The connections between economic relations and cultural forms communicate a moral value. When the poorer classes espouse enthusiasm for low-price, high-volume forms of food and entertainment, they identify themselves as “base.” The affluent, by contrast, proclaim their class position by seeking “rarefied” delicacies and attending the opera. Taste, in other words, serves to identify an individual as a member of a particular class. In this sense, culture is reproductive because the tastes espoused by an individual place him or her within a particular social class. At the same time, because taste communicates a moral dimension, it serves to communicate the fitness of an individual to be part of that class. Taste thereby performs its legitimating task by proclaiming the fitness of a system that would assign a person of a particular moral character to the appropriate class.

Importantly, however, cultural practices – that is, taste – cannot by themselves elevate an individual into a high status group. Much as a cultural product derives its monetary value from the efforts of a “businessman” who extols its virtues, a cultural producer – that is, an artist, writer, or academic – cannot necessarily generate economic wealth based on the esteem in which he or she is held in the field of culture. Indeed, in many fields the relationship between cultural status and material prosperity proves virtually inverted. Bourdieu offers the example of a writer who pens a bestselling novel. Such an individual may attain a measure of economic wealth thanks to his/her
commercial success. Yet, by so doing, she or he loses virtually all status in the field of
culture, for other writers regard this individual as a “sell-out.” The writer’s status in the
field of culture plummets as his/her status in the field of economics ascends. At the same
time, however, the bestselling novelist never attains the kind of wealth and influence
attendant to those who attain status in economic or political activities. Her status remains
inferior and, in a sense, contingent upon the approval of the elite of the economic field
(Bourdieu, 1993a, 1993b). Thus, even the individual who converts a cultural product into
a measure of material success finds that material prosperity must be conferred by other
materially prosperous agents. For Bourdieu, economic success does not derive solely
from cultural power; rather, material realities shape and define cultural practices.

Applications to this study

Bourdieu maintains throughout his corpus that material resources exert substantial
sway over the shape of cultural forms. Thus, Bourdieu would expect high levels of
economic and cultural capital to occur together. This tight coupling between material and
cultural dimensions parallels social scientific work on American evangelicalism, as when
Chaves (2004) observed the tendency of affluent congregations to espouse formal modes
of worship or when Lindsay (2007) documented the different cultural forms espoused by
“cosmopolitan” and “movement” elites.

In general, then, Bourdieu’s theory suggests that colleges that control relatively
high levels of material resources also will demonstrate abundant symbolic resources. For
example, colleges with adequate numbers of tuition-paying students and the necessary
number of credentialed faculty laborers might also attain relatively routinized responses
to the problem of integration. In this case, the latter would be considered a symbolic resource due to insights from microfoundational neo-institutional theory, which highlights the process of institutionalization and suggests that organizations with routinized responses to complex problems can allocate their resources in other ways.

However, because Bourdieu always casts position as relative to the field, this expected relationship is not a necessary relationship. That is, an organization may attain cultural wealth without material wealth, or *vice versa*. Such an inversion may occur because status is conditioned upon the social space in which that status is apportioned. Activities that secure status in one setting may erode position in another field. For example, officials at a college may adhere closely to the beliefs of the sponsoring denomination, and so may attain a high level of status in the field of evangelical religion. Yet this privileged cultural position may net limited material returns when the field shifts to higher education. The college’s religious faithfulness might create unease among tuition-paying students who fear that the college’s religious position would impede their ability to pursue graduate or professional education in non-evangelical settings.

**Limitations**

Although Bourdieu’s theory addresses the shortcomings of neo-institutional theory, his work does not prove without fault. For example, Bourdieu, like many theorists influenced by Marxian and neo-Marxist traditions, often assumes that individual actors know their status positions accurately. This assumption demands the organizational officials not only understand their own organization, but the way that powerful actors who apportion status in the field view that organization. Ironically, then, although
Bourdieu’s emphasis on materiality can serve as a corrective to neo-institutionalism’s cognitive approach, his own theory often assumes that individuals possess virtually limitless powers to evaluate and calculate (Smilde, 2007).

Neo-institutional approaches provide a valuable corrective to this tendency by advancing notions of bounded or applied rationality. In these accounts, individual actors may seek to evaluate themselves and their surroundings accurately. However, individuals cannot behave in an instrumental way because their evaluations inevitably partake of the cultural scripts that they employ to interpret their surroundings (Jepperson, 1991). In other words, by positing explicit cultural limits on human cognition, neo-institutional theory’s cognition-focused explanation of organizational behavior addresses Bourdieu’s latent assumption of instrumentality.

Additionally, Bourdieu’s analyses can seem ahistorical. The complex interaction of culture, materiality, and status traced by Bourdieu may presume that a religious tradition such as Episcopal Church of the United States of America (“ECUSA”) occupies a high status position in all times and places because it held high status for the first two centuries of US independence (Sherkat & Wilson, 1995). This presumption fails to account for phenomena such as American evangelicalism, which moved from outsider status to the “halls of power” precisely as mainline traditions such as ECUSA began to decline in number and influence (Lindsay, 2007).

Here again, neo-institutional theory can provide a useful corrective to Bourdieu’s work. While neo-institutional concepts such as DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) “isomorphism” may assume stasis, empirical work in the neo-institutional tradition emphasizes history, process, and negotiation. Thus, neo-institutional theory explains
university budget processes through an examination of departmental histories (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988), articulates the formation of community colleges over most of the 20th century (Brint & Karabel, 1991, 1989), and chronicles changes in Protestant congregations in the first decade of the 21st century (Edgell, 2006; Ellingson, 2007). Neo-institutionalism’s receptivity to process and change over time can help to address Bourdieu’s tendency toward ahistoricism.

On balance, then, the differences between the two theories seem to make them complementary rather than incompatible. This observation may seem surprising insofar as neo-institutionalism typically explains the perpetuation of the status quo ante while scholars typically cite Bourdieu when they are interested in criticizing established conditions. Yet this tendency to use these texts in these ways probably indicates more about scholars and their training than about the texts themselves (Wacquant, 1993). The focus on homogeneity and sameness that has characterized much neo-institutional is not a necessary component of that body of thought. DiMaggio (1988) notes that neo-institutional theory should recognize change, agency, and conflict far more explicitly than its early exponents managed to do. Such a model, he suggests, would have much in common with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. True to DiMaggio’s prediction, the theorists who inform my second research question explicitly postulate that institutions change, conflict with one another, and present internal contradictions (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Bourdieu shares this sense of organizations as nested within fields whose logics inform the acquisition of resources, reflect accumulated resources, and sometimes conflict with one another (Bourdieu, 1993a; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 1993).
While the emphases of the two theories differ, then, their fundamental understanding that organizations reflect both their environments and the agents who work within them provides sufficient common ground that these bodies of thought can illuminate qualitative data jointly. In order to consider the ways in which these two bodies of thought may align with one another in this project, I conclude this chapter by outlining the manner in which these theories inform this project’s research questions. These relationships presage the ways in which I apply theories to interpret case study findings in chapters four through seven.

Summary and restatement of research questions

This section begins with a review of rational choice theory, the dominant lens through which sociologists analyze religion and the framework implicit in many studies that cast evangelical Christian colleges as the by-product of courageous individuals and heroic choices (e.g., Benne, 2001; Schuman, 2010). My review of this theory highlighted three ways in which RCT proved inadequate to the study of evangelical Christian colleges. I then introduced three successive theories intended to address these oversights in the rational choice model.

First, I noted that RCT tends to view human cognition and decision-making as a stable, time-invariant phenomenon. As such, RCT advances an ahistorical, acontextual causal mechanism. I utilize classic neo-institutional theory to address this concern. The foundational texts in this tradition highlight the ways in which organizational officials do not simply seek to optimize utility and technical efficiency, but respond to cultural patterns established through years of repetition (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer,
1977; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981). In other words, the norms that define an organization’s context and environment provide the primary explanatory mechanism through which to explain that organization’s activities and behavior.

The classic neo-institutional understanding of social life informs my first research question. This question applies neo-institutional theory’s understanding of organizations as entities informed by the norms of their environments to evangelical Christian colleges, a group of organizations that sit at the intersection of two different and possibly conflicting normative structures. Accordingly, this question explores the “problem of integration,” meaning the difficulties faced by college officials as they seek to reconcile two disparate sets of institutionalized norms into a single set of operating principles.

1. How do three different evangelical Christian colleges attempt to integrate their religious and academic operations?

My second criticism of RCT notes that this theory tends to view religion as a binary phenomenon of belief and indifference rather than recognizing many variations of belief. RCT shares this orientation with classic neo-institutional texts, which tend to be reductionist and even deterministic in their understanding of social phenomena (Scott, 1997). Accordingly, I advanced two revisions of the classic neo-institutional model – demand-side and microfoundational approaches – that accommodate greater within-group variation. These models account for the resources provided by various normative spheres, the role of individual actors in shaping cultural scripts, and the consequences of the institutionalization of one or more of these scripts.

With their simultaneous attention to cultural norms and within-group variation about these norms, demand-side and microfoundational approaches to neo-
institutionalism inform my second research question. These theories highlight the ways in which the normative constructs of resource providers and the practical decisions of individual officials can shape collegiate operations. In other words, these theories suggest that, while evangelical Christian colleges face similar opportunities and constraints, they do so with slightly different organizational histories and cultural resources. Accordingly, my second research question explores the symbolic dimension of the problem of stratification, meaning that it asks about the ways in which a college’s cultural position informs its attempts to address the problem of integration.

2. How does each college’s different level of symbolic resources, meaning theological heritage or organizational history, affect its operations?

My third criticism of RCT notes that this theory relies solely on a cognitive framework that assumes rational calculation. While neo-institutional theory replaces instrumental rationality with bounded or applied rationality, this theory nonetheless relies on cognitive or cultural explanations. Organizational officials, in neo-institutional theory, prove of interest because they can imagine only certain cultural possibilities. This cognitive orientation ignores the fact that organizations also face very real material constraints. Officials might readily imagine activities that their organizations cannot afford to conduct.

I apply Pierre Bourdieu’s critical theory in order to address this shortcoming of the various neo-institutional theories. Bourdieu explicitly considers both cultural/cognitive and material explanations. Yet, for Bourdieu, materiality proves of primary causal importance, and the role of culture recedes to that of reproduction and legitimation of existing power relations. This theory, in other words, insists that sampled
colleges be considered explicitly as material entities. Further, because status always proves relative to the field in which that status is apportioned, material resources themselves assume cultural forms. For example, certain sources of money and labor may connote success in the field of education, but may incite disapproval from “rank and file” evangelicals who prove suspicious of academic pretentions. Accordingly, my third research question explicitly connects the cultural constructs developed in the two previous questions to material realities.

3. How does each college’s different level of material resources, meaning money, tuition-paying students, and credentialed faculty labor, affect its operations?

Having explicitly related these questions to the theory in an effort to impart construct validity and generalizability to my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I now review the methods by which I answered these questions.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODS

As William Sewell (2005) notes in the introduction to *Logics of History*, questions of methods become particularly important when attempting to explain social phenomena in material and cultural dimensions simultaneously. Such questions imply the search for meanings, circumstances, and conditions. Accordingly, researchers who undertake such a task necessarily reach beyond the quantitative metrics with which social scientists may be most comfortable. For this reason, I undertook a qualitative research project in order to answer the research questions posed in this paper. Qualitative research excels at the elucidation of meaning, context, and conditions under which particular events transpired (Mishler, 1979; Peshkin, 1993). As such, a qualitative approach proved ideally suited to the theoretical task that Sewell outlines.

Qualitative inquiry may assume many different forms. Among other approaches, social scientists produce life histories, ethnographies, and phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007). Some forms of qualitative inquiry distinguish themselves from other approaches by the use of a particular technique. Ethnographies, for example, typically draw heavily upon observation (Wolcott, 1999). Others distinguish themselves by their peculiar epistemology, as in the case of phenomenological research. Case study research employs no such distinctive features. Instead, the concept of the “case” itself distinguishes case study research from other forms of qualitative inquiry. Both spatial and temporal boundaries define cases. Within these boundaries, case study research employs
multiple data collection techniques in order to develop a holistic portrait of the case itself (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

This chapter reviews the methods that I used to design and conduct three qualitative case studies in an effort to answer my research questions. My decision to utilize multiple cases might not elicit uniform approval from qualitative methodologists. For example, Stake (1995) enjoins researchers to utilize a single case approach because this technique allows for the presentation of richer detail. Such detail provides an important guarantor of the validity of qualitative research. Yet not all methodologists share Stake’s preference. Yin (2003), for example, prefers the multiple case study approach. In this view, the multiple case study approach provides two advantages that compensate for any losses in richness of detail. First, multiple case studies, like multiple laboratory experiments, provide opportunities for comparison across incidents. Such comparison constitutes an important guarantor of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Second, multiple case studies tend to emphasize concepts and theoretical constructs rather than the intrinsic features of the cases themselves.

Yin’s (2003) second advantage of the multiple case study approach indicates the appropriateness of this technique for the research project summarized in this dissertation report. Where a single-site case study might present richer detail about a particular evangelical Christian college, the multi-site approach seems more likely to elucidate the general phenomena of integration and stratification. As summarized in the previous chapter on social theory, these concepts, not the cases qua cases, stand at the center of this project.
Case study projects, if reasonably well executed, reflect the qualities of the cases selected. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter outlines the sampling techniques and strategies that I employed in an effort to select research sites that were likely to illuminate concepts of theoretic interest. In the second section I present the techniques by which I conducted fieldwork, and enumerate the individuals and sites from which I gathered these data. I then conclude the chapter by outlining the procedures that I employed to analyze data, and to assure the trustworthiness and validity of findings.

Case selection

Qualitative research provides implications for theory rather than allowing inferences to a general population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003). As a result, case selection should be guided by theoretic concerns. For example, the review of literature presented in chapter one of this dissertation report suggested that baccalaureate colleges engage in different activities and employ different financial models than do other organizational forms. Theoretical concerns therefore compel me to limit sampled cases to baccalaureate colleges. Glazer and Strauss (1967) referred to the principle of selecting research sites in accord with theoretical interests as “purposive sampling.”

Creswell (2007) and Merriam (1998) outline several different purposive sampling techniques. Cases may exhibit qualities that appear to typify a particular phenomenon. Others may appear unique or unusual. Still others may be selected in “snowball” fashion, in which data collected at one site guides the selection of the next site. Each of these techniques offers advantages to the researcher who is interested in refining understanding of a particular phenomenon.
Because stratification is an important theoretic concern of this project, however, I suggest that these techniques do not sufficiently emphasize the disparities between different cases. Instead, I propose to employ a “maximum variation” approach to sampling (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). This technique allows the researcher to select cases that he or she presumes will occupy extreme points along an axis or axes of interest.

In this project, I propose to select cases along two theoretically informed axes. The first, or symbolic axis, reflects the theological diversity that characterizes American evangelicalism. The second, or material, axis indicates colleges’ levels of financial resources. The maximum variation technique will allow me to compare evangelical Christian colleges at different ends of these two axes. This comparison should illuminate the theoretical concerns indicated by these axes rather than simply the intrinsic features of the cases. I now consider sampling concerns related to these two axes in greater detail.

**Symbolic axis**

Because evangelical Christianity has long existed as a transdenominational movement, interstitial organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals have played an important role in codifying movement tenets and membership. Accordingly, I turn to these interstitial organizations as a means of identifying cases’ positions on the symbolic axis. Because the review of literature conducted in chapter one identified two primary forms of evangelical Christian colleges – Bible colleges and Christian liberal arts colleges – I consider each of these professional organizations separately.
The Association for Biblical Higher Education (2010a), or “ABHE,” has represented Bible colleges and institutes since 1947. ABHE serves simultaneously as an accrediting body and a professional organization. Indeed, college administrators established ABHE specifically for the purpose of professionalizing and regulating the academic programs at Bible colleges (Ringenberg, 2006). In its accrediting capacity, ABHE (2010b) requires member colleges to provide at least 30 hours of Biblical instruction to students pursuing church vocations, and prescribes 21 hours of Biblical instruction to those pursuing “a non church-related baccalaureate” (p. 29). Because these indicators foreground the historic Bible college movement and an ongoing commitment to Bibliicism, they suggest that ABHE represents a variant of evangelicalism that remains closely connected to fundamentalism. Such an approach has historically proven difficult to integrate into the mainstream of American higher education, as indicated by the adversarial position that the Bible colleges assumed with regard to secular higher education in the 1920s (Brereton, 1990). As such, I suggest that ABHE membership indicates a “low” level of symbolic resources.

This “low” level does not mean that the symbolic resources possessed by Bible colleges are inherently of limited value. Indeed, the review of Pierre Bourdieu’s critical theories in the previous chapter indicates that cultural resources are by definition relative to the field in which they are appraised. Thus, the designation of “low” levels of resources only indicates that the tenets espoused by most Bible colleges likely will gain minimal purchase in the field of higher education. I admit readily that these same cultural resources may prove of great value when the field of valuation shifts from higher education to evangelical religion.
The Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (“CCCU”) represents schools at the opposite end of the symbolic axis from those represented by ABHE. CCCU (2010a) proclaims its mission “To advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.” In its joint evocation of religious and scholarly elements, this phrase connotes the more theological, or “culturalist,” variant of evangelicalism that tends to emphasize neo-Calvinist theology and engagement with the secular academy (Marsden, 1997). CCCU thereby stakes out a dual commitment that characterizes the orientation that Mannoia (2000) termed “Christian liberal arts.” Such a position claims to engage academic disciplines and scholarship from an evangelical perspective rather than simply disregarding these endeavors to allow greater focus on training Christian educators, missionaries, and pastors. This position has proven more amenable to the mainstream of American higher education than has the Bible college movement, as indicated by the long and distinguished histories of schools such as Wheaton College and Taylor University (Ringenberg, 2006). Accordingly, I propose that membership in CCCU or other indicators of a “Christian liberal arts” orientation indicates a relatively “high” level of symbolic resources. Again, this designation does not indicate the intrinsic value of these cultural resources, but suggests only their presumed value in the field of higher education.

While ABHE and CCCU provide general criteria for case selection, they do not stand as ironclad markers of symbolic resources. This is true for several reasons. For example, a single college may belong to both organizations. Should such a college be classified as “low” or “high” on the axis of symbolic resources? Similarly, some colleges
may articulate an intentionally evangelical orientation, yet refuse to join either organization as a statement of religious and educational self-determination. Still other schools may be of too recent vintage to qualify for membership in either body.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the two organizations do not view themselves in a hierarchical manner. To be sure, ABHE schools generally have struggled to attain financial health and rigorous academic standards (Brereton, 1990). Yet it does not follow that ABHE schools views themselves as pale imitations of CCCU members. The most successful Bible institutes may in fact have access to greater symbolic resources within certain networks than do Christian liberal arts colleges affiliated with the CCCU. For example, some evangelicals may regard the “Christian liberal arts” approach as insufficiently orthodox. This charge appears to undergird a recent article in Christian Scholars Review in which Joeckel and Chesnes (2010), both of whom teach at a CCCU member school, sought to demonstrate that CCCU membership was not necessarily a way station on the road to secularization. This article assumed that a number of influential constituents regarded ABHE membership as a better safeguard against secularization than was CCCU affiliation.

With these concerns in mind, I reiterate that I do not intend the terms “low” and “high” to be evaluative. These terms simply represent substantively different positions with regard to higher educational practices. I have selected the terms “low” and “high” because classic texts in neo-institutional theory suggest that the organizational field of higher education views some practices as being more legitimate than others. In general, the Christian liberal arts approach has received greater acceptance in American higher education than has the Bible college approach. This does not imply that religious
authorities, much less the colleges themselves, regard these practices similarly. Indeed, as noted above, a “low” college may find that its cultural practices are valued more highly in the field of evangelical religion than are the cultural practices of a “high” college.

Material axis

Virtually all baccalaureate colleges (“BCs”) depend heavily upon tuition receipts (Desroches & Wellman, 2011; Toutkoushian, 2001; Wellman, Desroches, & Linehan, 2008). Consideration of tuition revenues as a material axis therefore would provide comparatively little variance from which to sample colleges. For the majority of these colleges, net tuition and fees payments provide virtually all of the income that a college collects in a particular year. Tuition dependence therefore proves acute even among colleges with a close affiliation to an evangelical denomination because denominations tend to provide greater financial support for seminaries than for colleges (Hamilton, 2000).

By contrast, Winston’s (2004) notion of a “general subsidy” provides a ready mechanism by which to measure stratification along the material axis. This subsidy reflects extra-tuition resources that the college contributes to overall educational expenditures. In other words, general subsidy is the difference between educational expenditures and net tuition payments. A few BCs secure a great many of these resources, while the vast majority depends almost solely upon tuition. As such, general subsidy provides a measure with substantial variation from which to select cases, and offers a reasonable omnibus measure of a college’s level of financial resources.
According to the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Set (“IPEDS”), 222 colleges in the United States both espouse an identification with a Protestant denomination and are baccalaureate colleges that provide limited or no graduate instruction. Of these 222 schools, five hold membership in ABHE and thirty-four claim membership in CCCU.

Data made available by the Delta Project (2010), an independent nonprofit initiative, do include information on general subsidies. This dataset standardized IPEDS figures over a 21-year period to account for changing variable definitions. As part of this task, researchers at the Delta Project constructed new variables such as average general subsidy per full-time equivalent (FTE) student.

Using the Higher Education Price Index (“HEPI”), I standardized subsidies for inflation for the years 2003 through 2007. The evangelical Christian baccalaureate colleges included in this sample provided a mean subsidy of $4,621.54 per FTE student for this five-year period. The median subsidy for the same period stood at $4,559.76. This agreement of mean with median suggests that the mean provides a reasonable measure of

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8 The small number of ABHE schools reflects the tendency of these colleges to award seminary graduate degrees alongside baccalaureate awards (Brereton, 1990; Ringenberg, 2006). Appropriately, the Carnegie Foundation does not classify such schools as “baccalaureate colleges,” meaning that few ABHE schools appear in my sample. This programmatic differentiation entails a different financial model than does that employed by BCs. Seminaries often receive substantial direct support from denominations. ABHE colleges that award seminary degrees therefore rely far less heavily on tuition receipts than do evangelical Christian baccalaureate colleges (Hamilton, 2000). Despite the ABHE seminaries’ explicit commitment to evangelicalism, I exclude these organizations from my sample because they follow a different financial model than do the baccalaureate colleges.

9 Unfortunately, the Delta Project’s definition of “subsidy” does not exactly parallel Winston’s measurements. Winston employed an economist’s definition of “cost” as foregone opportunity, and therefore included a measure of opportunity cost in his calculations. Delta, by contrast, simply considered educational and general (E&G) expenditures on educational activities.
the central tendency of these observations, and does not simply reflect an average of very high and very low subsidizers.

Although a few colleges provided a negative subsidy, the overall distribution of subsidies skewed notably to the right. In other words, high per-student subsidies fell much farther from the center of the distribution than did low subsidies. In this context, even colleges whose subsidies fell near the mean and median subsidies may be considered “low material resources” because their subsidies, in absolute dollars, fall far closer to the minimum subsidy than to the maxima.

Sampled cases

The maximum variation sampling approach demands representation at the extremes of both the symbolic and material axes (Creswell, 2007). Accordingly, I sought to identify cases from a range of theological traditions within evangelicalism, and from a range of levels of financial wealth as measured by general subsidy. I briefly summarize the three cases that I selected below. Of note, I designate each case with a pseudonym that protects the confidentiality of the case site.

Credo College. I identified “Credo College” as a case with a high level of symbolic resources and a low level of material resources. Credo was established in the early 20th century, although it moved to its current location in the southeastern United States only in the middle of the 20th century. I conducted fieldwork at Credo College between September 2008 and May 2009 with the approval of the University of Georgia’s Institutional Review Board, or “UGA-IRB” (project #2008-10150-0).
The “high” symbolic designation reflected Credo’s doctrinal positions and its operation as a Christian liberal arts college. A Reformed denomination that emphasizes theological refinement owns and governs Credo College. The school’s faculty members generally espouse a high degree of theological literacy rather than the specifics of dispensational theology or a Holiness emphasis on personal perfectibility. The College’s membership in CCCU rather than ABHE reflects this theological emphasis.

The “low” financial designation reflected Credo’s mean general subsidy per FTE. College finances indicate that Credo provided its students with a mean subsidy of $4,464.95 between the years 2003 and 2007. This figure places Credo slightly below the mean for this time period. Of note, however, very few colleges provided negative subsidies, which would indicate that the school utilized tuition revenues to subsidize other activities. The distribution of subsidies from 2003 through 2007 is therefore skewed heavily rightward. Credo’s subsidy may fall slightly below the mean figure, then, but it stands dramatically below maximum subsidies that sometimes exceeded $10,000 per student. As such, Credo College receives a “high symbolic resource, low financial resource” designation in my sampling design.

Green Valley College. I identified Green Valley College, or “GVC,” as a case with a low level of symbolic resources and a low level of material resources. An evangelical denomination that strongly emphasized personal perfectibility and practical ministry established Green Valley College as a Bible institute in the early 20th century. I conducted fieldwork at GVC between November 2009 and May 2010 with the approval of UGA-IRB (project #2009-10248-0).
The “low” symbolic designation reflects the many elements of GVC’s organizational structure indicating that the College’s religious commitments likely will attain limited purchasing power in the field of secular higher education. GVC functioned as a Bible college from its inception in the early 20th century. It remains an accredited member of ABHE. In keeping with the Bible college tradition, GVC continues to train a large share of its graduates for work in churches, mission agencies, and para-church organizations such as denominational charities. Further, a concentration of 30 course hours in Biblical studies remains at the core of the College’s curriculum even for students who do not elect a major in practical ministry. GVC’s emphasis on ministerial training and Biblical literacy appears to grant priority to denominational needs rather than to educational conventions, and so stands at sharp variance with the dominant norms of secular higher education.

The “low” financial designation reflects GVC’s mean general subsidy per FTE relative to the same awards conferred by its peers. GVC provided only $1823.66 in average subsidy to students over the 2003-2007 academic years. This figure stands well below the mean subsidy of $4621.54 awarded by all evangelical Christian baccalaureate colleges over that time period. Notably, this figure also stands well below the mean per FTE general subsidy conferred by Credo College. Thus, while both cases demonstrate “low” levels of financial resources, GVC’s material position appears notably more precarious than does that of Credo.

Sewall College. I identified Sewall College as a case with a low level of symbolic resources and a high level of material resources. Evangelical Christians from a variety of traditions established Sewall as a nondenominational liberal arts college in the middle of
the 20th century. I conducted fieldwork at Sewall College between October 2010 and May 2011 with the approval of UGA-IRB (project #2010-10843-0).

The “low” symbolic designation reflects Sewall’s history rather than its membership in interstitial organizations. The College emerged from the remnants of politically engaged fundamentalism after that movement’s causes, particularly efforts to ban the teaching of evolutionary biology, met with setbacks in multiple state legislatures (Larson, 2003). As discussed in chapter six, Sewall’s mission statement and other official documents continue to reflect this heritage of resistance to, rather than engagement with, the dominant norms of secular higher education. This approach seems likely to net little positive return in the field of higher education.

The “high” financial designation reflects Sewall’s mean general subsidy per FTE. Between 2003 and 2007, Sewall provided an average general subsidy of $5,764.56 per FTE. This figure stands above the mean and median for the sample during this time period, and so indicates that Sewall enjoys material advantages relative to its peers. Chapters six and seven explore this figure at some length, however, in order to determine whether it actually indicates what it appears to connote.

Data collection

By definition, case studies employ multiple data collection methods (Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, I utilized three different techniques in the completion of this project. I collected data via interview, document analysis, and observation. In the following paragraphs, I outline both these techniques and the ways in which the preceding review of theory and scholarship informed their application.
Interviews

Data collected through semi-structured interviews stood at the core of my qualitative research project. Spradley (1979) enjoined researchers to select both interview questions and participants that provide a range of perspectives upon the project’s research purpose. Accordingly, I posed questions about hiring processes, student recruitment, classroom teaching, and other indicators of the intersection of evangelical Christian commitments with the fiscal realities of baccalaureate colleges. The list of questions that I asked in a typical interview appears in Appendix A.

In the spirit of the “active interview,” however, I regularly posed follow-up questions asking for restatement or clarification of a particular response. This approach allows interview participants to frame the conversation with their responses to questions, and so increases the likelihood that the researcher will accurately represent their testimony (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). These questions do not appear on the interview protocol because they proved particular to a given question and response.

Table one summarizes the 41 individuals whom I interviewed over the course of this research project. As this table indicates, I drew interview participants from three different levels of college employees. First, I interviewed “deans,” by which I indicated any senior administrator who also held a faculty position. Examples included vice presidents, department heads, and chaplains who also held positions in Biblical studies or theology. Second, I interviewed faculty members. Where possible, I sought to interview faculty members who held appointments in a range of different disciplines. Finally, I interviewed administrators, by which I indicated individuals who conducted managerial tasks but did not hold any faculty duties. I use the term “staff members” interchangeably
with “administrators.” This proves consistent with usage patterns of higher education practitioners, and so allows me to present findings in a manner that echoes respondents’ own language. References to “staff members” therefore should not be confused with the more formal use of “staff” as a category inclusive of all employees. Examples of administrators included directors of student financial aid, distance education, and alumni affairs and advancement. Of note, I considered employees who held the title of “dean” but no academic rank – such as deans of enrollment management or deans of finance and administration – to be administrators.

Table one: Interview participants by case site and employment category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Credo College</th>
<th>Green Valley College</th>
<th>Sewall College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Members</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in table one, I interviewed far more individuals at Credo College than at the other two case sites. This occurred because Credo was the first site at which I conducted research for this project. The collection of new data in interviews therefore necessitated substantial revisions to my interview protocol. As I conducted additional interviews, this instrument became more precise and so required fewer revisions. The larger number of interviews at Credo therefore reflected the lower quality of data gathered in early interviews at Credo. I return to this topic when I discuss the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis in this chapter’s final subsection.
Documents and records

I employed document analysis as a second data collection source. These official records and unofficial documents provided evidence of organizational life that may be unreported in interviews. Further, documents provided an important check on interview testimony by providing a baseline against which interview data could be compared (Hodder, 2000).

The literature review conducted in chapter two indicated that evangelical Christian colleges tend to differ from their secular peers with regard to faculty promotion and tenure, undergraduate curricula, and student life policies. Accordingly, I reviewed documents likely to highlight these areas of substantive interest. I analyzed course catalogs, applications for admission, tenure policies, student handbooks, and accreditation reviews likely will provide insight into the questions raised in this project.

In addition to these familiar documents, I utilized a range of descriptive statistics made available by the Delta Project (2010). These figures provided details on changes in a college’s enrollment, finances, and staffing over a 22-year time period. Such data therefore provide important meso-level descriptions against which to interpret the micro-level data gathered from individual interviews and documents.

Observation

Observation stood as a third data collection source. As with interview participants and documents, observation sites reflected the theoretical interests framed in a project’s research questions (Wolcott, 1999). Chapel sessions held on campus constituted the primary observation site. These sessions illustrated a college’s position within the
spectrum of American evangelicalism by indicating whether the variant of evangelical faith espoused on that campus tended toward staid Reformed theology, exuberant charismatic worship, or practical lessons for daily life (Chaves, 2004). As such, observation provided an important check on the validity of sampling decisions based upon document review. For example, if a case selected as “high” on the symbolic axis centered its worship around the recitation of creeds and formal explications of Calvinist theology – as proved to be the case with Credo College – that case would seem to have been classified appropriately by my research design.

Of note, however, most researchers who rely upon observation utilize multiple years of observation data in order to generate a research report (Wolcott, 1999). This implies that observation data may be unreliable in small samples; activities observed on any given day may simply reflect the vagaries of that afternoon’s schedule and participants. Accordingly, I utilize and interpret observation data with greater caution than I use with findings from interviews and documents. In the three case studies that follow, evidence from observation appears exclusively as a supplement to these other data sources. For example, I utilize anecdotes drawn from observation of chapel services or visits to central campus structures to introduce the general patterns that I will document using other qualitative data sources.
Data analysis

Transcripts, codes, and outlines

The analysis of qualitative data typically proceeds inductively and iteratively. That is, recurrent concepts and themes become apparent through consideration of collected data and guide the collection of additional information (Creswell, 2007). Not surprisingly, then, I did not identify the over-arching themes that frame this research report when I began fieldwork in September 2008. Indeed, abstractions such as “the problems of integration and stratification” did not become apparent until I had completed the majority of data collection at my first case study site, Credo College. This subsection traces the steps by which these themes emerged from qualitative data.

The first step in my data analysis proved virtually indistinguishable from data collection itself. I began by generating written records from data sources that did not necessarily produce such records. For example, I wrote field notes immediately following observation activities, typically recording descriptive phrases by hand in a notebook (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). I also produced verbatim transcripts of semi-structured interviews. Because documents and records already assumed a written form, I simply utilized these sources in their existing paper or electronic medium.

Producing written records of interviews and observation activities provided me with an opportunity to revisit data gleaned through these interactions. Methodologists such as Glesne (2005) enjoin qualitative researchers to complete their own transcriptions for precisely this reason. The process of transcription provided me with an opportunity to consider data without the immediacy of data collection. Accordingly, transcription
provided the opportunity to identify terms, concepts, and ideas that recurred in multiple data sources.

While transcribing interviews and observation activities, I labeled paragraphs with simple alphanumeric codes that described their content. For example, I coded references to academic freedom as “F1,” and references to any financial difficulties experienced by the college as “M3.” See Appendix B for a list of all descriptive codes utilized in the analysis of interview transcripts, documents, records, and observation notes. Descriptive codes such as “F1” and “M3” reflected concepts that a review of previous research (chapter one) and theory (chapter two) suggested would be of interest for this study. However, they did not demonstrate particular theoretic or conceptual interest because they simply described data.

Because data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection, the collection of additional information informs the manner in which the researcher gathers additional information from the case site (Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, due to the sequence in which I visited these sites, I developed several new descriptive codes for GVC and Sewall that I had not developed when conducting fieldwork at Credo. Some of these codes, such as “B2” which indicated a school’s Bible college heritage, only proved appropriate to one site (in this case, GVC). Others, however, proved relevant for comparison across cases. In these instances, I returned to interview transcripts, documents, records, and field notes from previous sites in order to apply these new codes to existing data.

Codes that synthesized these descriptive data into analytic constructs emerged through the careful consideration of recurrent codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1967). I
compared these codes to one another repeatedly in an effort to determine which occurred across multiple data sources and which were localized to one data source. I imparted greater significance to themes found in multiple data sources than to those localized to one source. For example, both interview participants and documents at Credo College asserted the importance of Reformed theology for that campus’ operations. I therefore regarded this as an important theme by which to characterize this case.

Simultaneously, I used recurrent themes such as “Reformed theology” to contrast Credo with GVC and Sewall College. These two cases exhibited some elements of Reformed theology, but did not embrace this cultural trope with the unanimity demonstrated by officials at Credo. Accordingly, I developed a thematic code indicating ways in which data sources at GVC and Sewall indicated the limited influence of Reformed theology on their campuses (“R2”). In other words, through the development of themes I paid particular attention the ways in which the different cases exhibited different thematic tendencies. Such comparison across cases constitutes one of the primary theoretic advantages of the multiple case study approach (Yin, 2003).

Due to its inductive, iterative nature, qualitative research typically does not yield thematic and theoretic definition until its final stages. In this sense, “case studies” and “ethnographies” are not simply approaches to research; they are also research products (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1999). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, some important themes emerged very late in the project. For example, I did not begin to conceptualize status as relative to field until midway through data collection at Sewall College, my final case study site. This concept did not become relevant to the study until I fully understood the
way in which Sewall’s high cultural status in the field of conservative politics failed to translate to status or resources in the field of higher education.

Accordingly, the final step in qualitative data analysis consists of the generation of a written report that considers all research data in light of themes and concepts that emerged at any point in the research process (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1999). I present these written records in chapters four, five, and six of this dissertation report. Before proceeding to these chapters, however, I briefly consider the steps that I took to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of these case study reports.

Trustworthiness and validity

Glazer and Strauss (1967) suggested that qualitative researchers should analyze data through the “constant comparison” method. This technique involves the regular refinement of concepts and categories through the collection of additional data. The principle of constant comparison guided my strategy for ensuring the trustworthiness of my research. I compared findings across different data sources and across cases.

The three data collection techniques presented in the preceding sub-section provided an obvious opportunity for comparing findings across data sources. These comparisons ensured refinement of concepts and precision in data collection. Thus, for example, findings from documents often guided interview questions. I queried individuals at Credo about the College’s denominational and theological heritage, whereas I asked interview participants at GVC about that school’s extensive requirements in Biblical studies. These cross-source comparisons ensured that lived practice at a case
study site – as reflected in interview testimony – converged with official pronouncements made in documents and college records.

Findings also may be compared across cases. Yin (2003) cited this comparative dimension when extolling the suitability of multiple case study projects for the exploration of theoretical constructs. To be sure, comparison across cases is unlikely to yield the consonances that may be found when comparing findings across sources. Yet these contrasts become instructive for the refinement of general theoretical concerns. Indeed, given that this project takes stratification as a central concern, I expected some dissonance across cases.

Despite these differences across cases, however, concepts themselves should evidence some validity at all case sites. That is, while I might expect evangelical Christian colleges to behave differently based upon their denominational heritages and material resources, a finding that “material resources” has no bearing upon one case should cause me to reconsider my choice of analytic constructs. This is the concept of “construct validity,” meaning the usefulness and applicability of core theoretic concepts in multiple sites and contexts. Case study findings, reported in chapters four through six, follow surprisingly similar outlines and address similar themes. Accordingly, I conclude that cross-case comparisons demonstrate the validity of the constructs used to analyze qualitative data in these cases.

Each of these comparisons across dimensions increases a case study’s internal validity. That is, these techniques increase the likelihood that findings accurately portray the cases themselves. Because the primary purpose of case study research is to refine theoretical models, however, case studies also must achieve external validity by
demonstrating consonance with recognized social scientific conventions (Yin, 2003). For example, researchers should maintain an “auditable” record of findings such as interview transcripts and extensive field notes taken after ethnographic observation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2003).

Case study projects also achieve external validity through the completion of a case study write-up. This written report should demonstrate “saturation,” a concept indicating the exhaustion of further data collection opportunities (Wolcott, 1999). In other words, the researcher has collected data at all points indicated by his/her theoretic concerns, and the collection of new data in all likelihood would not substantially affect the researcher’s descriptions or interpretations. Additional interviews, observations, and document analyses only would reinforce what the researcher has already found. The completion of a case study report should demonstrate clearly that fieldwork has achieved saturation. I now turn to the three case study reports that I compiled for this research project in an effort to demonstrate the validity of these attempts to answer my research questions.

Introduction to findings chapters

The following three chapters present findings from three qualitative case studies. Due to the distinctive nature of each case, these chapters evidence slightly different organizational conventions. This project seeks to extrapolate theoretic consequences from these different cases, however, which necessitates the inclusion of some common elements in each chapter. For example, because this study explicitly foregrounds the role of resource stratification in shaping organizational responses to problems, each case
presentation begins with a brief review of the material and symbolic resources available to that particular college.

I further seek to create thematic unity by employing language consistently throughout all cases. In each chapter, a discussion of “the problem of integration of faith and learning” follows the chapter introduction. A discussion of stratification along symbolic and material axes constitutes then follows in each chapter. By employing these common structural elements, I seek to situate the distinctive elements of each case within a framework that is common to all cases in the study.

I draw upon these common elements when I summarize findings and relate them to social theory at the end of each case study report. Readers may find these summaries to be excessively short, even unsatisfying. However, this lack of detail reflects a conscious decision on how best to present case study findings. Because this project draws upon findings from multiple case studies, the core concepts of theoretic interest – that is, those topics highlighted by the project’s guiding research questions – are best understood through the comparison of one case to another. Such cross-case analysis constitutes one of the primary strengths of the multiple case study approach (Yin, 2003). This comparison, and the attendant exploration of theoretic concepts, occurs in this project’s final chapter. Accordingly, the concluding section of each case study report seeks merely to foreshadow the discussion that follows in chapter seven.

Finally, because each of these chapters seeks to address the project’s research questions from the vantage of a particular case study site, I re-state these questions below. If I have done my job well, these questions should provide a roadmap by which to navigate the three chapters that follow.
1. How do three different evangelical Christian colleges attempt to integrate their religious and academic operations?

2. How does each college’s different level of symbolic resources, meaning theological heritage or organizational history, affect its operations?

3. How does each college’s different level of material resources, meaning money, tuition-paying students, and credentialed faculty labor, affect its operations?
CHAPTER 5

CREDO COLLEGE

I classified Credo College as a “high symbolic resource, low material resource” case when sampling case study sites to include in this project. “Low material resource” provided a fairly straightforward designation indicating that the College’s financial resources fell below the median level attained by CCCU and ABHE member schools for which data was available. As discussed in the chapter on research methods, I employed the general subsidy that the College provided to its students as the primary measure of material resources. “General subsidy” reflected the College’s total expenditures on instruction and related activities net of students’ own contributions through tuition and fee payments. I selected this measure based on the assumption that not-for-profit colleges and universities charged tuition rates that did not cover total educational expenses (Winston, 1999). According to Winston’s (2004) research on college finances, colleges and universities differ more widely when measured by these non-tuition financial resources than by tuition receipts. General subsidies therefore provided a clear view of the discretionary resources available to a particular college. As reported by the Delta Project, Credo’s mean general subsidy of $4,464.95 from 2003 through 2007 fell below the mean subsidy awarded by evangelical Christian colleges during this time period. In the case study report that follows, I explore other indicators of scarce material resources and the manner in which operations at Credo College reflected this level of material resources.
The classification “high symbolic resource” represented the view that dominant normative structures that characterize much of higher education would likely have of the College’s religious tradition. I employed this particular lens of analysis because this project focused upon evangelical Christian colleges rather than upon the whole of evangelical Christianity. I therefore emphasized whether resources have currency in the field of higher education, not their purchasing power in the field of religion. As a result, the term “high symbolic resource” does not indicate that Credo College’s religious orientation would be viewed positively in every social setting. Indeed, as more than one interview participant noted to me during the course of the data collection summarized below, Credo’s intellectualized theology often provoked questioning glances from religious authorities who espoused a holiness, Restorationist, or fundamentalist interpretations of the evangelical tradition.

By contrast, the College’s reliance on Reformed theological narratives developed in the 16th century seemed likely to provide some measure of legitimacy in the field of higher education. After all, scholars in secular universities also studied Calvinist theology and Reformation history. Faculty at Credo and those at secular colleges and universities therefore at least shared some common ground. By contrast, almost no secular scholars in secular settings practiced as part of their profession the emphases on right behavior and right conduct that characterize elements of evangelicalism drawn from holiness, Restorationist, or fundamentalist traditions. To be sure, scholars might espouse such faith practices themselves, although such individuals have proved statistically uncommon (Gross & Simmons, 2008). Even for these believers, however, an emphasis on right conduct or behavior would not constitute part of their professional role. The separation
between the dominant forms of higher education and more practice-oriented forms of evangelicalism therefore proved almost complete, whereas the divide between the norms of higher education and Credo’s intellectualized, theological model of evangelicalism could be bridged at least in part by the shared subject matter of Calvinist theology and Reformation era history. For these reasons, relative to its evangelical peers the symbolic economy of Credo College likely would be viewed favorably by the dominant normative structures higher education.

Description and chapter overview

Credo College occupied a swath of contoured land abutting a precipice in the Appalachian foothills. The parking spaces reserved for guests sat relatively low on this uneven terrain, leaving the visitor to walk uphill to the quadrangle at the center of the campus. Credo’s massive chapel loomed on the horizon as I took this brief stroll. The chapel was by far the tallest building on the campus, yet it appeared even taller when viewed looking uphill from the parking area. As befits a school that proclaims its intentional identification with evangelical Christian faith, the chapel’s soaring roof simultaneously dominated the campus and, because the building sat on a ledge, loomed over the valley below. An exterior of native stones added a sense of visual weightiness to the structure. The chapel appeared anchored to the rock from which it was constructed, even as its soaring steeple and precarious hilltop footing indicated its heavenly ambitions.

Despite this grand exterior, the chapel interior reflected the Reformed tradition of plain structures that aimed not to distract from worship (Cornick, 2008). Its walls and ceiling were simple white. Three sections of plain pews fanned out around a raised stage
that stood empty save for a lectern. These sparse appointments proved in keeping with the tradition of Reformed worship, which was generally more formal than the sometimes emotive services conducted by other evangelicals (Chaves, 2004). Three thin stained glass windows provided the only splashes of color amidst these plain environs.

The largest of these three windows outlined a narrative account in a vertical orientation that suggested the story’s linear unfolding. The bottom panel illustrated the creation story contained in the third chapter of the book of Genesis. Moving upward, the next panel depicted “the fall,” or Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden. Many Christian traditions including most Reformed churches asserted that this fall imparted the quality of innate sinfulness to all subsequent human beings. Above the fall stood a pane depicting the crucifixion of Jesus, which members of the College community proclaimed as an act of redemption that rescued human beings from the inherently sinful state induced by the fall. Taken together, these three panels visually enacted an upward-moving sequence of creation, fall, and redemption. Interview participants referred to this story as “the Reformed metanarrative.” The decision to embed this story in the stained glass window testified to its importance at Credo. As a further reminder of the narrative’s centrality, the window rose behind the lectern that stood as the focal point of chapel services.

Much of this chapter developed the theme of this metanarrative and its uses. In the terms of neo-institutional theory, the historical pedigree and intellectualized nature of Credo’s theologically focused worship provided the College with a “script” (Jepperson, 1991). A script in this case indicated a cultural resource recognized by the dominant normative structures of secular higher education. This resource allowed individuals at the College to address practical problems in a manner that proved consistent with College’s
already existing response to what I have termed “the problem of integration.” This term denoted the difficulty in reconciling the dominant normative standards of higher education with evangelical religious beliefs that often have directly criticized the secular academy.

While providing a formal and perhaps formidable response to the problem of integration, the theological resource embodied in the stained glass window could not erase the College’s material problems. Credo required money and credentialed labor in order to continue its operations. Most small private colleges drew the largest proportion of their revenues from tuition (Toutkoushian, 2001). Yet Credo continued to require students to attend chapel sessions in direct contrast to the demise of *in loco parentis* student affairs programs in most of higher education (Thelin, 2003). Would such requirements appear onerous or attractive to tuition-paying students? Further, College faculty members annually signed the Westminster Confession of Faith, a Reformation-era formulation of the principles of Calvinist theology in English. This stipulation of employment directly violated the normative, though not the legal, understanding of academic freedom as a faculty member’s right to research and teach without impediment in his/her area of scholarly expertise (Slaughter, 1994). Would this requirement impede the College’s ability to identify, recruit, and retain credentialed faculty and staff members? Credo’s symbolic economy might lend legitimacy to the College’s response to these problems, but does not erase these concerns altogether.

I organize this chapter in three sections. I begin by exploring Credo’s symbolic resources in greater detail. I first consider what the term “Reformed” means to the College’s sponsoring denomination, and then turn my attention to a fuller exploration of
the Reformed theological metanarrative represented in the College’s stained glass window. This metanarrative constitutes the core of the College’s symbolic economy and the anchor of its relatively high level of legitimacy in the eyes of secular higher education. In the following two subsections, I consider the problem-solving uses to which Credo has put this metanarrative. I suggest that the formal and intellectualized nature of the College’s symbolic economy proves of some assistance in identifying and training suitable candidates for faculty positions. I then consider the specific instance of teaching evolutionary biology as an example of the high level of consensus and relative sophistication that Credo College brought to bear on the problem of integrating religious faith with academic insights.

In the second section, I consider the College’s limited material resources. I begin by describing the College’s position as a tuition-dependent organization. I then note two specific instances – expanded tuition revenues and private gifts – whereby the College seeks to bolster its financial position. In each case, I conclude that Credo’s symbolic resources provided some assistance with these problems. I also suggest that these have been at best partial successes, as each problem that the College addresses raises new concerns in turn.

The final section explores the interaction of rich symbolic resources and a shortage of material resources at the College. I suggest that, on balance, Credo’s rich symbolic economy proves the dominant explanatory factor. Cultural resources allow Credo to operate as a successful liberal arts college despite both the common problems faced by evangelical Christian colleges in the largely secular field of higher education (“the problem of integration”) and the College’s own shaky financial footing (“the
problem of stratification”). However, I raise questions about the extent to which Credo can sustain these successes into the future.

Symbolic resources, Reformed theology, and the problem of integration

**Distinctively Reformed**

While the image of the stained glass window briefly encapsulated many of Credo’s distinctive characteristics, an in-depth discussion of the College’s symbolic dimension repeatedly returned to a term – “Reformed” – that can prove elusive to define. In its most basic sense, “Reformed” simply indicated any non-Lutheran Protestant during the Reformation. This variant of Protestantism spread across linguistic groups in Europe by adopting a local character, meaning that “the Reformed” never attained the degree of theological or denominational consistency characteristic of Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Nonetheless, over their first century of existence these Christians came to share a number of characteristics derived from the work of the 16th century thinker John Calvin. Calvin and his followers argued that human beings were inherently sinful, incapable of improving their own condition, and therefore wholly reliant on a sovereign God for salvation. Despite later challenges from Jacobus Arminius, a Reformed thinker who found a fuller place for human free will than did Calvin, the majority of Reformed churches embraced both Calvin’s theology and the label of “Calvinist,” a term that Roman Catholics and Lutherans had coined to deride Reformed believers (Cornick, 2008; MacCulloch, 2009).

Reformed churches codified Calvinist thought into creedal statements such as the Confession of Dordrecht and the English-language Westminster Confession. A full
exploration of the religious tenets expressed in these documents would extend well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, two points about these confessional statements offered essential background against which to interpret the contemporary status of Credo College. First, these statements provided a clearly articulated, formal framework around which Reformed religious life could operate. This formality constituted a key component of my classification of Reformed thought as a neo-institutional “script” around which an organization could arrange responses to particular problems. Second, the content of these statements tended to be theological, prescribing particular ways to think about God rather than proscribing certain behaviors. As such, Reformed creedal statements occupied an intellectual realm that made them a subject of study for secular or mainline scholars as well as evangelicals (Cornick, 2008; MacCulloch, 2009, 2004; Marsden, 1997; Smidt, Luidens, Penning, & Nemeth, 2008). For this reason, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, I classified Credo’s symbolic economy as possessing a high level of purchasing power in the normative realm of secular higher education.

The broad definition of the term “Reformed” as “non-Lutheran Protestant” stood as crucial background against which to interpret the case of Credo College. Yet this definition lacked the precision necessary to be the only meaning of “Reformed” employed in a study of evangelical higher education in the contemporary United States. After all, virtually all evangelical Protestants could be labeled “Reformed” in this broader sense of the term (Marsden, 1997; Porterfield, 2001). Further complicating matters, Reformed colleges tended to emerge out of a diverse array of ethnodenominational traditions that paralleled the national churches of Europe (Lindsay, 1992). These factors
indicated that differences among the Reformed, in the broad sense of that term, are more important for the purposes of this study than are the historical roots common to many American Protestant groups.

In an effort to address this topic, George Marsden (1997) identified three strains of Reformed Protestantism in United States. The “doctrinalists” tended to define the Reformed church through fealty to the 16th century confessional statements. By contrast, “pietist” believers reflected the mood of the 18th century American Great Awakenings, and so tended to emphasize upright conduct and the conversion of new believers. Pietism thereby emerged as the strand of Reformed Christianity most closely associated with the bulk of American evangelicalism. Finally, “culturalists” defined themselves through their attitude toward the non-Reformed world. These Reformed Christians emphasized the construction of schools, publishing houses, and other agencies through which they could place their theological heritage in dialog with secular American culture including political pluralism and scientific discoveries.

A College dean noted that all three of these elements appeared at Credo. “I’ve always appreciated that Credo has all three of those strands alive and well on campus,” he told me. Yet, he conceded, these three elements did not exist in equal proportions. Credo regulated student and faculty conduct, but it prohibited behaviors such as the consumption of alcohol only on campus. The College did not deem the consumption of alcohol to be sinful, only inimical to the pursuit of undergraduate education. “We don’t believe that drinking is wrong, we just believe that it makes a college a better place if there isn’t binge drinking starting on Wednesday night,” one dean told me. This
orientation illustrated the relative weakness of the pietist strain, which tended to emphasize behavioral restrictions. The same dean concluded simply, “we’re not pietists.”

Credo College also manifested some elements of the doctrinalist strain, particularly in its continued employment of the foundational documents of the Reformed tradition. “Every year, we sign the Westminster Confession of faith,” one faculty member told me. While this adherence to Reformation-era creeds indicated the influence of doctrinalism on campus, this faculty member significantly defined those documents as important not for their own sake, but for the ideas and teachings that they contained. “The lines [of acceptable belief] are right out there for you,” he concluded. This indicated that the doctrinalist tradition, like pietism, operated in the service of a more intellectualized version of the Reformed faith.

The culturalist sub-tradition emphasized intellectualized expressions of faith and engagement with secular cultural institutions. Adjectives such as “formal,” “systematic,” and “intellectual” best described the variant of Reformed faith that characterized Credo College. Indeed, the College approached its faith in such a strongly culturalist manner that it termed its mandatory introduction to the College’s religious tradition “The Christian Mind.” Although manifesting elements of all three traditions, Credo College seemed clearly to position itself in alignment with the culturalist religion of the mind rather than the pietist faith of evangelical fervor or the doctrinalist emphasis on traditional creeds. I now turn my attention to a deeper exploration of the specific form that the culturalist tradition assumed on Credo’s campus.
Creation, fall, redemption

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, study participants often referred to the image depicted in the chapel’s stained glass window as the “metanarrative of creation-fall-redemption.” In this theological metanarrative, all truth existed with reference to a Creator. A Creator both made the natural world – what Reformed Christians term “general revelation” – and allowed this world to be intelligible to human beings. Thus, academic inquiry into the natural world became an act of worship, for it involved the discovery of truths that God revealed through a created order. “Whether it is God revealed in scripture and looking awfully supernatural, or whether it is the study of part of the creation – of people, patterns, or literature,” an academic dean told me, “there ought to be a sense that ‘The way I used to think about it is wrong, and I need to repent of it.’” The term “repent” suggested that the “fall” component of the metanarrative juxtaposed human sinfulness with Divine perfection. “In our Reformed tradition, we would say that there is nothing in our lives that is unaffected by our sin and our rebellion against God,” a minister on staff told me. This fallenness meant that all humans required a corrective in order to perceive truth accurately. According to the faculty and staff of Credo College, this corrective came through Christian scriptures, which Reformed Christians termed “special revelation.” Through special revelation’s promise of Divine

10 Throughout this document I capitalize terms such as “Creator” and “God” that participants employed to refer to divinity. I employ this usage in an effort to reproduce the conventions of the evangelical Christians about whom I write. Such use of “insider” terms characterizes much qualitative fieldwork in the social sciences, particularly that influenced by the ethnographic tradition (Wolcott, 1999). This usage therefore reflects the conventions of Credo College, and should not be interpreted as an indication of my own religious commitments.
salvation from sinfulness, Reformed Christians anticipated “redemption,” the third term of their theological metanarrative.

The Reformed theological metanarrative permeated College life. For example, chapel sermons touched directly upon Reformed theological concepts. A weeklong cycle of services built around “Reformation Day” highlighted the College’s self-conscious ties to 16th century religious upheavals. Speakers at these and other sermons often invoked John Calvin, one of the most influential thinkers in the Reformed tradition (MacCulloch, 2009). Calvin distinguished himself from other Reformed thinkers in part through his emphasis on “election,” or the notion that God chose the saved and did not simply respond to human actions. Over time, attitudes toward human free will distinguished “Calvinist” Reformed Christians, such as those at Credo, from “Arminian” Reformers, whose belief in human free will and action influenced much of American evangelicalism (MacCulloch, 2004; Marsden, 1991). Several chapel speakers pointedly contrasted their Calvinist heritage with the Arminianism that dominated most of American evangelicalism. One speaker spent most of her sermon criticizing “prosperity theology,” the common evangelical notion that those who behave righteously would prosper materially (Balmer, 1993). She stressed that Calvinist theology simply did not leave enough space for human agency to exercise such a great influence over divinely ordered affairs. Another sermon, delivered by a guest lecturer from the Reformed Church of Scotland, dwelled entirely upon a few verses from the book of Ephesians and their illumination of the concept of election. Such detailed debates about the Reformed intellectual tradition might seem alien to the worship traditions of other evangelicals, who
often regard theology as an unnecessary ornament to personal salvation and right behavior (Hughes, 1997; Lindsay, 2007; Marsden, 1991).

Credo’s theological metanarrative reflected the principles of Calvinist thought and implicitly broke from the many American evangelicals who allied themselves with the Arminian tradition. Credo proclaimed human fallibility and divine sovereignty in its motto and mission statement, both of which emphasized the “preeminence” of Christ relative to fallen humanity. This emphasis on divine sovereignty had a surprising consequence for the College’s attitude toward the non-Reformed world. One faculty member related to me the process by which he left a fundamentalist church and became a Reformed Christian. “I bumped into a few Reformed folks who said, ‘We think the Bible has a bigger reading than that. God encompasses the world.’ That was like getting saved the second time for me because it emphasized the sovereignty of God and how this is His world,” he told me. In other words, the Reformed emphasis on divine sovereignty suggested that the non-Reformed world must serve some purpose. Interaction with the secular world was not something to shun, then, but an opportunity to explore God’s design more fully.

In keeping with this emphasis on divine sovereignty and human fallenness, the “culturalist” elements of the College sought to engage with the non-Reformed world rather than to remove its influence from campus. “We feel that God teaches us through general revelation,” a faculty member said, employing a term that the Reformed Christians at Credo used to signify empirical observation of the natural and social worlds. This individual stated that faculty members should explore and teach on any academic subject “so long as it does not contradict special revelation,” a term indicating the
College’s theological worldview and its interpretation of the Christian scriptures. In other words, teaching and research at Credo College remained subject to the College’s faith commitments, but these religious beliefs did not demand that academic work be regarded only with suspicion. He went on to suggest that this impulse derived from religious grounds rather than from a desire to secure approval from the non-Reformed world. “That kind of sovereignty has a good theological basis usually associated with the Reformation,” he concluded.

As this last passage suggests, the theological metanarrative performed an important service to the College’s efforts to address the problem of integrating religious faith with academic content. Other evangelical Protestants might cast the non-evangelical world – including the secular academy – as a danger of which to be wary. Credo College, by contrast, viewed the non-Reformed world as something of which to be unafraid, for the non-Reformed world also fell under divine authority. In the words of one dean, “There was a Dutch theologian who eventually became prime minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper. He wrote that there was not one inch of the entire creation over which Jesus Christ does not rightfully declare, ‘This is Mine’ The idea is that the physical world is God’s, and the devotional practices are God’s. There is a robust understanding here of God as the creator of all.” Because God exercised sovereignty over all of these activities, even the secular world should be considered as congenial rather than antithetical to religious faith. As one long-serving faculty member told me, “A difference between our school and another Christian school would be our view of culture. The more fundamentalistic schools tend to be anti-cultural: ‘We don’t enter into this or that because it is the evil world.’ We take a different view on that.”
Because the College defined its religious beliefs in terms of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Reformation and its intellectual legacy, Credo tended to regard the history of the western world as its own history rather than as a history of descent into depraved irreligiosity. The College proclaimed this orientation in its core curriculum, which included 16 credit hours of “Cultural Engagement.” Credo clearly viewed these courses as central to its work. A faculty member noted that the College placed such a high priority on these core courses in cultural engagement that it pressed senior faculty members into teaching them. In his recollection, when the College began offering this course sequence the president decided, “those core courses were going to be taught by the regular faculty members even if that meant we had to hire adjuncts to teach other courses.” Clearly Credo College placed great emphasis on instruction in a particular way of engaging with the secular academy and its cultural heritage. Just as clearly, this impetus to engagement emerged not in spite of religious strictures, but directly from religious principles of divine sovereignty and human fallenness. Credo’s theological metanarrative proved crucial in foregrounding the problem of integration by ensuring that the College attempted to engage with rather than discredit the non-Reformed academy.

Because of its commitment to engagement with the non-Reformed academy, Credo College viewed itself as different from other evangelical Christian colleges. “It’s not a Bible school education,” one dean told me. “It’s not a vocational or career education.” A faculty member in Biblical Studies echoed this view. “We don’t train missionaries or preachers here,” he said. “We give Bible courses that are background.”

Individuals at Credo College tended to refer to their approach – engagement with the secular academy through the lens of Reformed theology – as “Christian liberal arts”
education. The Council of Christian Colleges and Universities employed this term to describe its members in an effort to distinguish those schools both from mainline liberal arts colleges and from evangelical Bible colleges. While Credo may have adopted this term from a membership organization, College documents indicated that Credo did function as a liberal arts college. Many small private baccalaureate colleges confer a large proportion of their degrees in vocational or pre-professional areas rather than in liberal arts fields (Delucchi, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). At Credo, by contrast, between 2005-06 and 2008-09 a far greater proportion of students graduated with baccalaureate degrees in humanities (35+%), social sciences (20+%), and natural sciences (15+%) than in education (<10%) or business and other professional fields (<10%). In other words, while some evangelical Christian colleges have emphasized applied fields that posed relatively few challenges to religious faith (Hughes, 1997), Credo has emphasized the academic fields that have tended to produce the insights with which conventional evangelical beliefs conflict. This commitment to liberal education proved consistent with the College’s “culturalist” religious belief that Reformed evangelicals should engage in dialog with the secular academy.

Given that Reformed theological notions of divine sovereignty and human fallenness mandated engagement with secular culture, it is appropriate that the symbolic resource of Reformed theology also proved of some value in the College’s efforts to address complex problems that arose from such engagement. In the following subsections, I outline Credo’s theologically informed responses to two key issues identified in this study. I begin by considering the theological narrative as a tool for addressing the material problem of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty members. I then discuss the
College’s response to the problem of integration that arose when academic insights conflicted with church teachings, as in the case of evolutionary biology. I posit that the sophistication and single-mindedness with which Credo faculty approached this topic evidences the effective transmission of the College’s Reformed identity both to prospective faculty members and, through ongoing training, to those hired at the College.

Using theology to identify and train faculty members

In its “culturalist” or intellectualized form, Reformed theology has developed a refined theological vocabulary and distinctive Calvinist concepts (Marsden, 1997). These intellectual tools provided ready indicators of which candidates for faculty and staff positions would be suitable for employment at the College. “I was looking for somebody who was already solidly committed to a Reformed understanding of theology in general, and education in particular,” one faculty member told me. Faculty search committees at peer colleges had to sift through candidates who espoused a wide range of evangelical beliefs. By contrast, hiring bodies at Credo looked to Reformed theology for clear indicators of a candidate’s suitability.

As a result, Credo’s hiring process proved in-depth and formalized. Each candidate for a faculty position submitted a written response to the Westminster Confession of Faith as part of his or her application. Candidates who came to campus for an interview typically faced a series of questions about any reservations they may have included in this statement. Even the College’s trustees, many of whom were denominational officials, engaged in this questioning. “The fact that Board members interview every faculty member forestalls any slip to secularism,” a dean told me. This
in-depth examination of candidates often revealed which applicants were unsuitable for positions at Credo College. One faculty member related to me that the Board of Trustees rejected a highly qualified and devoutly evangelical applicant due to differences between the candidate’s Reformed denomination and the denomination that sponsors Credo College. Denominations that identified themselves both as Reformed and evangelical nonetheless often developed different positions on the role of women in the church (Smidt, Luidends, & Penning, & Nemeth, 2008). This candidate faced rejection by the Board of Trustees because the Reformed denomination to which he belonged ordained women. Credo’s sponsoring denomination did not ordain female ministers. Thus, although the candidate held membership in a Reformed church and identified himself as an evangelical Christian, the College’s Board of Trustees cited religious grounds as a basis on which to reject the department’s recommendation to hire this individual.

The outcome of this decision, a failed search, might be regarded as an incident in which the College’s symbolic economy had disrupted the satisfaction of its material need for credentialed labor. Yet the faculty member with whom I spoke interpreted the story in precisely the opposite manner. In his telling:

I think it’s a huge plus in the sense that [the College] knows who it is and doesn’t pretend not to be who it is. It attracts, develops, and retains faculty and other employees … around its mission congruence. The confessional standards, the statement of academic purpose of the College, the vision of the College all hang together to reinforce that mission and culture.

For this individual, a failed search represented a more positive outcome than the hiring and eventual departure of a candidate whose interpretation of evangelical Christianity did
not match that espoused at Credo. In other words, Reformed theology stood as a resource that enabled Credo to identify who would and would not be a suitable candidate for a faculty position.

Reformed theology also aided the College in a second aspect of faculty hiring by identifying Credo to candidates. That is, Credo’s identification with a recognizable and clearly bounded subgroup allowed the College to signal its position within evangelicalism to prospective faculty members. The College’s theological language and statements of faith could serve to discourage “pietist” applicants who tended to focus on right conduct rather than engagement with secular culture. In the words of one dean, “We are able to attract very serious scholars who are serious about their faith and want to talk about it with other people who are like-minded.” According to many faculty members, this allowed the College to identify and attract highly qualified candidates who earned terminal degrees at prestigious secular universities. “Most of our faculty could be just about anywhere they wanted to be,” one faculty member told me. “We’ve got PhDs from Cambridge, Stanford, Oxford, and Yale.” An academic dean concurred in this assessment, noting, “If you were to look down the degrees of our professors, at the places that they went, it’s a surprising list of institutions.” In his analysis, the College attracted these highly qualified faculty members because it was “well grounded in a Reformed theological tradition” and could communicate this tradition clearly to candidates. A faculty member concurred. “There are some faculty here who had what were, in the world’s eyes, more attractive positions elsewhere. They gave those up because they believe in the mission of the institution.” In his telling, “A great example is one of our
economists.” This individual left a tenured position at a public research university “because he believed in what the College was trying to do.”

In addition to its twofold contribution to the hiring process, the College’s Reformed heritage shaped training and faculty development. This training proved necessary because many Credo faculty members, as indicated in the previous paragraph, had earned terminal degrees from secular universities. Credo officials therefore sought to provide additional training to new faculty members in order to ensure that classroom teaching reflected a distinctly Reformed approach to academic subject matter.

In training as in hiring, the chief value of Credo’s symbolic economy seemed to be its formalization and systemization. The College could communicate its identity and expectations to new hires with relative ease. One mechanism of communication proved to be statements on contemporary issues and problems endorsed by the College’s faculty. These statements allowed prospective faculty members to determine at a glance what Credo expected in certain areas. In the words of one faculty member, “there is a lot that you can hand to a person and say, ‘You don’t need to wait until you have 10 years of institutional history under your belt. You can read these things about what we aspire to be, what we are, and what we value.’” For example, a “statement of community belief” generally addressed areas of broad concern to the College, such as the universal applicability of Reformed theological concepts. A second document, the “philosophy of education” statement, also communicated the College’s Reformed identity, noting that “the Grand Narrative” of creation, fall, and redemption framed the College and its work.

Beyond these statements, Credo provided additional formal accounts of organizational values. One faculty member offered, “there is a reading list in the faculty
manual of books that the faculty has agreed to recommend.” These books included volumes of theology by Abraham Kuyper and commentaries on the contemporary landscape of higher education written by Reformed thinkers, including some of the College’s own faculty members. According to one academic dean, these texts constituted an agreed-upon basis from which the College could train new faculty members. “We have a mentoring and book study for new faculty members that lasts a couple of years,” he told me. This multi-year training process emphasized the importance of presenting Reformed theology and academic content alongside one another. “Basically, it has to do with faith related to their discipline,” he concluded. In other words, this seminar constituted an extended training and evaluation mechanism by which deans could ensure that new faculty members embraced the College’s tenets as laid out in various faculty statements and the recommended reading list.

These formal mechanisms yielded a faculty that explored Reformed theology with notable purposefulness. In keeping with the “culturalist” tradition, this purposefulness did not mean that they provided identical answers to difficult questions, only that they posed these questions within the common constraints of Reformed theology. In the following subsection, I consider the usefulness of this approach for addressing the problem of integration as represented in the “controversial topic” of evolutionary biology.

Using theology to address the problem of integration

With its central element of human fallenness, the Reformed metanarrative instilled a sense of humility in most faculty members and deans at Credo College. One dean stated that apparent conflicts between academic and religious values did not indicate
intrinsic antagonism between the two spheres, but the inability of fallen human beings to understand the two dimensions fully. “The appearance of conflict is with my own limited knowledge, my own finiteness, my own fallenness,” he said. “It doesn’t mean that they are in conflict, only that we haven’t yet arrived at the level of knowledge or understanding where they come together.” A faculty member in Biblical Studies echoed this theme. “We don’t always know when [religion and academic insights] contradict each other,” he told me. “We once thought that the world was flat and the center of the universe, and we struck out on that one. So we have got to be careful.”

In this spirit, individuals at Credo tended to take a measured approach to “controversial topics” such as evolutionary biology in which academic insights and evangelical beliefs tended to conflict. In the words of one faculty member, “Reformed types are arguers, and consensus is not a virtue.” The College reflected this lack of consensus and attempted to offer few “right answers.” Instead, Credo instructed students in particular ways of using Reformed theology to frame controversial topics.

One such topic, evolutionary biology, drew the ire of many evangelical Christians throughout the 20th century. These believers tended to cast evolution as an affront to their belief in divine creation (Larson, 2003). Faculty members at Credo approached the topic of evolution differently. Rather than teaching that evolution was wrong or a threat to Christian belief, faculty members in the sciences reported presenting evolution as a widely accepted scientific principle. One faculty member characterized conventional evangelical dismissals of evolution as “not intellectually honest.” This lack of honesty stemmed directly from avoidance rather than engagement with the broader academic world. “The last thing I wanted to give my students was a straw man argument,” he told
me. Instead, he and his peers presented evolutionary biology as widely accepted knowledge.

Alongside this content, however, Credo presented the lens of Reformed theology. In the words of one dean, this yielded “a very different narration” of academic insights than would be the case at a non-evangelical college or university. “There is a sense of awe and wonder that is directed toward a Creator,” he concluded. A faculty member in the sciences concurred. For him, “evolution is not the issue.” Instead of instilling a particular position on the truth or falsity of evolutionary biology in his students, he sought to impress upon them “the preeminence of Christ and who He is.” For this physicist, the question was not whether belief in evolution was permissible, but “how does a Christian think about really broad topics” using a Reformed theological lens.

The example of evolution indicated the usefulness of the Reformed theological lens as a symbolic resource that can address the problem of integration. Evangelical Christians whose religious beliefs operated on the level of right behavior likely would seek a particular, definitive answer to the tensions between evolutionary biology and the most common evangelical reading of the book of Genesis. Credo managed to sidestep this problem by proclaiming that, while a “right answer” exists, human beings are fallen and therefore incapable of knowing that answer. Rather than focusing upon potential conflict, then, humans simply should accept the apparent contradictions of science and faith as evidence of their own sinfulness and imperfection. In other words, thanks to the Reformed theological metanarrative, controversial topics such as evolutionary biology did not threaten religious belief at Credo College but, by reinforcing the prominence of doubt and fallenness, bolstered religious claims. The nature of Credo College’s symbolic
economy therefore provided a response to the problem of integration that would be unavailable to most other evangelical Christian colleges.

_The uses and limits of the College’s symbolic economy_

Formal mechanisms such as faculty statements, a recommended reading list consisting of works of Reformed theology, and a book study group paralleled Credo’s overall symbolic economy. This economy, in Marsden’s (1997) terms, assumed a “culturalist” form in which Reformed Christianity assumed a largely intellectualized form. By extension, the College primarily communicated its identity in intellectualized, formal mechanisms. These mechanisms helped the organization to attract faculty members who approached controversial topics in a similar manner. After hiring, Credo provided training to make those similar tendencies converge even more tightly. The result proved evident in the nuanced and near-unanimous approach that College faculty took to the controversial topic of evolutionary biology.

The previous paragraph summarized many of the advantages offered by Credo’s symbolic economy. Yet the College’s symbolic economy alone did not explain Credo’s successes in recruiting and training faculty members. Credo also relied on material mechanisms, including two key employment policies, to achieve its high level of consensus on the Reformed worldview.

The College’s tenure arrangements provided faculty members with a series of revolving three- and five-year contracts. These contracts would be renewed annually pending successful performance reviews, meaning that a highly regarded faculty member might never have fewer than five years of guaranteed employment. However, this system
also could serve as a mechanism for dismissing faculty members. “Ours is not a barnacle system,” one faculty member told me. As his comment indicated, even a long-tenured professor could face dismissal at the end of a contract if he or she strayed too far from the Reformed message. A professor in the department of philosophy held responsibility for “Faculty Development,” and conducted annual reviews of individuals’ teaching to ensure that they remained within the bounds set by denominational officials. One faculty member who had served at the College for many years noted this obliquely when discussing the controversial subject, evolution, identified above. “I flirt with theistic evolution. I think that God could have created the world through evolution,” he told me. “Now, if I say that out loud, I am out of here because our denomination still does not accept that.” This faculty member seemed to believe that Credo’s tenure system existed to ensure that individuals who embraced too-controversial ideas could be removed from the College’s employ. While the College’s culturalist position tolerated a range of views, the material reality of its tenure policy provided a mechanism by which ideas that proved excessively controversial could be silenced or removed from the College altogether. A second faculty member concurred with this assessment, stating simply, “I’m not going to survive if I’m contrary to the culture here.” The College’s definition of tenure as a series of revolving contracts served to enforce the consensus around the Reformed metanarrative that its hiring and training policies had sought to develop.

The College’s symbolic economy also found material backing in the form of faculty compensation. Credo had for decades paid its faculty members at a lower rate than did other evangelical Christian colleges. One long-serving faculty member summarized his experience by asking, “You know that saying: ‘You did four jobs and got
paid for half?” Since 2000, however, Credo had sought to increase faculty compensation for new faculty hires. Figures made public by the College’s office of institutional research indicated Credo’s success in this endeavor. By 2008, Credo paid a higher mean salary to assistant professors than did the average CCCU member college. Unfortunately, neither these data nor figures standardized by the Delta Project on College Costs disaggregated faculty compensation by discipline. However, the growing proportion of Credo’s degrees conferred in the social sciences and humanities, referenced earlier in this chapter, made it unlikely that rising mean wages simply reflected the hiring of well-compensated faculty members in business, computer science, or other pre-professional programs. Instead, these high starting wages – at least, relative to other evangelical Christian colleges – seemed likely to bolster the effects of Reformed theology in convincing prospective faculty members to accept employment at Credo College.11

In summary, then, Reformed theology proved a valuable tool with which Credo could approach two vital problems associated with the operation of an evangelical Christian College. The formal nature of Reformed theology both enabled the College to identify and attract qualified faculty members and provided a template that those faculty members could employ when addressing controversial topics such as evolutionary biology. Substantial though these contributions may have been, the symbolic domain achieved its work only with the backing of material resources embodied by human resource policies. The prominence of the Reformed metanarrative in campus architecture received material backing in the form of annual reviews that could result in the dismissal

11 Of course, due to the phenomenon known as “salary compression” (Hearn, 1999), increasing salaries for new assistant professors also allowed these individuals to outstrip the earning potential of more senior individuals such as the faculty member quoted at the outset of this paragraph.
even of long-serving faculty who transgressed the widely accepted interpretation of the Reformed tradition. In addition to the clarity of its Reformed identity, Credo offered relatively generous starting salaries in an effort to attract new faculty members. Prospective faculty members who might initially have displayed an interest because of the College’s theological heritage likely found that their interest only deepened when they learned that Credo offered higher starting salaries than did most evangelical Christian colleges. Although Credo’s symbolic economy dominated campus architecture, cultural and material dimensions seemed to reinforce one another in these instances.

Unfortunately for Credo College, its material resources proved more meager than did its rich symbolic economy. The diversion of resources into faculty salaries may have helped the College to attract skilled labor, but did not address other, pressing material problems. I now turn my attention to these problems and to Credo’s responses to them.

Material resources: The price of Reformed identity

I classified Credo College as a school with limited financial resources based on its mean general subsidy as reported by the Delta Project on College Costs and Affordability. Credo’s average award of $4,464.95 per FTE from 2003 through 2007 stood below the mean figure for all CCCU and ABHE member schools during this five-year time period. The statistic “general subsidy” captured the amount of educational expenditures provided by non-tuition revenue sources, thereby providing an omnibus measure of a tuition-dependent college’s financial health. In Credo’s case, this figure indicated that the College possessed fewer non-tuition financial resources than did its peers. As one faculty member opined, “You just don’t have much to work with.”
At least two material challenges resulted from the College’s financial position. First, given its meager non-tuition resources, Credo depended heavily on tuition payments in order to meet its annual operating expenditures. The following sub-section outlined the College’s efforts to recruit an adequate number of tuition-paying students. This line of analysis considered the possibility that Credo College might address its relative paucity of non-tuition revenues with funds derived from tuition receipts. Insofar as this proved to be the case, Credo’s success in attracting students appears due largely to the appeal that the Reformed metanarrative holds for some students. Yet this broad appeal raised new problems for the College. The College’s very success in recruiting adequate numbers of tuition-paying students imperiled Credo’s single-minded focus on the Reformed metanarrative by bringing students from the non-Reformed evangelical world to the campus.

A second sub-section reviewed Credo’s efforts to increase gifts from private sources. Expanded revenues from these sources provided one likely source from which the College could increase its limited non-tuition revenues. Paralleling the treatment of students and tuition revenues, this section considered the complex relationship between Reformed belief and private giving. Reformed identity seemed to identify some potential sources of gifts to which other evangelical Christian colleges would have little access. Yet, by so doing, the College’s symbolic economy likely identified gifts from sources that would contribute only in return for restrictions on College behavior.
Students and tuition

Much of this account emphasized the Reformed theological heritage that distinguished Credo both from the secular academy and from most other evangelical Christian colleges. Despite this twofold differentiation, Credo’s faculty and staff at often voiced concerns that would be familiar to private baccalaureate colleges from secular or mainline religious traditions. “There are many ways in which we behave like a typical small college,” one faculty member noted frankly. Heavy reliance on tuition revenues stood chief among these similarities. According to figures provided by the Delta Project, from 2003 through 2007 Credo derived 81% of its total annual revenues from tuition. Credo far outpaced its peers in the CCCU in this regard, as the average CCCU member organization for which data were available derived 67% of its total revenues from tuition.

Credo’s state of “tuition dependence” made the College vulnerable to variation in patterns of student enrollment. A large entering class indicated a comfortable budget cycle, whereas a smaller than expected group of first-year students augured a year of fiscal austerity. As a result, Credo appeared to work determinedly to create a robust flow of tuition receipts. Figures from the Delta Project proved illustrative. Credo’s per FTE tuition revenues of $18,493.12 from 2003 through 2007 outpaced the mean figure of $15,153.33 for non-Credo CCCU12 schools by almost a full standard deviation. Further, Credo increased its tuition receipts per FTE without employing an open admissions policy. Indeed, relative to other CCCU member schools, Credo’s admissions practices appeared selective. Non-Credo CCCU members for which the Delta Project provided

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12 Theological seminaries tend to receive a greater share of funds from denominational sources than do baccalaureate colleges. For this reason, comparisons between Credo and its peers include only CCCU members classified as “baccalaureate colleges.”
data admitted approximately 76.7% of applicants between 2003 and 2007. Entry to Credo proved more difficult to secure, with only 65.7% of applicants securing admission during the same time period. Taken together, these figures indicated that Credo’s growing tuition revenues derived from a relatively high level of student demand for enrollment at the College rather than from the ease of admission.

Of course, continuing students pay tuition as well as do new enrollees. Credo further increased its tuition revenues by retaining a high proportion of its students. The College’s enrollment grew notably throughout the last decade for which the Delta Project compiled data, from 880 FTE in 1997 to 1254 FTE in 2007. These students not only tended to enroll and remain at Credo in greater numbers than they had in previous decades; they also tended to complete their programs of study at higher rates than did their peers at other CCCU member schools. Approximately 62% of Credo students finished their programs within 150% of the program’s expected duration, whereas 53% of those enrolled at other CCCU schools managed to do so.

The figures cited above explained the mechanisms through which Credo had developed its robust tuition stream. Unfortunately, however, these mechanisms did not indicate why students found Credo such an appealing destination. Student aid awards offered one possible explanation for this phenomenon. Many private baccalaureate colleges employ the practice of “tuition discounting” – a technique whereby colleges award student aid to virtually every applicant in an effort to maximize the number of enrollees – in an effort to generate greater tuition revenues (Breneman, Doti, & Lapovksy, 2001). However, figures provided by the Delta Project provided no evidence that Credo College engaged in this practice. Between 2003 and 2007, Credo expended
only $881 per FTE on scholarships. Credo’s peer colleges in the CCCU dwarfed this figure with awards averaging $2,454.54. Such meager student aid awards could not explain the College’s success at recruiting and retaining a large number of tuition-paying students.

In place of this material explanation, the participants with whom I spoke cited the College’s symbolic economy as the basis of its appeal to students. Credo’s Reformed heritage appeared to draw students as surely as it attracted faculty members. “What our students have in common is that they are serious about their faith, they are probably serious about the Bible, and some of them are serious about theology,” one dean told me. A faculty member concurred, stating that the College’s Reformed interpretation of evangelical Protestantism helped to distinguish Credo from other possible college destinations. “They mostly are very serious Christians,” he told me. Yet, he noted, many other colleges also emphasized evangelical religion. Reformed theology distinguished Credo from its evangelical peers. “More than half of our students would have Reformed leanings of one type or another,” he concluded. An academic dean built upon this assessment by summoning enrollment figures to bolster his claims. “We are the first choice of 72% of the students who come here,” he said, “and the reason we are that is because of what we do differently than they perceive other places as doing.” All of these individuals clearly believed that Credo’s Reformed identity allowed the College to attract and retain a large number of tuition paying students.

Students may have chosen to enroll at Credo because they found the College’s Reformed tradition to be desirable. However, these students did not necessarily emerge from Reformed churches themselves. Credo’s sponsoring denomination is small, and
Reformed Christians as a group constituted less than 0.3% of the U.S. population in 2008 (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). In order to find enough students who can pay tuition without receiving a great deal of student aid, Credo must reach beyond the Reformed tradition. This has yielded a student body that, in the words of one faculty member, “is far more diverse than the faculty.” A dean concurred. Referencing Credo’s recent past, he noted that, “maybe 10, 15 years ago, we would have had more than a majority coming from the denomination.” In recent years, however, reliance on the denominational pipeline had faltered “due to people coming from other denominational backgrounds, which is fine.” This dean’s recollection of enrollment patterns proved accurate. According to figures made public by the College’s office of institutional research, students identifying with a Reformed denomination dropped from more than 60% in 2000 to approximately 50% of the student body by 2009. Non-Reformed evangelical groups such as Southern Baptists, independent evangelicals, and those expressing “other” as their religious preference grew rapidly as the proportion of Reformed Christians declined.\(^\text{13}\)

At first glance, it may appear surprising that non-Reformed evangelicals should find a Reformed college an attractive destination. After all, as one faculty member observed, Reformed theology – with its emphasis on the innate sinfulness of humanity and its dim view of human agency vis a vis divine sovereignty – “is not popular because it is a rough tablespoon of medicine in a hurry.” Yet as many scholars (e.g., Marsden, 1997; Lindsay, 2007; Porterfield, 2001) have noted, contemporary American

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\(^{13}\) Perhaps these changes in denominational composition simply reflected changes in the demographics of the surrounding area. Unfortunately, because Credo did not disaggregated these figures by a student's county or state of origin, I could not conduct such a cross-tabulation.
evangelicalism drew freely from Reformed theological concepts, even as the practical theology of most evangelicals espoused an Arminian understanding of human free will. This tendency has given many non-Reformed evangelicals a passing familiarity with the concepts, if not the specific theological narratives and formulations, of the Reformed tradition. One dean at the College noted this trend when ruminating on the College’s appeal to non-Reformed evangelical students. “I’ve laughed a couple of times about how difficult it is to sell the distinctives of Reformed education when so much of broader evangelicalism has adopted elements of a Reformed approach and even our lingo,” he told me. In this account, Reformed theology appealed to prospective students because of its resonance with their own pre-existing beliefs.

While Credo’s growing appeal to non-Reformed students broadened the College’s tuition revenue stream, this growth also posed some challenges to the College. In the words of one faculty member, when teaching non-Reformed evangelical students, “you’re dealing with a dispensationalist, Scofield type of approach.” Evangelicals in the dispensationalist tradition tended to de-emphasize formal theology in favor of practical soul winning. This orientation sprang from dispensationalist belief in the fast-approaching end of the earth, a conviction popularized by annotations included in the Scofield reference Bible (Marsden, 1991). Credo’s faculty seemed to believe that teaching Reformed theology to these practice-oriented evangelicals could prove laborious. “To the extent that we grow in attracting students who are from this area of the country, we are also growing in attracting students who are from your typical Bible belt mentality,” a second faculty member told me. “If you’re a Christian because you’re not a communist and you’re not Jewish, then you don’t even think about what being Reformed
means.” His exasperation crested as he added, “You think, ‘I could just go to another Christian college like the University of Alabama.’” A third faculty member rephrased these thoughts by referencing “TULIP,” an acronym that Reformed Christians often employ to outline core theological tenets of the faith (Cornick, 2008).14 “We’ve brought in more Bubbas who come from Baptist backgrounds,” he said. “When you start talking ‘TULIP,’ they don’t understand it.” Each of the comments hinted at what individual faculty members perceived as the theological illiteracy of their non-Reformed pupils.

To be sure, not everyone at the College viewed non-Reformed evangelicals in such an unfavorable light. One dean flatly stated, “folks in the Reformed tradition have a heritage of arrogance.” A faculty member concurred, noting, “we need to be better in terms of not expecting everybody to understand who John Calvin was.” These conflicting interpretations suggested that a College-wide consensus had not emerged on the question of whether the enrollment of large numbers of non-Reformed students threatened the theological consensus that made the College attractive to those students in the first place. The presence of such a discussion at all, however, suggested something important about the interplay between the College’s symbolic and material economies. On the one hand, the College’s tuition receipts increased in large part due to the enrollment of non-Reformed students. Yet these students, at least in the eyes of some faculty members, threatened the high level of consensus that made the College attractive to non-Reformed students in the first place. The College’s symbolic dimension helped to address Credo’s financial woes by attracting many non-Reformed students to campus, yet this act might have stretched those cultural resources to the limit of their capacities.

14 The letters in “TULIP” stand for “Total depravity,” “Unconditional election,” “Limited atonement,” “Irresistible grace,” and “Perseverance of the saints.”
A much higher level of consensus existed around the potential consequences of the College’s tuition dependence. Credo’s heavy reliance on tuition receipts ensured that, no matter how robust the College’s tuition stream might be, collegiate finances remained prey to variation in student demand. These concerns simmered visibly as the national economic downturn gripped Credo’s current and prospective students during the study period. Faculty and staff comments betrayed anxiety that the upcoming year’s enrollment might not be sufficiently large to provide the College with the tuition revenues to which it has become accustomed. “The price that we charge is tremendous, at $130,000 for a four-year education,” one faculty member told me. “Who has got that kind of money?” Given these limits to the College’s ability to rely indefinitely on tuition revenues, I now turn my attention to gifts from private sources, a prospective alternative source of revenue.

*Gifts and fundraising*

As discussed with regard to evolutionary biology, Credo College’s Reformed theology provided a device by which to frame difficult or controversial subject matter. This approach to evangelical Christianity meant that Credo’s governing denomination would tolerate some dissent from individuals so long as this dissent remained within the College’s confessional framework. Several individuals with whom I spoke noted that a certain level of disagreement therefore characterized Credo and many other Reformed schools. Two academic administrators echoed a faculty member’s statement, quoted earlier in this chapter, that “consensus is not a virtue.” “Within Reformed theology, the idea of tension is not something to run from,” a dean told me. Another dean reflected on the College’s high level of religious consensus and the extent to which this permitted
divergent interpretations by individuals. “Do we agree on core things? I think so. But we disagree on some other things,” he said.

While the College and its sponsoring denomination officially tolerated a range of opinion on some issues, conversations with Credo officials generally revealed that some positions evoked unofficial sanction. Often, these sanctions took the form of restrictions on gifts made to the College. “The people in the denomination are helping to pay the bills and they expect a certain kind of teaching,” one faculty member told me. A second faculty member related a specific incident in which positions advocated by College faculty and staff had roused the indignation and disrupted the planned contributions of denominational bodies. I visited campus during the 2008-2009 academic year, and the upcoming U.S. Presidential election often emerged as a topic of casual conversation with interview participants. One faculty member told me, “Some of us are going to vote for Barack.” Indeed, I had seen a story to this effect in the College’s student-run newspaper. “It wasn’t a big percentage – maybe 25% of the faculty,” he continued, “but people got hold of this and they were irate. ‘How can you vote for a baby killer?’” Although this individual did not state whether he had changed his own electoral preferences in response to the outcry, he noted that his political position could have direct consequences for the College’s ability to raise funds from its sponsoring denomination, member churches, and individuals within the denomination. “You don’t want to hurt the mission of the College by saying things that are going to cause churches to stop giving,” he said.

As this statement implied, any action that might disrupt the flow of gifts into Credo’s coffers proved a threat to the College’s financial model. Gifts constituted the school’s only major source of non-tuition revenues. In keeping with its teaching focus,
the College also conducted very little funded research. Further, Credo received no direct appropriations from federal, state, or local sources. The funds that it received indirectly from public sources came primarily in the form of portable student aid. These funds followed an enrollment-dependent pattern that paralleled that of tuition, and therefore did not constitute a distinct source of income. Instead, it relied almost solely upon gifts to supplement tuition revenues. According to Delta Project figures, Credo’s flow of gifts placed it above the mean figure for CCCU member schools from 2003 through 2007. Credo raised approximately $5,222.12 per FTE from private sources, compared with only $4,427.41 for other CCCU members.\textsuperscript{15}

As suggested by the faculty member’s comments about the U.S. Presidential election, Credo’s stream of gifts relied heavily on the College’s religious orientation. Indeed, several deans spoke about their fundraising responsibilities in frankly religious terms. These comments indicated that gifts, like so much else at Credo, proved widely understood through the College’s theological heritage. One told me, “in some sense, development work is also ministry work. You are obligated to be involved in peoples’ lives and to encourage them in an important part of their Christian calling, which is to be generous.” A second individual concurred, noting, “part of our mission is to encourage donors to see their gifts to the College as leveraged investments in kingdom initiatives.”

\textsuperscript{15} Arithmetically attentive readers may have noted that this figure proves too large to be consistent with tuition data reported previously. If $18,493.12 per FTE in tuition receipts constitutes 81\% of total revenues, how can the College claim to have received more than $5,000 per FTE in gifts from private sources? The answer to this apparent puzzle proved relatively straightforward. Credo claimed to have lost money on some allegedly revenue-generating activities such as investing. The inclusion of negative numbers in the calculation caused Credo’s total revenues to be smaller than the sum of tuition and gifts revenues. Thus, funds from these two sources combined to account for more than 100\% of total revenues.
To these officials, giving to Credo made sense because the College hewed faithfully to its Reformed heritage.

As in the case of teaching evolutionary biology, however, Credo’s symbolic dimension exhibited a capacity to assume surprising forms with regard to giving. Echoing the language of “kingdom initiatives” mentioned in the previous paragraph, multiple interview participants spoke about “kingdom causes” or “kingdom ventures.” These comments implied that the College itself mattered less than the religious mission that it espoused, and that other organizations also pursued this mission. “We may not be someone’s passion, and that’s okay,” one dean told me. “I’m not going to try to shove their square peg into our round hole.” Even if the donor chose not to support Credo, however, this individual sought “to encourage them to give to kingdom endeavors. If this isn’t the right one, that’s okay.” A faculty member who had been involved in fund raising efforts echoed these comments. Remembering a recent weekend event at which the College hosted 70 potential donors, he simply stated that “the weekend was not about asking them for money. That, to me, is an artifact of what this place is about. The weekend was about engagement and dialogue, not money.” This comment seemed like it might disguise a less flattering reality, so I pressed him for further comment. He obliged, noting that the approach that he had undertaken with his colleagues directly contradicted the advice of a fundraising specialist with whom the College had contracted. “There was only one time during the entire weekend when there was a direct appeal as opposed to many [appeals], which was what the consultant wanted,” he told me. “We said, ‘No. We’re going to be us. This is about long-term relationships, worldview, and dialogue.’”
As in the case of students and tuition revenues, Credo’s symbolic economy played a multi-faceted role in the College’s pursuit of gifts from private sources. The College’s religious tradition helped to identify potential donors who might be sympathetic to Credo’s mission, yet a willingness to tolerate some diversity of opinion on topics such as the U.S. Presidential election threatened to alienate donors who identified primarily with the College’s religious faith. Credo framed fundraising work as a form of ministry, yet also shied away from making a “hard sell” to potential donors. In short, the College’s rich symbolic economy had provided Credo with means of addressing serious material problems, but had raised some other difficult questions in the process of so doing.

Discussion

The primacy of Credo’s symbolic economy

Credo College can hardly be understood apart from its symbolic economy. The theological metanarrative of creation-fall-redemption thoroughly pervades Credo, shaping the College’s responses to the problems of integration and stratification. Credo employed its theological metanarrative in order both to identify candidates for faculty positions and to train these individuals to employ specific religious scripts when examining difficult academic subject matter. The College also utilized its symbolic dimension to attract an adequate number of student applicants, making Credo notably both more selective in admissions practices and more judicious in student financial aid awards than were other evangelical Christian colleges. These responses proved sufficient to allow Credo not only to remain solvent, but to thrive despite its material limitations.
Only in the realm of gifts from private sources did Credo’s theological lens prove unable to provide some sort of solution to recurrent material challenges.

In many ways, then, Credo College stood as a paradoxical institution. On the one hand, the College operated in a manner akin to a well-resourced liberal arts college. The College hired faculty members from prestigious secular graduate schools, provided these individuals with extensive training in the College’s religious tradition, practiced moderately selective admissions, and conferred a large proportion of its degrees in liberal arts fields. On the other hand, the College conducted these operations despite commanding the financial resources of a struggling baccalaureate college that relied overwhelmingly on tuition receipts for its annual operating budget. This financial outlook appeared unlikely to change given the struggles that Credo faced in raising funds through private gifts and donations.

Credo’s symbolic economy explained these apparently divergent findings. The College operated in a manner that its meager financial resources would not predict due almost exclusively to the coherent, intellectualized nature of its religious identity. This consistent, abstracted identity provided a “script” that individuals working within the College could apply to a variety of practical problems, from teaching evolutionary biology to raising funds through private gifts. Further, because this intellectualized form of evangelicalism stood closer to secular academic approaches to religion than did more practice-focused variants of evangelicalism, the dominant normative structures of secular higher education held Credo’s faith in a high degree of esteem relative to other, more “pietistic” variants of evangelicalism.
Credo’s future

Of course, as suggested by the case of gifts and by the large numbers of non-Reformed students who now enroll at the College, Credo may not be able to operate in this manner indefinitely. National economic cycles may reduce demand for a high priced college such as Credo, thereby curtailing the College’s ability to practice selective admissions while awarding few student aid dollars. Revenues from other sources seem unlikely to fill any gaps vacated by variation in tuition receipts. Conflict with the denomination appears likely to make gifts an erratic revenue source for the foreseeable future. Every time faculty members voice support for a controversial idea such as theistic evolution or a pro-choice political candidate such as Barack Obama, donations from the denomination may decline. Further, increased reliance on non-Reformed students may imperil the central place of the Reformed theology that, historically, has attracted qualified faculty members and students to the campus. A few years of disappointing enrollments or further tensions with denominational givers may make the College’s tenuous balance unsustainable.

Interestingly, the topic of the College’s long-term viability arose in several interviews. One dean demonstrated his thorough grounding in Reformed thought by using the theology of John Calvin to frame his response. This individual explicitly referenced Calvinist belief in the futility of human action relative to divine providence. With this as backdrop, he noted that, while Credo College may one day succumb to its financial limitations, the College’s mission would survive the organization itself. “We have to be content with saying, ‘If, at some point, we become superfluous, we have to trust that that is part of God’s plan,’” he told me. He acknowledged that, as a “fallen” human being, this
idea proved difficult for him to accept. Nonetheless, he continued, it was his duty to view the College not as a self-perpetuating organization, but as a manifestation of a cosmic plan for divine redemption of created and fallen humanity:

I don’t approach my work here as, “My goal is to preserve the College.” That is always the temptation with institutions, but the institution exists for a higher purpose. My job is to make sure that mission is fulfilled. If, at some point, Credo can’t do that, then I have to be okay with saying, “So be it. Maybe I will go back to the currency market.”

In the end, it seemed, faculty and staff at Credo interpreted both the College’s daily life and its hypothetical death through the lens of Reformed belief. Even on the subject of the College’s precarious situation as a relatively successful but still tuition-dependent enterprise, cultural factors explained Credo College far more thoroughly than did material factors.

The complex role of symbolic resources

Credo College offers little support for the explanation of social life offered by rational choice theory (RCT). In the RCT formulation of American religious history formulated by Finke and Stark (2005), religious organizations in the United States thrive in so far as they remain vigorous, informal, flexible, and responsive to the demands of individual believers. Advocates of RCT argue that such sects tend to thrive, while churches that exhibit formal organization and intellectual abstraction tend to decline. As a “culturalist” Reformed college, Credo confounds this theoretical interpretation. Credo clearly exhibits a preference for formal doctrinal statements and intellectualized religious
belief. These characteristics have not impeded the College’s ability to compete in a
marketplace full of nimble, flexible providers, but have given Credo a competitive
advantage. This advantage has allowed Credo to recruit credentialed faculty labor and
tuition-paying students, even though these sectors represent some of the most competitive
venues in which colleges operate. Since RCT predicts stagnation where the College has
experienced growth, this body of theory appears to offer little insight into Credo College.

The variant of neo-institutional theory that I employ in this project offers far
greater analytic purchase on the case of Credo College. This purchase evidences itself in
two ways with regard to the theological metanarrative that characterizes operations at the
College. First, neo-institutional theory provides a basis upon which I can imagine this
cultural narrative as a resource – that is, as an existing object rather than a subjective
experience – that individual agents can employ in response to complex problems
(DiMaggio, 1988; Ellingson, 2007; Friedland & Alford, 1991). The usefulness of this
framework becomes clear in the preceding paragraphs, which often portray the problem-
solving advantages of Credo’s symbolic economy relative to the cultural horizons of
many other evangelical Christian colleges.

Second, neo-institutional theory provides a basis for understanding the importance
of formalization and routinization in translating an idea into a durable cultural asset.
Theorists who have explored the “microfoundations” of institutionalization suggest that,
over time, a particular solution to a problem will become the de facto response of
individualized agents. This institutionalized script imparts legitimacy both to the response
and to the individual who enacts it (Powell & Colyvas, 2006; Colyvas & Powell, 2008).
At Credo College, these microfoundational processes become clear in the case of the
theological metanarrative. Credo’s ready response to a range of problems is easily formalized and therefore easily transmitted. Within the framework of neo-institutional theory, such responses are far more likely to be accepted within higher education as legitimate strategies than are the more idiosyncratic and informal responses that might characterize other evangelical Christian colleges.

While neo-institutional theory explains the upper hand that cultural forms appear to have over material constraints at Credo College, it fails to account for the curious pairing of a high level of symbolic resources with a low level of material resources. After all, neo-institutional theory predicts that cultural forms shape material realities. The neo-institutional lens therefore predicts that, all else being equal, an organization with a high level of symbolic resources will attain a high level of material wealth because these symbolic resources comply with the expectations of its institutionalized environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Clearly, however, Credo College does not follow this pattern. What can explain this apparent paradox?

The work of Pierre Bourdieu fills this explanatory gap. Bourdieu (1992a, 1992b) claims the economies of culture and money often demonstrate an inverse relationship. In this formulation, a cultural form begins to lose its symbolic value as it achieves the broad popularity that accompanies material prosperity. Bourdieu illustrates this inverse relationship with the examples of bestselling novels. These volumes reap handsome financial returns for authors but generally inspire critique or even contempt from other writers. For Bourdieu, this pattern indicates the complex relationship between symbolic resources and material resources. These two kinds of resources often accompany and
legitimate one another, but do not always do so; financially secure writers, artists, and thinkers may find their symbolic resources on the wane due to their material prosperity.

In his influential book *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) provides a model of what this “high symbolic resource, low material resource” pairing might look like in education. Bourdieu employs the example a teacher or professor. These individuals evidence expensive habits such as attendance at the theater and opera, consumption of fine cuisine, and attendance at “art cinemas.” Bourdieu identifies these cultural practices with the French upper classes. Yet, as he notes, teachers and professors earn relatively meager wages. In Bourdieu’s view, this apparent contradiction between high status cultural practices and low wages does not threaten established system of social stratification. Rather, educators reinforce existing patterns of stratification by spending their few material resources in this way. By so doing, academics affirm that these activities confer such a high level of social status that they might be pursued even by one with a small amount of economic capital. The “high symbolic resource, low material resource” case therefore does not necessarily subvert the order of stratification, but may actually legitimate and perpetuate that social arrangement.

With his example of the academic who earns meager economic wages but who engages in “upper class” cultural practices, Bourdieu (1984) provides a template against which to interpret the curious pairing of Credo’s coherent, legitimacy-conferring symbolic economy and its meager financial resources. Credo, like a teacher or professor, possesses a limited array of financial resources. With these resources, however, the College pursues activities that the “upper class” of its social space – that is, the dominant normative structures of higher education – regards as important. Rather than emphasizing
right practice as do “pietist” Reformed Christians, Credo’s faculty and staff pursue theological refinement. In place of the dispensationalist belief in the fast-approaching end of time, the College’s mission foregrounds the study of 16th century creeds, history, and intellectual disputes. These cultural choices parallel the activities that achieve high status in the normative field of higher education, for secular colleges study theology and Reformation history, but do not teach practical discipline for a moral life.

To be sure, Bourdieu’s (1984) work proves broadly sympathetic with the neo-institutional valuation of normative structures. In the field of secular higher education and judged by that field’s dominant normative structures, the cultural practices pursued by individuals at Credo appear more legitimate than do the practices of some other groups of evangelicals. Both theories highlight this point. Yet this poses a paradox to neo-institutionalists who expect cultural practices that comply with normative structures to yield material prosperity. In Bourdieu’s analysis, however, this apparent paradox makes perfect sense. This resolution occurs because Bourdieu reverses the causal relationship between the material and symbolic domains. For Bourdieu, materiality is the cause and symbolic economy is the effect. Dominant cultural practices therefore do not legitimate actors, but receive legitimation from actors. Credo, in other words, possesses a high level of cultural resources as a way of reifying existing social structures by demonstrating that “upper class” tastes are to be desired even by those who can scarcely afford them. For Bourdieu, Credo is not materially impoverished in spite of its symbolic wealth. Rather, it pursues “upper class” cultural practices in spite of its material limitations.

In short, the case of Credo College suggests the value of the explanatory framework sketched in the chapter outlining theoretical perspectives on this project.
Credo appears to operate primarily on the symbolic plane, and neo-institutional theory excels at explaining the nuances of cultural practice and their effects for actors and organizations. Yet neo-institutional theory also faces an inability to explain the apparent contradiction of Credo’s normatively sanctioned culture and its material woes. Bourdieu’s work explains this apparent paradox with reference to the often-inverse relationship of symbolic and material economies. In other words, a conjoint cultural and material outlook appears the best mechanism through which to consider both the College’s future viability and its implications for the materially stratified realm of collegiate education. I return to these themes and compare them with findings from other cases in chapter seven of this dissertation report.
CHAPTER 6
GREEN VALLEY COLLEGE

I identified Green Valley College (‘the College’ or ‘GVC’) as a ‘low symbolic resource, low material resource’ case based on the sampling principles outlined in chapter three of this dissertation report. Designations of ‘high’ or ‘low’ status reflected the presumed perspective of the widely held normative standards of higher education rather than from the perspective of evangelical Christianity. Neither of these designations reflected the College’s standing in the eyes of religious constituents. Taken together, fundamentalist certainties and financial poverty often have connoted moral authority in American evangelicalism (Brereton, 1990; Burkinshaw, 2000; Eskridge & Noll, 2000). I therefore did not label GVC as a ‘low symbolic resource, low material resource’ school in order to indicate its utter lack of resources. Rather, I employed this terminology in order to emphasize the limited purchasing power of these resources in the sphere of secular higher education. By so doing, I sought to tie my sampling strategy to this project’s underlying theoretical interest in exploring potential tensions between the colleges’ religious dimensions and the world of higher education in which they operated.

The label “low material resources” provided a fairly straightforward designation for GVC’s relative lack of financial wealth. Winston’s (1999) model of higher education finance posited that colleges charge students less in tuition than they incur in educational expenditures. The schools then make up the gap between costs and tuition revenues with a “general subsidy” derived from non-tuition revenue sources. Accordingly, I have
measured material wealth by the general subsidy awarded per each full-time equivalent (FTE) student. Between 2002 and 2007, baccalaureate colleges\textsuperscript{16} that held membership in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) awarded a mean subsidy of $4,754.39 in constant dollars.\textsuperscript{17} GVC fell well below this marker. With a mean per-FTE subsidy of $1,823.66 over this time period, GVC conferred the most meager general subsidies of any of the four schools considered in this project. These low subsidies indicated a general lack of non-tuition financial resources, suggesting that GVC depended almost solely on tuition revenues for its annual operating budget. As such, GVC would feel acutely any substantial interruption in its ability to recruit tuition-paying students or to secure credentialed faculty members to instruct these students.

The designation of a low level of purchasing power for symbolic resources proved more abstract. In this case, the label indicated that GVC emerged from a fundamentalist strain of evangelical Christianity that emphasized right conduct and the possibility of inerrantist understandings of religious truth. While these orientations likely provided the College with symbolic capital in some religious settings, they also evidenced a close association with the elements of evangelical Christianity that defined themselves through their militant hostility toward secular society in general, and toward secular higher education in particular (Marsden, 1991, 1977). GVC’s religious beliefs therefore seemed likely to stand in sharp contrast to conventional understandings of collegiate education.

\textsuperscript{16} As discussed in a prior chapter, evangelical Christian colleges that include theological seminaries tend to receive more generous financial support from sponsoring denominations than do colleges without seminaries (Hamilton, 2000; Ringenberg, 2006).

\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, I have limited financial comparisons between GVC and other schools to CCCU members that do not confer graduate degrees.

\textsuperscript{17} Unless otherwise noted, I computed all finance and enrollment figures presented in this chapter from a dataset provided by the Delta Project, an endeavor to standardize Integrated Postsecondary Data Set (IPEDS) figures across time.
such as the autonomy of faculty members to teach in their areas of disciplinary expertise. Such autonomy may be a widely held norm in secular higher education (Slaughter, 1994), but contrasted sharply with the fundamentalist belief that the invariant truth of some propositions made academic inquiry on these subjects pointless. GVC therefore seemed likely to possess few symbolic resources from the perspective of higher education, regardless of its symbolic wealth in other domains of society.

**Description and chapter overview**

On my first visit, I parked in a gravel lot, over which a radio antenna loomed. The highly visible nature of this antenna suggested GVC’s roots in the Bible college movement. These schools often sprang from successful radio ministries and, in turn, regularly graduated large number of ministers and missionaries to spread the message even further abroad (Brereton, 1990; Marsden, 1987, 1980). In other words, the visual prominence of radio suggested the College’s roots in an educational movement that the secular and mainline worlds of higher education long had viewed with suspicion. Moving beyond the parking area, the College sat on a heavily wooded campus of more than 900 acres, an expansive plot relative to its enrollment of fewer than 1000 FTE students. Although this large plot of land might have suggested some level of material affluence, much of the campus stood unutilized and seemingly unmanaged. The green brush that characterizes many parts of the rural South sprouted thickly around the edges of campus. Mud and standing water collected around the edges of cracked asphalt driveways.

I organized this chapter around the two conceptual problems in which I situated this study. The first of these, the problem of integration, indicated the challenge of
reconciling academic norms that disdain external control with evangelical beliefs that historically have sought to constrain some forms of academic inquiry. I treated GVC’s response – or, more accurately, responses – to the problem of integration in the first section of this chapter. I then turned my attention to the problem of stratification, by which I indicated the different levels of symbolic and material resources with which different colleges face common problems such as the challenges of integrating religious faith with academic knowledge. In a final section, I considered the relationship between these two problems and the implications of these relationships for the theories that frame this study.

To be sure, most evangelical Christian colleges face the problem of integration, and worries about finances, curriculum, and hiring proved common to a wide array of colleges of universities. Yet these concerns assumed particular urgency at GVC due to the College’s low levels of available resources. Such concerns became a crisis early in my research at the College. In February 2010, budgetary constraints led to the mid-semester dismissal of 13 non-faculty staff members. Anxieties about finances previously had lingered in the background of conversations. After these dismissals, however, such concerns became palpable. In the words of one faculty member, “It hasn’t affected faculty, but I think it is going to next year. It’s not done.” These concerns about the College’s material position intertwined closely with activities in the symbolic domain. Would general education courses crowd out traditional Bible classes, or enhance students’ abilities to read Christian texts adeptly? Could GVC recruit enough tuition-paying students and credentialed faculty members to fill these programs, or would such
efforts divert funds and attention from GVC’s traditional work as a Bible college? These questions pointed to the tight link between GVC’s symbolic and material dimensions.

Two models for addressing the problem of integration

*Bible college roots*

Green Valley College’s sponsoring denomination\(^{18}\) grew from a Progressive-era attempt to spread an evangelical Protestant message among the working poor in urban areas of the United States. Over the course of the late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries, this orientation toward practical soul winning received a substantial intellectual boost from the emerging doctrine of premillennialism. Premillenialists sought, and generally still seek, to interpret history through the lens of the book of Revelation. By dividing human history into seven ages, or dispensations, premillenialists sought to predict the coming end of the world. By the early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, most premillenialists argued that this “end of days” soon would arrive (Brereton, 1990; Carpenter, 1997; Marsden, 1991, 1980). The anticipated end of the world lent great urgency to evangelism. As a result, in so far as they considered education at all, premillenialist denominations tended to found Bible colleges. These schools eschewed theological disputations and academic refinement because the coming end of the world soon would make such topics moot. Instead, Bible colleges emphasized practical training in the vocations of evangelism and missions. By so doing, they moved away from the intellectualizing pursuits that characterized Reformed, or Presbyterian, forms of evangelicalism.

\(^{18}\) I elide the name of this denomination to preserve the College’s anonymity.
A second intellectual trend proved as influential on the Bible college movement as did premillenialism. In place of abstract theological puzzles, Bible colleges tended to emphasize the importance of right conduct and right actions. This pragmatic orientation reflected the strength of the holiness theology of human perfectability among many American evangelicals. According to holiness thought, humans could be made “sanctified,” or blameless, through direct contact with the Holy Spirit. In other words, through divine gifts evangelicals were capable of living perfectly. This differed sharply from the Reformed theological narrative whose emphasis on innate human sinfulness had dominated the “evangelical consensus” of the 19th century. Holiness thought instead proclaimed that humans could be freed from the burden of sin immediately, meaning that right actions (“orthopraxy”) rather than right thoughts (“orthodoxy”) characterized the faithful Christian. This orientation diminished the importance of creeds and doctrine in favor of practical training for working ministers (Brereton, 1990; Carpenter, 1997; Marsden, 1991, 1987).

GVC’s Bible college heritage proved evident in the College’s continuing emphasis on training ministers. “Let me tell you, I hear it every year,” one dean told me. “We produce more missionaries and candidates for pastoral ministry than all the other [denominational] schools combined.” So, indeed, that is out there. That is our posture.” Data on degree completions, made public through the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) “WebCASPAR” portal, validated this dean’s claim. Between 1987 and 2009, GVC awarded an average of 44 baccalaureate degrees in fields falling under the broad

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19 Due to changes in accounting conventions during the 1999 academic year, NSF’s WebCASPAR portal does not report figures for 1999. I therefore omit that year when calculating the mean figure for the 1987 through 2009 time period.
NSF category “Religion and Theology.” These degrees constituted approximately 36% of all baccalaureate awards at GVC between 1987 and 2007. Further, although most private baccalaureate colleges focused on offerings leading to secular vocations such as business, nursing, and teacher education during these years (Delucchi, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996), GVC increased the number of Religion and Theology baccalaureate degrees awarded. From 2003 through 2009, the College conferred an average of almost 57 such degrees, a marked increase from its average over the 1987-2009 period as a whole. The proportion of degrees awarded in Religion and Theology also increased during recent years, with an average of more than 39% of baccalaureate degrees conferred in these fields between 2003 and 2007.

GVC’s extracurricular policies and activities also evidenced the influence of holiness traditions at GVC. Like most evangelical Christian colleges, GVC required faculty, staff, and students to sign a statement of faith. This statement explicitly required all members of the College community to affirm the role of the “Holy Spirit” in “producing holiness of life” among Christians. By so doing, this document affirmed the holiness tradition’s belief that human beings could be made perfect through direct experience of Divine gifts. Perceived vices accordingly faced strict regulation. “I can’t drink and smoke because I’ve agreed to that,” one dean told me. In further recognition of the importance of practical action, GVC required students to complete “Christian service” credits during seven semesters. According to one academic dean, experience in church and parachurch organizations constituted “training for future work.” Her statement

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20 The denominator for this comparison – total degrees – comes from the Delta Project’s database. For that reason, comparisons of proportions of total degrees over time can only be made through 2007, the last year in that database.
assumed that almost all of GVC’s students would pursue Christian vocations after graduation.

GVC’s Bible college heritage also proved clearly visible in the College’s curriculum. The Association for Biblical Higher Education (2010), a professional organization comprised of Bible college faculty and administrators, required all of its member organizations to mandate 24 credit hours of Biblical education for students completing a baccalaureate degree. GVC voluntarily exceeded this threshold, insisting that all students earn at least 30 credit hours of Biblical education in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Many faculty members and staff spoke about this requirement with pride. “That’s what makes us Green Valley College,” one faculty member told me. The distribution of these hours further revealed the influence of the Bible college movement on GVC’s curriculum. Fully 15 of the 30 required hours must be completed in the study of the Bible, with an additional 6 hours of elective credits that may be spent on the study of the Bible. By contrast, GVC reserved only 9 hours for theological study. “It’s not training in a religion,” one dean told me. “You’re trained in, ‘What does the Word of God say?’” This allocation of students’ time clearly reflected the priorities of holiness theology and the Bible college movement. Students spent a great deal of time studying Christian scriptures that they could share with non-believers, but comparatively little time contemplating abstract theological puzzles. Taken alongside the College’s emphasis on church vocations and the holiness-inspired extracurriculum, this distribution of hours demonstrated the continued influence of the fundamentalistic wing of evangelicalism, its roots in holiness theology, and its primary educational form, the Bible college.
The Bible college approach to the problem of integration

GVC’s roots in the Bible college movement allowed a particular model of the integration of faith and learning to flourish at the College. This view emerged in the late 19th century and crystallized amidst the controversies over evolution and the higher criticism of the Bible in the 1920s. Reflecting their general hostility toward the secular academy, officials at virtually all Bible colleges viewed academic learning as a clear threat to religious faith. Most Bible colleges thereby defined themselves as foils to the secular academy, ignoring the academic disciplines in order to focus on vocational training for church leaders. Such schools taught little in the way of general education except in so far as it might provide a helpful technique for ministers or missionaries (Brereton, 1990; Carpenter, 1997). In such a setting, the integration of faith and academics occurred only rarely. When such integration did occur, however, it consisted of drafting academic knowledge into the service of religious ends. Academics became subordinate to religious training.

The Bible college approach to the problem of integration entailed three consequences at GVC. First, advocates of this model tended to conceive of the College as primarily a religious community. Indeed, many faculty members and administrators spoke of their work as a form of ministry. While faculty and staff at any evangelical Christian college might describe their work as “ministry,” proponents of the Bible college model did not simply cast themselves as agents of the divine plan. Rather, they explained their work in terms that explicitly evoked congregational or parish ministry. One senior faculty member told me that he regularly counseled recent hires, “Don’t just teach the material. Share your life.” When I asked for an example of what he meant by this, the
professor described an occasion on which he had related a painful incident from his childhood. After class, one student approached him to say that his story had proven soothing to one of her friends. “That’s what the Holy Spirit did,” he told me. This individual clearly viewed his work as analogous to congregational ministry. “As a pastor, you have to become aware that people have needs and they are hurting,” he told me. An administrative staff member also described her work as a form of ministry. “Christian service is about how we can help people in society,” she told me. Some elements of the College’s upper administration also seemed to view their work as a form of ministry. In the words of one faculty member, “two presidents ago our president was essentially a giant minister. He raised funds like a minister. The Lord was doing everything on campus that was being done that was good. ‘The Lord wants us to go over here and do these things now.’ You expected a call, an invitation, and an offering plate.”

Second, the Bible college model for the integration of faith and learning raised vocational Christian education above other forms of instruction. “The ministry is appreciated more” than are the liberal arts, one faculty member told me. At times, this approach to the problem of integration yielded conflicts between faculty members in Christian vocational programs and those in academic areas. The origins of human life proved to be one such point of contention. “All of our Old Testament professors now are of the view that the earth is 6,000 years old,” said a faculty member in the natural sciences. “What the students are hearing in their Old Testament classes is that, grammatically, the earth has to be 6,000 years old.” By this, the faculty member referenced the Old Testament instructor’s insistence on an “inerrantist” reading of the Bible which reconstructed the earth’s history by tracing human lineage through Christian
scripture from Eden to the birth of Jesus. In this view, religious interpretations trumped disciplinary knowledge, and any content provided by the academic disciplines would be compared to a particular reading of Christian scriptures. Thus, in the words of one faculty member, “if somebody is having personal issues, you are most likely to hear somebody say, ‘It’s because of demonic strongholds’ rather than the kind of answers that a counseling psychologist might give.” Such testimony highlighted both the subordinate role that the Bible college tradition assigned to academic knowledge and the primacy that this model granted to religious certainties.

Although the Bible college model asserted the superiority of Christian vocations to other academic departments, it nonetheless retained a place for other academic areas. In this formula, however, academic fields existed primarily to serve the practical ends of training more adept ministers and missionaries. The College would teach academic content if its insights could further the work of the pastors, missionaries, and other church workers trained at GVC. Faith and academics, in other words, could be integrated into Christian practice.

Qualitative fieldwork provided ample evidence in support of this third consequence of the Bible college model. For example, the College taught all of its anthropology courses through the department of world missions. Fuller Theological Seminary pioneered this seemingly quixotic arrangement in the 1960s out of the conviction that an understanding of non-western cultures would better equip missionaries to secure converts to evangelical Christianity (Marsden, 1987). As further evidence of this approach to the problem of integration, the College offered a degree in “cross-cultural business administration” that more than one participant described as a means by
which covert missionaries could secure access to nation-states that did not permit open evangelism. “As you know, many denominations and missions can’t go into certain countries and call themselves missionaries,” one dean told me. “But you can go in as a retail consultant or something. So, that being said, that’s where our need lies, in cross-cultural business administration.” Students trained in these areas might be employed by commercial firms, yet covertly used these jobs as a means of gaining entre into new venues in which to conduct missionary activities. A second dean reiterated these tenets by invoking the trade of the first century CE Christian evangelist Paul of Tarsus. In her words, “The world is not accepting missionaries. They are accepting tent makers, where you go over, have a trade, and present the gospel while you’re there.”

Both of these deans seemed to value missionary work so highly that they would accept deception as a necessary and – in the second case – Biblically permitted activity. This orientation may be of interest in its own right theologically, but its consequences for GVC’s activities and operations prove of greater interest to this study. Taken together, these two deans suggest that academic credentials could be of value insofar as they provide a service to religious activities. If business degrees help to veil religious activities deemed too controversial to be conducted in the open, then those degrees may be offered as part of a larger plan to support practical ministry and missionary work. GVC’s program in cross-cultural business administration thereby repeated the general pattern of the Bible college model by subordinating academic work to religious beliefs.
Influences beyond the Bible college tradition

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) found that less than 0.3% of Americans identified themselves as members of GVC’s sponsoring denomination. For this reason, GVC has relied heavily on evangelicals beyond its own denomination both to provide an adequate number of tuition-paying students and to fill faculty and staff positions. “The professors here teach all views: speaking in tongues, Pentecostals, and things,” one dean told me. A professor in the Department of Bible concurred with this assessment. “We don’t have a straitjacket of theological orthodoxy,” he said. “We’re evangelical, of course, but, when it comes to some of the variations within evangelicalism, we welcome those differences because we feel that is good for our students. We don’t want a ‘party line’.” Another faculty member concurred with this assessment of GVC’s evangelical varieties. “Some of our profs are Arminians and some are Calvinistic, and we get along fine with each other,” he told me. “We have our discussions, talk about our differences, and examine our presuppositions.” GVC’s openness to evangelicals from beyond the denomination and its Bible college tradition allowed the College to swell its enrollment and staff its classrooms. Yet the inclusion of evangelical beliefs from beyond the premillenial and holiness traditions also introduced new ideas about what the College should be and how it might operate. Many variants of evangelicalism, particularly those rooted in Reformed theology, placed more emphasis on theological narratives and less emphasis on right conduct than did GVC’s sponsoring denomination (Marsden, 1991).

A second source of influence from beyond the Bible college tradition came from secular higher education. This influence made itself most visible in the form of
accrediting and regulatory bodies. At the time of my visits, GVC had recently reaffirmed its accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Like all other colleges and universities that maintained membership in that body, GVC developed a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as part of the accreditation process. Green Valley College elected to focus its QEP on improving the integration of faith and learning across the College’s broadened curriculum. “The College chose to look at our motto – which is ‘Developing character with intellect’ – as our QEP,” one dean told me. “That was, in part, adopted because of a desire to make integration of faith and learning more intentional across our curriculum, particularly in our classes.” Significantly, the QEP appeared to offer a greater authority to academic knowledge than did the traditional Bible college approach. Students received religious education as the “cornerstone” of their education, while an academic course rooted in a particular discipline stood as the “capstone” of instruction at GVC. The document implied that, while religious faith constituted the College’s foundation, this faith was best understood through the lens of knowledge in an academic discipline. Classroom study, not practical soul-winning, stood atop the College’s curriculum.

*The Christian liberal arts approach to the problem of integration*

As GVC hired individuals from beyond the denomination, and as it encountered and negotiated with authorities from secular higher education such as accrediting bodies, the College began to evidence a second approach to the problem of integration. Contrasting themselves with the Bible college approach, supporters of this alternative approach termed their solution to the problem of integration the “Christian liberal arts”
model. This name reflected GVC’s expansion into general education and academic majors. GVC had added more than a half-dozen majors to its catalog in the past decade, including programs in traditional liberal arts fields such as biology, psychology, English, and philosophy. These majors traced their roots to the secular academy rather than to practical occupations. As such, some advocates of the Bible college model viewed these liberal arts offerings as unfaithful to a religious tradition that often emphasized its conflicts with higher education. “Our liberal arts, so you know, are seen by several as secularization and compromising the religious distinctive in response to the market,” one academic dean told me. This dean and other individuals with whom I spoke instead regarded these liberal arts programs as a means of fulfilling the College’s mission to present academic content and religious belief alongside one another.

To be sure, advocates of the Christian liberal arts model did not regard academics as equal to religion in authority. Religious truths continued to trump academic insights. An academic dean illustrated this relationship while explaining the College’s new course in evolutionary biology. “We, of course, believe in creation,” he said. As a result, he joked, the course’s title might instead have been “not evolutionary biology.” Yet he also argued that the College must teach this content because students who pursued graduate or medical education would require this knowledge in order to attain their professional goals. These dual commitments, to teach evolution and to defend a creationist view, required some intellectual suppleness on the part of faculty members affiliated with the Christian liberal arts approach. “Essentially what I do is teach all the basic tenets of evolution,” a faculty member told me. “Then I address issues that I think are problematic.” In order to maintain this delicate balance, he “acknowledged that the
universe is 13.7 billion years old and the earth is 4.5 billion years old,” a position that might give pause to “young earth” creationists who insisted that the earth had been created 6,000 years ago. Yet alongside his refutation of young earth creationism, he maintained his distance from evolutionary biology. “The data does not demonstrate what evolutionists claim that it demonstrates,” he stated. In other words, he staked a position that was both “old earth,” because he acknowledged the validity of geological evidence, and “creationist,” because he insisted that an omnipotent being rather than natural processes had created the fossil record.

This faculty member’s approach to evolutionary biology typified the Christian liberal arts approach to the problem of integration. Advocates of this model asserted that religious certainties should remain uppermost in the College’s work. At the same time, they suggested that the Bible college model subordinated academics too fully. They therefore tended to present academic content, such as “old earth” geological evidence, alongside their religious narrative. This differed from the Bible college approach, which emerged from a desire to shelter evangelical children from the secular academy by refusing to teach controversial subjects (Carpenter, 1997). Advocates of the Christian liberal arts approach tended to regard this engagement with the secular academy as a means of generating a more thorough dialog between religious and academic commitments. Indeed, one dean described the Bible college model as a “sugar-coated” solution that avoided difficult academic questions such as an evangelical position on evolution in favor of “a prayer and a few verses.” A faculty member concurred with this assessment but employed a different metaphor. “I often frame the tension as between people who think that we should be a glorified Christian summer camp as opposed to an
actual college,’’ he told me. This individual left little doubt about the location of his own
sympathies. “I would definitely be of the ‘actual college’ group.”

Proponents of the Christian liberal arts model tended to offer two characteristics
of an “actual college.” First, they illustrated the rehabilitated status of academic
knowledge by evoking the liberal arts tradition of general learning rather than the
vocationalist Bible college tradition. In other words, advocates suggested that a Christian
liberal arts college should offer a holistic approach to education. One dean told me that,
when considering faith and academics, “It’s not ‘This and that,’ but the collective whole.”
Faculty members in this model therefore sought to bring religious and academic content
into dialog in a single classroom. One faculty member described a typical course as “a
constant exploration of theological and Biblical perspectives” that occurred alongside
content from the academic disciplines. “Integrating that with the social sciences is a huge
piece of my role,” he summarized. This approach contrasted markedly with the Bible
college model’s reliance upon a specialized set of courses in Bible and theology that held
sway over other departments

Second, advocates of the Christian liberal arts model tended to argue that faith
and academics should be integrated into a theological worldview rather than into right
practices inspired by the holiness belief in perfectability. “I try to help students to think
theologically,” one faculty member told me. “I frame much of my responsibility as
helping students to think about thinking. This is a meta-narrative approach: ‘How are you
thinking?’” An academic dean echoed these sentiments. “I think that, sometimes, we
deceive ourselves to think that you can learn a body of knowledge without a distinct
framework,” she told me. This statement implicitly criticized the Bible college model
which, by emphasizing the holiness tradition’s belief in human perfectability, tended to
treat knowledge as a series of propositions and techniques to be transmitted. This dean
regarded a theological narrative as a better mechanism by which to bring academic
content and religious belief into dialog with one another. “When you get a framework
and begin to drop the pieces of information into the framework, it’s far richer” than a
collection of propositional statements, she concluded.

Advocates of the Christian liberal arts approach commonly justified their
orientation by noting the need to prepare their students for life in a secular world. Often,
this secular world assumed the form of graduate study in law, medicine, or an academic
field. One faculty member ardently defended his decision to teach evolution by appealing
to standards of scientific realism. “I’m not of the ‘people used to ride around on
dinosaurs’ variety of creationist,” he told me. Yet he justified this work not by appealing
to conventions of academic freedom, but by referencing students’ post-GVC careers.
“These are things that our students have to know in order to do well on the GRE and tests
like that,” he said. An academic dean echoed this sentiment, noting, “They are going into
an environment where they have got to know evolutionary theory, so we have got to
teach it to them.” While the Christian liberal arts approach stopped short of suggesting
that secular vocations were as valuable as church vocations, it nonetheless contended that
knowledge of academic subjects would be of practical importance to evangelicals who
lived in a non-evangelical world. In a roundabout way, then, this model suggested that
the secular academic world could offer something of value to evangelical Christians.
Referring to the general embrace of “culture” and “the world” encouraged by 16th century
Calvinist theologians, one professor told me, “It takes us back to the Presbyterian thing.
The Presbyterians would say, ‘It’s from the Lord. It’s good.’” In other words, although the Bible college tradition explicitly set itself against the challenges of secular society, advocates of the Christian liberal arts model did not consider non-evangelical academic knowledge anathema to religious commitment. Evangelical students, in this view, did not require safe haven from the onslaught of secular academics; they merely needed to develop appropriate “lenses” or “narratives” that would instruct them in the best means by which to engage the non-evangelical world.

Relations between the two models

The Bible college and Christian liberal arts models offered two different techniques by which to address the problem of integration. Most individuals indicated a preference for one model or the other, yet, with the exception of oblique references to the shortcomings of the approach that they did not favor, no one indicated a desire to see the other model removed from the College’s curriculum. Most participants assumed that both approaches would continue to exist alongside one another. This acknowledgment of the on-the-ground conditions at GVC characterized many participants’ responses when I asked them about relations between advocates of the two models. GVC’s organizational memberships also testified to the assumption that the College would continue both to train ministers in the holiness tradition and to provide theologically narrated majors in liberal arts fields. GVC stood alone among the four schools included in this study by maintaining membership both in CCCU, which primarily includes Christian liberal arts colleges, and in ABHE, which accredits Bible colleges.
Beyond this recognition of continued coexistence, many participants suggested that the inclusion of two distinct approaches to the problem of integration made the College distinct and vibrant. One dean extolled the virtues of the coexistence of the two models. “I come from a Christian liberal arts undergrad and a Reformed seminary,” he told me. He then went on to contrast his Christian liberal arts approach with the Bible college tradition that characterized GV when he began his tenure at the College. “To step into this – which is training ministers, and to hurry up and do it because the Lord is coming soon and we need to get the souls, as the primary emphasis of the institution – has been clashing, engaging, and informative.” Despite the divergent views espoused by advocates of the two models, he thought, the coexistence of both approaches would prove valuable to the College. “I’ve learned from it,” he concluded. A faculty member echoed this assessment that the cohabitation of the two models proved fruitful. For this individual, the promise of something unique emerging from this creative tension “keeps me going” when his work becomes difficult.

Interestingly, a number of faculty and staff members with whom I spoke emphasized that the cohabitation of the two models proved stimulating in a way that would attract prospective students. A staff member summarized this view. “I think we are a good blend,” she said. “We are a Bible college with 30 hours of Bible, but within a Christian liberal arts setting so that, if the students want to go on to be doctors or lawyers, we have the liberal arts part of it.” An academic dean agreed, noting that a college that attempted to perform both of these tasks “is a rare find.” A faculty member echoed this assessment. “We are unique in attempting to maintain active affiliation with both” the Bible college heritage and the Christian liberal arts approach, he told me. This individual
believed that the College’s distinctive commitment to both models would make GVC attractive to potential students. With this individual’s forecast in mind, I now turn my attention more explicitly to the material resources to which those tuition-paying students contribute, and to an analysis of the relationship between GVC’s complex symbolic economy and its material dimension.

The two models and scant material resources

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, GVC possessed meager non-tuition financial resources. The College offered its students a general subsidy of $1,823.66 between 2002 and 2007. This figure fell far below the mean general subsidy of $4,754.39 offered by other CCCU member colleges over this time period. Other measures of GVC’s financial outlook confirmed this portrait of the College’s scant material resources. GVC collected approximately half as many dollars in gift contributions ($1,982.94) than did other CCCU member schools ($4,501.48) between 2002 and 2007. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, GVC also trailed its peers in total revenues. In 2007, GVC collected $20,603.96 per FTE, a figure that fell well below the $26,372.18 collected by other CCCU member schools during that time period.

This section reports findings related to the College’s material dimension and its relationship to GVC’s symbolic economy. During the study period GVC, like most baccalaureate colleges, relied upon tuition receipts for the bulk of its revenues. Accordingly, this section outlined GVC’s supply of credentialed labor and tuition-paying students, two resources that proved central to undergraduate instruction.
Hiring and training personnel

Like most evangelical Christian colleges, GVC faced a dilemma when attempting to identify and hire credentialed personnel. On the one hand, the College sought individuals who shared its religious commitments. On the other hand, GVC required individuals who had earned credentials, such as research-based terminal degrees, that likely had been conferred by secular or mainline universities that did not share those religious beliefs. Concerns about how the College could manage these conflicting imperatives proved widespread among individuals with whom I spoke. These concerns often manifested themselves in the importance that interview participants gave to making satisfactory hiring decisions. “We had to find somebody who fits the relational culture of our department,” one faculty member told me. In his view, securing this fit proved “non-negotiable.” Other participants issued similarly categorical statements about the importance of hiring decisions. “If we relaxed our standards on the people who we hire,” one faculty member told me, “then we would not be able to integrate a Christian worldview into everything we are doing on campus. So we are very cautious about that.”

Despite widespread concern about hiring personnel, GVC employed few formal policies in this area. “We’re not that strategic, or at least we haven’t been, historically,” one dean told me. Later, he noted, “Traditionally, one of the nine department heads would do the search in his or her area. The search committee itself is optional. The formality is minimal, and the strategy is minimal.” A faculty member echoed this sentiment, noting, “our hiring practices in the past have not always been very consistent. Indeed, there is a range of variability.” On the one hand, he offered, “the Bible and Theology Department certainly has a strong tradition of having a big search committee
with lots of input.” For other departments, by contrast, “it has almost been, ‘Who can we get?’” Faculty and staff members’ own stories of how they came to GVC confirmed the observation that College officials often made hiring decisions idiosyncratically. One faculty member told me that he learned that GVC had an opening only through a personal connection. “My pastor at that time had a brother-in-law who taught in the Bible and Theology Department here,” this faculty member told me. A dean told me that he had not even formally applied for a job at GVC. “I applied for another position and my resume was shared,” he told me.

Similarly, College officials employed few formal mechanisms by which to train newly hired faculty and staff members. The provost’s office organized a one-semester seminar intended to familiarize new faculty members, especially those who might have completed graduate degrees at secular research universities, with the College. However, the College’s administration provided little guidance after this semester had ended. Formal involvement from the College’s upper administration “would not come back again until promotion and tenure,” one dean told me. While a number of participants mentioned professional development programs organized by the College, these offerings appeared to be irregularly scheduled. “You’ve got those opportunities,” one dean said, “but I wouldn’t say that there is anything structured or planned.” Another dean echoed these sentiments, opining, “We have let that whole process go for too long.”

Symbolic economies and credentialed labor. GVC’s limited reliance on formal hiring and training mechanisms generally proved consistent with the symbolic economy of the Bible college model. Due to the soul winning necessitated by premillenial predictions of the imminent end of the world, Bible colleges tended to neglect the
structure and care of the formal organization. Indeed, some Bible colleges relied almost solely upon divine providence for financial health (Brereton, 1990). This orientation tended to flout conventional preparedness in favor of hope for a successful search for credentialed faculty and staff members. In the eyes of a few individuals, GVC’s tendency to rely upon individuals rather than formal policies proved consistent with this orientation. “In the summer and the fall, to get the best candidates, you need to interview at national conferences. We skip all that,” one dean told me. In his view, most of his colleagues preferred divine favor to conventional practices for identifying potential faculty and staff candidates. “It gets to March or April, and we say, ‘I guess we need to get on this. Let’s see what the Lord sends us.’” He concluded on a note that bespoke his dissatisfaction with these practices: “the Lord sends us leftovers.”

GVC’s personnel practices also proved consistent with the College’s sponsoring denomination. Many evangelical groups have developed strong denominational structures. For example, Reformed Christians have tended to secure agreement around doctrinal or theological statements (Cornick, 2008), and Southern Baptists since the late 1970s have de-emphasized the autonomy of individual believers in favor of the authority of what Ammerman (1990) termed a “fundamentalist” national conference. These two denominations have developed formal organizational mechanisms by which to secure relatively high levels of agreement among members. By contrast, the College’s sponsoring denomination from its inception cast itself as a confederation of local bodies. Its central governing body possessed little power to impose formal sanctions on local churches or parachurch organizations. Accordingly, no participant in this study mentioned trustees or denominational officials as important figures in campus life. The
denomination seemed to prioritize the local and the individual over the programmatic or corporate. One dean echoed this interpretation by linking the decentralized nature of the denomination with the idiosyncratic hiring practices of the College. He bluntly said of GVC’s haphazard hiring process, “I think it fits the lack of vision of the denomination.”

Of course, GVC did not limit itself solely to denominational candidates when seeking to fill vacant faculty and staff positions. Many of the individuals who orchestrated the College’s hiring practices considered candidates who identified as evangelicals but who were not members of the sponsoring denomination. This mechanism allowed the College’s faculty and staff to include both individuals who strongly identified with the denomination and the Bible college model, on the one hand, and those who preferred the broader evangelical movement and the liberal arts model, on the other hand. Tension between denomination and transdenominational evangelicalism manifested itself in several College documents. For example, the College’s statement of faith, in the words of one dean, “is very consistent with other evangelical statements of faith.” Indeed, this document set forth tenets, such as “the incarnation and virgin birth of the Son of God,” that virtually all evangelicals professed (Smith, 2000). The statement proved more elusive, however, on topics about which evangelicals have generated less transdenominational consensus. For example, both the sponsoring denomination and GVC historically have espoused premillennialism. However, many evangelicals from beyond the denomination have not espoused a premillenial position (Marsden, 1991; Smith, 2000, 1998). Premillennial language therefore had been removed almost completely from the College’s statement of faith. This document mentioned the “urgency
of preaching the gospel to all mankind” without offering the premillenial explanation that “urgency” derived from the fast-approaching end of time.

Considering candidates from the broader spectrum of evangelicalism created additional difficulties that became evident when the College attempted to determine whether an individual candidate was suitable for employment at GVC. Because GVC employed few formal policies in this area, hiring practices tended to be particular to an individual. In the words of one dean, “Some may trust an denominational candidate a little bit more.” Others, however, “look to have a conversation” about theology. Still others may ask “‘Who are you related to? Did you serve overseas? Do you know so-and-so?’” Hiring practices at GVC proved so diffuse that different participants disagreed on the value of straightforward data points. For example, one dean told me that the schools a candidate had attended stood as an important indicator of whether he or she would be suitable for GVC. When seeking to identify a promising prospect, she told me, “you can look at the colleges they have gone to. If I’m interviewing someone who has been to 100% public universities, then I’m looking for a way to see where else they may have had this influence.” A long-tenured faculty member voiced an entirely different opinion of the value of this information. In his view, “you can’t always tell from the schools they attended. That is not a good indicator.” He elaborated upon this position with a hypothetical example. “You have people who went to a very liberal seminary, fought uphill all the way, and came out stronger. On the other hand, you have people who went to a very conservative seminary or Christian college, and they have drifted personally while they were there.” These contradictory passages suggested that hiring practices at GVC proved almost idiosyncratic.
In summary, GVC’s hiring practices evidenced a complex relationship with the College’s symbolic economy. On the one hand, GVC’s tendency toward informal mechanisms and decentralized decision-making evidenced strong ties to the Bible college model and the College’s sponsoring denomination. On the other hand, these same decentralized policies allowed different departments to come to their own conclusions about whom to hire. When coupled with the limited supply of credentialed candidates who held membership in the sponsoring denomination, this tolerance for local decision-making allowed some hiring bodies to select individuals whose variant of evangelical faith differed from the premillenial and holiness roots of the Bible college. What appeared to be a simple enshrinement of the principles of the Bible college’s symbolic economy therefore proved multivalent and ironic. The hiring practices of the Bible college model allowed the Christian liberal arts model to take root and to reproduce itself through future hiring actions chaired by practitioners of that model.

**Material economy and personnel practices.** Reliance on individuals also proved consistent with the College’s material dimension. Many participants pointed to GVC’s financial woes as a factor that explained the College’s struggles in personnel and hiring. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the College’s finances seemed to totter on the brink of crisis throughout the study period. The College’s precarious position made it difficult to develop hiring strategies. In the words of one faculty member, “plans are a dead letter because nobody seems to be able to generate enough money to do anything.” Participants worried that positions would go unfilled or disappear completely due to budgetary constraints. One department chair expressed frustration with this situation, noting, “We can’t afford to hire the people that it would take to give the middle
management people like me the relief that we would normally get.” A faculty member echoed the difficulties that GVC’s material poverty posed for the hiring process by relating a story from his own interview as a candidate for employment. “The obvious financial constraints of a context like this one, certainly the facilities and the total, radical difference between [the large public university at which he had earned his Ph.D.] and this really weighed heavily upon me,” he told me. Although he eventually decided to accept GVC’s offer of employment, visiting the College’s campus proved to be “a ‘rubber meets the road’ experience” for him. He extrapolated from his own experience that other candidates might be turned away by the College’s material circumstances.

The interface of hiring and material poverty also manifested itself in the area of salaries and wages. GVC paid full-time faculty members a mean salary of $35,231.99 between 2002 and 2007, a figure far below the mean salary of $45,422.37 at other CCCU member schools during the same time period. Further examination of finance data suggested that GVC faculty members also received relatively little in the way of instructional support. GVC’s instructional expenditures of $3,718.69 per FTE from 2002 through 2007 again fell well below the CCCU member mean of $6,145.81 per FTE for the same time period. This figures seemed to confirm the impression that GVC’s meager financial resources limited the College’s ability to offer attractive salaries or extra-salary benefits to prospective faculty members. Testimony from interview participants further bolstered this interpretation of salary and expenditure data. “We don’t pay an awful lot,” one professor put it bluntly. Another faculty member expressed his dissatisfaction with the College by citing low salaries and the rarity of sabbatical relief that would allow him to write devotional and scholarly essays. When I asked why he had remained at GVC
despite these factors, he stated ruefully, “I finished second for some really good jobs.”

The College’s poor material conditions had prompted this individual to seek outside employment. Only his failure to secure such an offer had kept him at GVC.

Recruiting tuition-paying students

At first glance, GVC appeared to encounter fewer difficulties in recruiting tuition-paying students than it found in securing an adequate supply of skilled labor. Finance and enrollment figures indicated that the College’s tuition revenues grew markedly between 1987 and 2007. GVC collected approximately $8,000 per FTE in gross tuition revenues in the late 1980s. Tuition revenues per FTE in the late 2000s far surpassed this figure. Indeed, between 2004 and 2007 GVC’s average annual tuition revenues per FTE never dipped below $12,000. The College’s apparent successes in the realm of tuition did not stop with the capture of greater revenues per FTE. By 2007, GVC also boasted the largest enrollment that it had claimed in at least two decades. Enrollments grew from approximately 600 FTE in the late 1980s to approximately 800 FTE in the late 2000s.

The combination of greater per FTE gross tuition revenues and larger FTE counts meant that, by the late 2000s, GVC collected far more in total tuition dollars than it had in the 1980s or 1990s. Put colloquially, more students paid more money to attend GVC in the late 2000s than had been the case in prior decades. These measures suggest that GVC had attained a somewhat better material position by the time of my visit than it had occupied in previous decades.

Most interview participants credited GVC’s enrollment growth to the College’s symbolic resources. Faculty and staff members with whom I spoke praised the
coexistence of Bible college and liberal arts models for addressing the problem of integration. Although individuals tended to express their own preference for one model or the other, they also tended to express the belief that the coexistence of these two models within a single organization made GVC an attractive school for prospective students. Interview participants tended to denote this presumed attractiveness with some variant of the word “unique.” For example, a dean referred to GVC as offering a “unique and potentially remarkable” combination of Bible college and liberal arts traditions. A second dean concurred, stating that GVC constituted “a unique blend” of these two models of evangelical Christian higher education. For one faculty member, the combination of these two elements constituted “a unique draw” for prospective students. GVC’s faculty and staff members, in other words, seemed to regard the coexistence of these two symbolic economies as a source of great appeal for prospective students.

Careful consideration of finance and enrollment data, however, revealed this impression to be unlikely. GVC’s enrollment growth seemed to result from material sources as much as from the College’s symbolic domain. In particular, GVC’s enrollment growth seemed related to the student financial aid practice known as “tuition discounting.” This enrollment strategy created a strong link between tuition revenues and student aid expenditures by allowing colleges to employ scholarships as recruitment tools. When it works well, tuition discounting allows a college to collect greater total revenues while charging lower net prices because it encourages more students to enroll (Breneman, Doti, & Lapovski, 2001; Redd, 2000). Given the linkage between tuition receipts and student financial aid implicit in the concept of tuition discounting, the gross
tuition figures cited above must be interpreted in the context of the College’s student aid
expenditures.

GVC’s student aid practices proved consistent with the principles of tuition
discounting. Between 2002 and 2007, GVC expended $3,412.24 per FTE on student
aid. In other words, GVC returned more than one-quarter of its gross tuition revenues to
students in the form of student aid expenditures. These student aid awards notably
outstripped those of other CCCU members. The mean student aid award among non-
GVC CCCU members between 2002 and 2007 stood at $2,048.17 per FTE, more than
$1,350 per FTE less than GVC’s student aid expenditures per FTE. Just as GVC’s student
aid expenditures did not simply reflect the practices of its peers, the College’s grants did
not appear to be rewards conferred on an unusually meritorious group of student
applicants. Between 2002 and 2007, more than three-quarters of the College’s admitted
students submitted SAT scores with their applications for admission. These students’
SAT verbal (598) and math (568) scores, measured at the 75th percentile, proved
somewhat lower than similar scores for other CCCU member schools (605 and 616,
respectively). To be sure, these results are by no means an embarrassment to the College.
However, their below-mean status in the sample indicated that GVC did not confer its
student aid awards because its pool of applicants for admission proved unusually
distinguished.

Since the College’s student aid awards both outpaced its peers and did not seem to
recognize a particularly meritorious group of applicants, these policies instead proved

21 Beginning in 2002 GASB accounting standards included all expenditures related to
student aid, such as the administration of aid programs, in this calculation. I have chosen
to analyze these expenditures rather than simple student aid awards as a measure of
GVC’s overall organizational efforts in the execution of student aid strategies.
consonant with the practice of tuition discounting. Bolstering this assessment, GVC enrolled a higher proportion of students who received need-based federal grants (45%) than did its peers in the CCCU (36%). Low-income students have tended to be more price-sensitive than their more affluent peers when choosing a college, meaning that these students generally have responded to price discounts (Steinberg, Piraino, & Haveman, 2009). Further, low-income students generally have had access to less information about potential colleges destinations than have their affluent peers (Grodsky & Jones, 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). These two general characteristics of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds suggested that the many students at GVC who had qualified for need-based federal grant aid were the likely targets of the College’s tuition discounts because College officials intended these tuition discounts to sway students who faced concerns about affording any college and who were uncertain about the range of options available to them. One faculty member echoed this assessment. He acknowledged that GVC’s dual commitments to its Bible college and liberal arts curricula could stretch a student’s program of studies beyond four years, but noted that financial exigencies likely would intervene at that point. “They’re having a hard time affording four [years] right now,” he noted. In his assessment, GVC’s aggressive student aid offers might convince students possessing modest financial resources to continue at the College. By so doing, GVC’s awards would yield precisely the results that tuition-dependent colleges sought from discounting policies.

GVC’s student aid practices implied that the College’s enrollment growth resulted in part from generous price discounts. Student aid expenditures topped those of comparable schools, and seemed to be allocated in an effort to maximize enrollment
growth and tuition revenues. This suggested that GVC’s material wellbeing, tenuous though it may have been, derived from the aggressive use of material resources rather than from the College’s unusual symbolic economy. In other words, what many faculty and staff members regarded as GVC’s “unique” symbolic dimension attracted students in part because it occurred in concert with generous price discounts. In the case of GVC, the symbolic axis alone could not explain College operations. Materiality appeared to be at least as influential.

Beyond indicating the importance of the College’s material dimension, GVC’s student aid expenditures suggested something about GVC’s continued struggles to attain material prosperity. GVC diverted a large proportion of its spending into student aid efforts. In other words, while the College now generated far greater tuition receipts than it had grossed in the 1980s and 1990s, officials had chosen neither to spend these revenues on instructing students nor to invest them in capital assets. Instead, these revenues went to offset substantial price discounts, yielding a kind of organizational treadmill in which GVC increased its revenues and its expenditures simultaneously. This cycle of earning and spending ensured that GVC made little progress in its efforts to improve its overall financial position. GVC’s material economy therefore remained meager relative to its peers. Materiality not only proved an important explanatory factor in understanding the College, then, but also proved relatively invariant.
Discussion

A simmering crisis

The first section of this chapter outlined the two distinct responses that Green Valley College developed to the problem of integration. The Bible college model drew upon GVC’s historical roots in holiness theology and the practical training of ministers. This approach tended to relegate academics to a subordinate position, casting academic knowledge as useful only in so far as it allowed ministers and missionaries to do their work more effectively. By contrast, proponents of the Christian liberal arts model professed the importance of academic knowledge for students’ post-College careers. This approach placed academic content and a theological “worldview” together in a single classroom, relying upon the theological lens to guide students through any controversial content. Every participant implied a preference for one model or the other. Yet, just as surely, every participant indicated that GVC should continue to pursue both models simultaneously. One dean acknowledged that this complex coexistence often baffled outsiders. “Experts will come in and say, ‘You don’t know who you are. You have to be one or the other,’” he told me. “But we’re one of three CCCU colleges that is ABHE also. That is who we are.”

Although all participants expressed the expectation that the two models of integration would continue to coexist, the limited purchasing power of GVC’s symbolic and material resources made this uncertain proposition. The maintenance of two adjacent curricula could tax faculty roles and financial resources as well as students’ programs of study. Early in this chapter, I noted that GVC fired 13 staff members during the study period. This suggested that during the study period the College’s longstanding lack of
material resources teetered on the verge of crisis. Referring to the two different models of integration practiced at the College, one faculty member noted that “If it didn’t have so much impact on our current dollars and cents as an institution, it would be a remarkably robust conversation to have.” A full consideration on the merits of the Bible college and Christian liberal arts approach would be professionally gratifying, he suggested, but would not prove feasible given the College’s urgent need to attract greater numbers of tuition-paying students, credentialed laborers, and other material resources. “We’re dealing with jobs and majors and stuff like that, so it moves out of the realm of theory alone,” he concluded. More than one participant mentioned the possibility that these grim realities could force the College to change its operations radically in the foreseeable future. “The verdict is out,” one dean said. “Who knows if we’re a dinosaur or not?”

As this rhetorical question implied, GVC’s limited resources in both symbolic and material domains created a climate of almost constant hardship. One faculty member commented upon this eloquently. In his view, GVC’s woes did not stem solely from finances. He acknowledged that the national economic downturn had reduced the number of students able to afford high tuition rates at a private baccalaureate college. Yet, he continued, “some of us know that there are other Christian schools that are growing in this environment. We can’t say that it is just that. It’s not just the economy, stupid. There is more than that.” In this frank analysis, GVC existed and operated as it did due to the interaction of symbolic and material domains. The limited purchasing power of resources in each domain reinforced one another, and their cumulative weight appeared to wear on several participants during the study period. “Maintaining this rather bipolar relationship is a little bit dicey at the moment,” one faculty member confided. As this statement
implied, GVC’s limited material resources and a “dicey” relationship between two competing symbolic economies often proved inextricably linked to one another. The College could not afford to lose the tuition-paying students who came to GVC for one model of integration or the other, yet neither could it afford to maintain two parallel curricula within a single organization. “I think we are in a bit of an identity crisis,” a faculty member said, “and we are also in a financial pinch, a serious one, at the moment.” In his judgment, these two facets of the organization connected intimately. Referring to the College’s financial woes, he remarked, “I think, while it’s rather amorphous, that this tug between these two sides [i.e., the Bible college and liberal arts college models] is a part of that.”

“Bricks without straw”

Advocates of rational choice theory (“RCT”) apply models from supply-side economics to religious life. In these explanations, mainline churches tended to struggle beneath unwieldy bureaucracies, muddled messages, and the dulling effects of semi-establishment status. Upstart sects, by contrast, often prosper because they can respond quickly to market demands without such encumbrances. Such sects can provide individuals with messages that they find appealing, thereby binding members tightly together while ridding themselves of “free riders” who partake of the group’s services without contributing to its activities (Iannaco, 1994; Stark & Fine, 2002).

Advocates of RCT likely would view GVC as a school that occupies an advantageous position in the religious marketplace. Yet GVC’s market position does not appear to be particularly strong. The College routinely struggles to identify credentialed
laborers, and seems to attract students on the basis of generous student aid awards rather than because it responds ably to their marketplace demands. Further, the RCT interpretation would cast the College as a nimble organization able to respond to market demands more quickly than would competitors encumbered by formalized theological narratives, vested financial interests, or strong denominational hierarchies. Given the anxiety conveyed by many interview participants, however, I find this explanation to be unconvincing. These individuals seem to perceive GVC’s lack of encumbrances not as an opportunity to innovate, but as the absence of security in turbulent times. RCT therefore seems to offer an unpersuasive explanation of life at GVC.

A second body of social theory proves somewhat more helpful. In “cultural scripts,” neo-institutional theory provides a particularly useful concept through which to interpret findings from GVC. “Scripts” in this case refer to familiar answers that an organization could access to address problems that do not lend themselves to technical solutions (Jepperson, 1991). In other words, a “script” offers a package of cultural practices that inspire confidence or consensus. These practices, if institutionalized, might carry the blessing of normative structures. Consonance with these normative expectations therefore proves an important benchmark by which to measure organizational success. Those organizations that employ scripts that hold normative sway in a given field tended to prosper, while those whose scripts deviated from established practices tended to face uncertain outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

As indicated in chapter two, however, a too-literal reading of this process would be overly deterministic, and so would reduce rich case study material to a facile reading of mimetic processes. Fortunately, recent iterations of neo-institutional theory provide
greater nuance through which to interpret findings. In these conceptualizations, established scripts do not appear suddenly and fully formed, but develop over time through a series of small-scale interactions and negotiations (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). This theory of process allowed for the possibility of partial, contradictory, or contested institutionalization in a field. Further, scripts from different institutionalized fields, such as religion and education, might abut and quarrel with one another (Friedland & Alford, 1991). These reinvigorations of the “script” concept open neo-institutional theory to the possibilities of change, conflict, and dynamism.

The concept of partial, complex, or even contradictory cultural practices provided great insight into GVC. College officials, as noted repeatedly in this chapter, have not settled on a single script by which to address the problem of integration. Instead, they employ two such scripts, one faithful to the Bible college tradition and the other drawing from the broader evangelical movement and the secular liberal arts. The coexistence of these two cultural scripts seems to suit the College’s faculty and staff members, most of whom praise GVC as a “unique blend” of two distinct approaches. Yet this coexistence also appears to prevents GVC from using one script or the other to gain leverage on its material problems. This proves an important point because neo-institutional theory holds that cultural practices generally cause material outcomes. Organizations, in other words, could reap material returns on cultural resources. Colyvas and Powell (2006) identify incidents of this sort in Stanford University’s development of protocols by which to manage research discoveries. Their case study illustrates the processes by which once-novel solutions such as the creation of a technology transfer office solidify as scripts. Once Stanford’s efforts demonstrate their usefulness at Stanford, this script attains the
status of normative establishment. As a result, universities that pursue technology transfer tend to implement a model that looks something like the one that Stanford pioneered in the late 1970s.

Unfortunately for those who would like to see GVC attain a greater level of material prosperity, the College does not possess a single symbolic resource that it could refine to the status of a script that routinized the problem of integration. Instead, GVC offers two different responses in the forms of the Bible college and Christian liberal arts models. The symbolic economy of coexistence offers no single set of cultural practices that could attain normative establishment. As a result, GVC’s efforts to recruit and train qualified personnel devolve into a series of personal efforts rather than a coordinated, centralized endeavor. GVC simply does not possess a single cultural narrative around which such efforts could be centralized. This illustrated the price that GVC pays for its refusal to develop a single script that could attain normative status as had Stanford’s response to the then-novel problem of research commercialization (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Neo-institutional theory, with its strong conceptualization of the causal role of scripts, provides a useful lens through which to interpret these data points.

While neo-institutional theory yields a great deal of insight into GVC’s operations, this body of theory tends to reduce material circumstances to dependent status. Organizations prosper or struggle based upon the degree of consonance between their espoused cultural practices and the practices that hold normative sway in a given field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This causality is almost never reversed; materiality only rarely affects culture. Yet the case study data presented above clearly illustrate the
independent influence of material circumstances such as tuition discounting, relatively low faculty salaries, and a meager denominational pipeline of credentialed labor and tuition-paying students. These phenomena do not simply reflect the College’s symbolic economy, but also shaped and limited GVC’s symbolic possibilities. For this reason, a body of theory that emphasizes material causality proves an important complement to the cultural lens supplied by neo-institutional theory.

I seek this materialist lens in the critical theory of Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, material position and cultural practices maintain a close relationship to one another. Partly for this reason, Bourdieu (1990) explicitly disavows that his understanding of class connotes an objectively existing social structure in the Marxian sense of the term. Bourdieu, in other words, makes a great effort to ensure that he does not produce a variant of classic “base and superstructure” Marxism. Instead, Bourdieu uses the term “class” to connote proximity in social space. Members of a class are not \textit{a priori} proletarians or capitalists, but are individuals who share experiences and social spaces. This understanding of class highlights Bourdieu’s materialism. Bourdieu (1984) argues that positions in social space derive primarily from economic and political power. Insofar as individuals share cultural practices, they do so as a means of communicating, legitimating, and reproducing their positions in society. Cultural practices may bind a “class” together, then, but they did so only because money, politics, and other forms of material power previously created the conditions in which that class would come into being. For Bourdieu, materiality shaped culture, not \textit{vice versa}.

Bourdieu’s model of material causality casts many of the insights provided by neo-institutional theory into greater relief. The neo-institutional understanding of
“scripts” leaves GVC with the inability to convert a coherent cultural narrative into material prosperity. Bourdieu provides additional analytic refinement by highlighting the ways in which material conditions foster the inability to develop a single coherent script in the first place. Thus, for example, GVC’s symbolic economy, however attractive it might have been to the College’s faculty and staff, proves insufficient to attract a sufficient number of tuition-paying students. As a school with modest financial resources, GVC can ill afford interruptions in its tuition revenue stream. College officials respond to this financial vulnerability with aggressive student aid practices aimed at ensuring relatively large enrollments. GVC thereby seems to secure a moderate improvement in its material position. Yet, as Bourdieu would have predicted, this does not prove to be the case. Instead, GVC’s strategy seems merely to trap the College in the same social space. Rising student aid expenditures siphon off new revenues, meaning that GVC continues to control a relatively low level of financial resources. The College’s cash flow increases, but its position in stratified social space remains constant. If the key neo-institutional concept for GVC proves to be “scripts,” then, Bourdieu’s greatest insight comes from the neo-Marxian notion of “reproduction,” or the process whereby individuals, organizations, and networks continue to occupy the same class position (or social space) regardless of their efforts to change that station.

In the case of Green Valley College, then, neo-institutional theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s philosophy provide different but complementary insights. Both theories illuminate the manner in which the limited purchasing power of GVC’s resources constrains the College’s ability to become more affluent. Neo-institutional theory offers cultural scripts and Bourdieu’s work emphasized materialist factors; the two differed
merely on points of emphasis. Both lenses yielded similar diagnoses. While these theoretic generalizations may seem overly abstracted, at least one participant recognizes the dampening effect that GVC’s low levels of resources exert on his activities.

Employing a metaphor from the Hebrew book of Exodus, this faculty member notes that those who work and study at the College must “make bricks without straw.” He concludes with an entreaty for a more prosperous future. “Let us make bricks with straw for a year.” Unfortunately for this individual’s request, little hope of such a prosperous future appears on GVC’s horizon.
CHAPTER 7

SEWALL COLLEGE

In this research project, I employ a maximum variation sampling design in which I select cases based on their differences from one another (Creswell, 2007). As discussed at greater length in chapter three, Sewall College (“Sewall” or “The College”) stands as “high material resource, low symbolic resource” in this sampling design. The designation “high material resource” proves relatively straightforward. This label indicates the College’s financial wealth, as measured by its general subsidies awarded per full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollment. From 2003-2007, Sewall’s general subsidies per FTE ranked above the median figure for non-Sewall members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). As I discuss in greater detail in the sections that follow, however, this designation proves misleading in the case of Sewall College because it measures a school’s spending rather than its revenues or capital assets. Sewall sustained its relatively high level of expenditures per FTE only by spending virtually all revenues that it collected in an effort to subsidize instruction. This high rate of spending and, by extension, low rate of saving constitute a central tension of this chapter. Sewall stands as a “high material resource” case within the specified sample design of this study.

22 I draw the term “general subsidy” from Winston’s (1999) model of college and university financing. In his analysis, colleges spend more on educational activities than they collect in tuition payments. Schools make up the shortfall between expenditures and tuition revenues with revenues drawn from other sources. Winston labels these funds as “general subsidies” because every student who attends the college enjoys access to the services and facilities that they fund. See the literature review and methods chapters for more detailed information on general subsidies and its use in this analysis.
at the same time that it ranks as the poorest of the three studied colleges by many other measures.

The designation “low symbolic resource” reflects the relationship between the particular strain of evangelical Protestantism that characterizes Sewall college and the dominant normative structures of secular higher education. In the early 20th century, the evangelical Protestant groups that founded new colleges cast these schools as bulwarks against trends in the secular academy such as the teaching of evolutionary biology, the application of academic methods to the study of Christian scriptures, and the governance of colleges and universities by secular authorities (Carpenter, 1997; Larson, 2003; Ringenberg, 2006). These historical roots indicate that, in general, evangelical Christian colleges have expressed a range of beliefs that stand at variance with those that dominate the secular academy. At the same time, however, evangelical Christians and the colleges that they sponsor differ with one another in their denominational or theological orientations (Smith, 2000). Some groups espouse intellectualized theological narratives, others emphasize right practice, while still others articulate connections between evangelical faith and social or political issues. These different doctrinal positions within evangelicalism mean that evangelical Christian colleges differ notably from one another in their orientation toward the secular academy. Some colleges may adopt antagonistic positions toward the secular academy, while others may stress commonalities with non-evangelical scholars. Sewall’s symbolic culture inclined toward antagonism with secular higher education. The label “low symbolic resource” reflects this site-selection decision.

To be sure, the designation “low symbolic resource” should not be taken as indicating that the rhetoric, values, and beliefs espoused by individuals at Sewall College
have no value. These cultural forms may be highly esteemed in many different social fields. However, I assert that their overt hostility to academic conventions means that Sewall’s symbolic resources will have limited purchasing power in the field of higher education. This distinction becomes crucial in the chapter that follows, because I argue that Sewall’s symbolic economy proves advantageous in the field of evangelical religion and conservative politics precisely because of its hostility to secular academic norms.

**Description and chapter outline**

Sewall College’s roots in hostility to the secular academy find a surprising match in its longstanding commitment to liberal arts instruction. Where colleges with explicit denominational identifications might emphasize training students for pastoral or missionary appointments, Sewall’s founding documents stress the importance of teaching in the liberal arts fields. Contemporary degree awards reflect this focus. Between 2004 and 2009, Sewall awarded less than 5% of all baccalaureate degrees in religion and theology. This figure places Sewall slightly below figures for Credo College, which hovered around 5% from 2004-2009, and well below those at Green Valley College, which awarded approximately one-third of all baccalaureate degrees in religion and theology over the same time period.

Sewall proves slightly more like Credo and GVC when viewed through the prism of size. All three colleges experienced enrollment growth from the late 1980s through the late 2000s, with Sewall’s enrollment growing to approximately 1000 FTE count by 2008. This figure places Sewall between the enrollments of Credo (approximately 1200 FTE count) and GVC (approximately 900). However, Sewall generally employs slightly fewer
faculty member than do these other schools. Sewall’s count of 42 full-time faculty members in 2008 stands well behind the number at Credo (70) and slightly behind that at GVC (49).

This chapter proceeds in four sections. The first section considers Sewall College’s symbolic economy. It begins by outlining the nature of the College’s religious beliefs, paying special attention to Sewall’s explicitly non-denominational form of evangelicalism and its informal yet powerful connections with conservative social and political causes. By way of conclusion, the chapter considers the ways in which these faith commitments inform the College’s response to “the problem of integration,” by which term I indicate the dilemma posed by simultaneously seeking to operate as a college and to champion evangelical faith that often situates itself as a deliberate critic of academic knowledge standards. As in previous chapters, I pay particular attention to the controversial subject matter of evolutionary biology as a means of elucidating the College’s response to this problem.

The chapter’s second section explores the “problem of stratification” at Sewall. While all of the evangelical Christian colleges considered in this research project face the problem of integration, they do so with different cultural legacies and material resources at their disposal. I use the term “problem of stratification” to refer to the different positions from which studied colleges respond to the problem of integration. Of course, this case study alone cannot fully illuminate the problem of stratification. Status is irreducibly relative, meaning that this line of analysis cannot be completed until I compare Sewall with other study cases in my discussion section. Nonetheless, in this
chapter I seek to provide the building blocks from which a more general analysis of stratification may emerge through comparison with other cases included in this study.

In this chapter, my analysis of the problem of stratificationforegrounds the manner in which the College secures the resources that account for its position relative to other evangelical Christian colleges. This section pays specific attention to the hiring of credentialed labor, the recruitment of tuition-paying students, and the solicitation of gifts and grants. Each of these activities provides the College with the material resources needed to maintain its operations. Yet interview data stress that, in the absence of a denominational authority to check the influence of the secular academy, these material pathways also provide an important mechanism that keeps the College faithful to its evangelical religious commitments. For example, College officials express concern that tuition receipts and donations will diminish if Sewall deviates from its commitment to evangelical orthodoxy and conservative causes. Attention to the College’s efforts to gather material resources therefore emphasizes the connections between material assets and the College’s symbolic economy.

In the third section, I frame this connection between the College’s symbolic and material economies as a “demand-side” phenomenon. In other words, Sewall is not a by-product of visionary leadership, as would be the case in a supply-side explanation. The College instead results from a tightly knit network of politically and socially conservative evangelicals who both support the College and require it to operate in certain ways in order to receive that support. Members of this network therefore both support Sewall’s work materially and shape its work symbolically. Having formulated the demand-side view of the College, I then briefly consider it in light of the three theoretical frameworks.
that guide this study: rational choice theory (RCT), neo-institutional theory, and the critical theory of Pierre Bourdieu. This cursory review of theoretical implications falls short of a full discussion of the implications of Sewall College. However, it seeks to illuminate themes that lend themselves to comparison with the other cases considered in this research project. I consider both these themes and their implications for social theory more fully in the discussion chapter with which this research report concludes.

The symbolic economy of nondenominational evangelicalism

Sewall College’s architecture proclaimed the College’s religious commitments to those who viewed the hilltop campus from afar. Four large Roman crosses sitting at right angles to one another towered over the rest of the campus, reminding students, faculty, staff, and onlookers that Sewall’s founders intended the College to help to spread evangelicalism to the proverbial four corners of the earth. Next to these crosses, and second only to them in height, stood a large chapel capable of seating 800 worshippers. This building, like many others at Sewall, dated from the 1960s or 1970s, and reflected the plain functional style of many campus structures from that era. Only the crosses embedded in the windows marked these buildings as distinct from aging structures at other campuses.

While Sewall’s architecture indicated the centrality of the College’s religious beliefs, the College’s symbolic economy proved a complex mixture of formal statements and informal assumptions. This section summarized major elements of the College’s religious culture and the manner in which these elements interacted with the dominant normative structures of secular higher education. First, it elucidated the College’s
intentional and explicit commitment to nondenominational evangelicalism. The section then considered the College’s relationship to the “Christian Right” and associated conservative political and social attitudes before concluding by considering the manner in which this nondenominational, politically conservative variant of evangelical Protestantism interacted with the conventions of the secular academy. The section paid particular attention to the controversial topic of evolutionary biology as a lens through which to view the interaction between evangelical belief and academic work.

_Nondenominational evangelicalism_

Specific Protestant denominations chartered most of the evangelical Christian colleges that comprise the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (2011). These denominations often continued to fund and govern colleges, directing them toward particular activities such as the transmission of a theological narrative or the training of ministers for the denomination. Sewall College never had such a denominational tie. From its establishment in the first third of the 20th century, Sewall has proclaimed the specifically nondenominational nature of its evangelical commitments. Reflecting upon this long heritage of nondenominationalism, one dean23 told me, “There’s not a lot here that you have to absolutely believe other than the faith statement.”

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23 As noted in the chapter on research methods, I use the term “dean” to indicate an upper-level administrator who retains some faculty responsibilities. My usage of this term therefore does not necessarily correspond with individuals’ titles. For example, I would classify a “dean of advancement” who did not teach at the college as a staff member, whereas I would label a teaching faculty member who directed a small center at the office or maintained other administrative responsibilities as a “dean.” This definition allows me to employ the terms “dean,” “faculty member,” and “staff member” consistently across the different cases considered in this research project.
Sewall’s nondenominational roots manifested themselves clearly in the College’s statement of belief. This document’s opening sentence proclaimed that the College required “no sectarian tests” of its students. Faculty, staff, and trustees must espouse the statement of faith itself, but this document – as suggested by its opening – codified general tenets common to most evangelicals rather than denominational particulars. For example, evangelicals in the 20th century often quarreled over the nature of scriptural authority. This debate split the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary into feuding factions, one of which accepted Biblical authority while the other contended that a genuine evangelical must also espouse the inerrant nature of Christian scripture (Marsden, 1987). Sewall sidestepped this question by including language from each group in its Statement of Faith. At Sewall, “the Bible, in the Old and New Testaments, constitutes the supreme authority in faith and in life.” This passage abutted a phrase that proclaimed that Christian scripture to be “inerrant” in the “original writings.” Sewall’s statement of faith thus opened space for a range of evangelicals, regardless of whether these individuals believed in the authority or the inerrancy of scripture. Those who asserted inerrancy found the word itself in the statement of faith, while those who preferred authority could take comfort in the qualification that limited inerrancy to “the original writings” rather than a particular English-language translation of those texts.

Sewall’s statement of faith proved similarly broad-minded on the question of whether the end of the earth loomed imminently. Debate over this topic divided evangelicals throughout the 20th century. “Dispensationalists” argued that the end of the earth was imminent, and supported their case with a reading of the Biblical book of Revelation that divided the earth’s history into seven ages known as “dispensations.”
Dispensational theology found expression in the commentaries included with the Scofield Reference Bible, a widely circulated text among evangelicals. Even as the Scofield Bible made dispensationalism into a common idea among some evangelicals, however, other believers rejected the idea as an over-interpretation of the oblique book of Revelation. Still other evangelicals simply regarded speculation on the end of time as a distraction from theology and practice (Marsden, 1991). Although debate over dispensationalism engulfed much of evangelicalism during the 20th century, Sewall’s statement of faith remained quiet on this issue. To be sure, the document proclaimed the College’s belief “in the bodily resurrection of all persons, judgment to come, the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting punishment of the lost.” Yet it provided no timetable for these events, and neither endorsed nor rejected the concept of “dispensations.” Sewall’s statement of faith therefore proved sufficiently flexible to accommodate a range of beliefs about the end of the earth. As one dean noted, “We have a couple of dispensationalists and six non-dispensationalists in our Religion department.”

Most individuals with whom I spoke seemed to embrace the College’s nondenominational character enthusiastically. One dean praised nondenominationalism for allowing the College to cultivate a range of viewpoints rather than sinking into narrow doctrinalism. He told me, “You constantly allow for different streams and the valuing of those different streams.” A faculty member who belonged to a Reformed denomination noted that he worked alongside Wesleyan and Arminian believers in a manner that would not be possible at a Reformed college. A second dean echoed this appraisal. “You don’t have to agree on baptism or the permanence of hell or any number of things,” he said.
Yet this latitude with regard to particularities of belief did not indicate that faculty and staff members at Sewall College could drift from evangelical orthodoxy. The dean cited in the previous paragraph quickly added that, “you do have to agree with these basic things that are really focused on in the statement of faith.” Faculty and staff members did not have to choose between authority or inerrancy of scripture, and did not have to articulate a position on dispensationalism. Nonetheless, these individuals were compelled to accept the statement of faith’s broadly evangelical assertions of Biblical centrism and the eventual end of time.

Overall, faculty and staff members at Sewall College seemed to regard this as a reasonable balance between enforced orthodoxy and nondenominational latitude. “We are still trying to exercise discernment and find our way,” a faculty member told me. While the College’s nondenominationalism allowed for such exploration, its commitment to the statement of faith also kept it focused upon its broad points of agreement. The faculty member concluded, “I would say that this place strikes me as having been a little more faithful than some others.” Another faculty member elevated Sewall’s achievements to the level of cosmic significance. “We actually believe that we are accomplishing something of eternal significance here in this relatively unknown place,” he said.

Despite this general embrace of the College’s symbolic economy, some interview participants expressed ambivalence about the College’s nondenominational nature. One dean summarized the advantages and disadvantages of nondenominationalism by noting, “I don’t have the interference of a denomination, but I also don’t have the support of the denomination.” He expressed relief that he could go about his work at the College without worrying about whether he had offended ministers, bishops, or other
denominational officials. At the same time, he noted that this lack of denominational authorities made him reliant upon the College’s administration and a small body of dedicated donors for support. “If a denomination said, ‘We really think that this is important,’” that would be cool,” he said. “But I don’t get that.” A faculty member concurred that the College’s nondenominational nature sometimes made the College financially vulnerable. “We don’t have a denomination supporting us, so sometimes in the past we have struggled financially,” he said. This theme of the strengths and limitations of a symbolic economy that rested upon explicit nondenomiationalism resurfaces throughout the pages that follow.

_Nondenominationalism and ethos: Conservative politics_  

Sewall’s nondenominationalism meant that the College required faculty and staff members to proclaim no formal orthodoxy other than the basic tenets expressed in the statement of faith. As noted in the previous sub-section, this commitment to nondenominationalism accommodated individuals with a range of views on issues such as scriptural authority and the end of the earth. For all its official commitment to nondenominationalism, however, the College nonetheless articulated an informal ethos that seemed to favor some strands of evangelicalism over others. One dean noted that faculty and staff at the College tended to espouse “neo-Calvinist” beliefs. This term indicated the tendency of many nondenominational evangelicals to borrow concepts from Calvinist (or Reformed) theology without necessarily embracing the complex theological narratives and formal training that characterize most Reformed denominations (Porterfield, 2001).
A second dean affirmed the assessment that certain Reformed concepts seemed to hold sway on campus. Before accepting a position at Sewall, he said, “I had a few things that I wanted to make sure that the school didn’t have as a baseline, because otherwise I would not be able to come in good conscience. One of those was that I was not a Calvinist.” Even as a prospective employee, this dean recognized that the College did not formally require Calvinist belief, but that the faculty and staff who worked there informally elevated certain Reformed concepts to a level of quasi-orthodoxy. “I did not see anything in the statement of faith that said that I had to be, but I just wanted to be sure that there were not de facto expectations out there,” he said. Ultimately, College officials assured him that his own faith commitments would be welcome on the campus. While he generally regarded this to be the case, he also noted that he sometimes clashed with the College’s more outspoken Reformed believers. “I get into fights all the time with our religion faculty,” all of whom he characterized as Reformed believers. He concluded that, “It’s enjoyable, but we disagree strongly.”

In addition to the liberal borrowing of concepts from orthodox Calvinism (Porterfield, 2001), nondenominational evangelicalism in the United States often has identified itself with conservative social and political causes. To be sure, not all evangelicals espouse conservative views. Indeed, some positioned themselves on the leftist end of the political spectrum, while a few eschewed politics altogether in favor of separatism from public life (Dalhouse, 1996; Lindsay, 2007; Smith, 2000).

Despite these important caveats, the connections between evangelical religion and conservative politics deepened throughout much of the 20th century. Gold and Russell (2007) found that a voter’s identification as an evangelical Christian predicted
preferences on a range of policy issues with increasing precision between 1980 and 2004. Further, although political and social activism still lagged behind worship, art, and education as a proportion of overall activities, evangelical congregations spent a larger proportion of their time on these activities than did other Christian churches (Chaves, 2004). An individual’s self-identification as an evangelical also predicted a range of attitudes on social issues such as race relations, gender roles, and family responsibilities (Edgell, 2006; Emerson & Smith, 2000). Of further note, the connection between evangelicalism and conservative politics need not reduce evangelicals to “cultural dupes” whom conservative political groups have convinced to vote against their own economic self-interest. In fact, Moreton (2009) argued persuasively that evangelical belief shaped the right wing of American politics in the 20th century even more profoundly than the Republican party influenced evangelicalism. Lindsay (2007) provided further evidence for this claim by noting the large numbers of influential evangelicals who occupied positions of influence in foundations and non-governmental organizations. Evangelicalism and conservative politics, then, proved intimately connected beginning in the 1980s and for decades thereafter.

The hallways of Sewall’s main building provided striking evidence that, despite the College’s official non-affiliation, conservative political beliefs constituted an important part of the College’s unofficial ethos. Each hallway featured a string of watercolor illustrations of various statehouses from across the United States. Beneath each picture hung an excerpt from one of that state’s official documents. Invariably, these documents mentioned the role of “God,” “the Divine,” or “the Almighty” in the foundation of their state. These pictures and captions seemed intended to proclaim that
the nation’s founders did not intend religion and public life to be separated from one another. This, in turn, opened a door through which evangelical Protestants could practice their faith openly by influencing public policy. To be sure, many of these references proved indirect to the point of obliqueness; those mentioning “Providence” hardly provided a compelling case for the evangelical beliefs of a state’s founders. The inclusion of these examples seemed to be an effort to include all states as part of a broader message trumpeting evangelical involvement in politics and lawmakers.

Multiple interview participants also mentioned the College’s connections with conservative political causes. These individuals noted that, while the College did not officially proclaim rightist political tenets, these orientations permeated Sewall’s ethos. One dean acknowledged these connections openly. “In the latter part of the 20th century, particular theological edifices and histories became deeply tied to political ideologies, and we are not indistinct from that,” he said. In this account, the College’s \textit{de jure} faith commitments implied a set of \textit{de facto} political and social attitudes. “Here, you’d find that being a conservative evangelical probably means you are going to be a Republican. There would be some thought as to why you would be a Republican, but it’s almost automatic.” Another dean echoed these assessments by citing a particular faculty member’s interest in “paleo-libertarianism,” a variant of free market economics that combined libertarian suspicions of governments with conservative social and moral positions. “We have a professor who wants to establish a paleo-libertarian research center, and it’s welcome as long as it can adhere to the faith statement,” he told me. All of these deans quickly added that their statements reflected Sewall’s unofficial ethos rather than its official or formal dimensions. In the words of the second dean, “We’re
very careful to say that it’s not institutional. We wouldn’t be a libertarian college.”
Nonetheless, all acknowledged that these political attitudes likely would prove a comfortable match for the College’s unofficial ethos.

Despite assertions that the College strictly maintained its nondenominational, apolitical character, at least one notable example of the blending of rightist politics and evangelical religion occurred with the College’s official blessing. Sewall, like most evangelical Christian colleges, required students to attend chapel regularly. Individuals wielding scanners checked the identification cards of individuals as they entered and as they left the chapel, ensuring that students both arrived on time and remained in the chapel for the duration of the service.

A dean who also taught in the College’s religion department organized the majority of these chapel services. Three times per semester, however, the College’s president invited a guest speaker to address Sewall’s students, faculty, and staff. These “president’s chapels” constituted particularly important services at the College, and received special attention on the calendar of campus events. One president’s chapel service that I attended featured a guest speaker whose sermon consisted of a lengthy analysis of the allegedly anti-Christian worldview propagated by environmentalism. The speaker opened by reminiscing about his appearances on the Fox cable news network, and stated that, “Any time I’m making liberals mad, I must be doing something right.” Referring to the environmentalist movement as “the green dragon,” the speaker then claimed that this “dragon” must be resisted because environmentalism venerated material reality as sacred and thereby usurped the authority of God. Such a position, he claimed, proved fundamentally incompatible with evangelical belief; in his view, no one could be
both an evangelical Protestant and an environmentalist. He buttressed this claim by arguing that environmentalism had restricted “sacred human freedoms” by imposing high taxes on fossil fuels and by outlawing the pesticide DDT despite what he claimed was a lack of scientific evidence of that chemical’s harmful side-effects. These arguments explicitly linked evangelical belief with the political and economic interests of petroleum companies and chemical manufacturers.

By making these arguments behind the pulpit in the College chapel rather than in a public policy forum, the guest speaker referenced in the previous paragraph boldly asserted that orthodox evangelical belief could not be separated from conservative politics. That is, he did not present his views as possible consequences of Christian faith. Instead, by deeming his political thoughts to be appropriate fodder for a chapel sermon, he cast them as the inevitable by-products of true evangelical belief. Further, he secured the College’s tacit approval of these positions by speaking at a “President’s chapel” service.

The closing sentence of the previous paragraph calls into question Sewall’s openness to all forms of evangelical belief. Despite Sewall’s official position as a nondenominational and apolitical body, this sermon on the moral dangers of “the green dragon” occurred with the blessing of the College’s highest official. The statement of faith might not mandate conservative political attitudes, but Sewall’s chief executive seemed to encourage them strongly. This presidential endorsement indicated the strength of the College’s informal ethos of political conservatism.
Nondenominationalism, politics, and the problem of integration

The two previous sub-sections identified official nondenominationalism and an unofficial leaning toward conservative politics as key planks of Sewall’s symbolic economy. The establishment of these cultural horizons yielded a particular solution to the problem of how an evangelical Christian college integrated the authority claims of religion and academe into a single organization. In other words, the following exploration of the problem of integration highlights the operation of nondenominationalism and conservative politics on Sewall’s campus.

On the one hand, the College’s official nondenominationalism allowed for latitude on theological positions by de-emphasizing these positions relative to the basic tenets of generic evangelicalism. This created space in which Sewall faculty could offer distinctive academic programs such as a bachelor’s degree in “Christian thought.” According to one faculty member, this program offered “kind of a liberal arts approach to Christian faith.” Where a denominational college might stress either education in theology or training for vocational ministry, Sewall could emphasize instruction in liberal arts fields related to evangelical faith. Students did not enroll in denominationally prescribed courses, then, but instead pursued “quite a bit of philosophy, theology, history, even a political science, an economics, and a literature course. They take Greek.” This program reflected Sewall’s unusual commitment to non-denominational evangelicalism and the opportunities that it afforded. Individuals therefore spoke proudly of this program as a badge of the College’s distinctiveness relative to other evangelical colleges. A faculty member acknowledged that other CCCU member colleges offer master’s degrees in Christian Thought, “but we’re one of the very few with the bachelors degree.”
On the other hand, the informal elevation of particular social and political attitudes offered very little latitude on propositions related to acceptable course content or personal conduct. Religious authority clearly took precedence over academic authority. One faculty member emphasized the authority of religious faith on campus by comparing Sewall to other evangelical Christian schools. “There are places that call themselves Christian colleges that have made more intellectual concessions than they should have,” he told me. In his view, however, Sewall thus far had resisted such pressures to become more like the secular academy, “however benighted and under-published we may look to another place.” A second faculty member echoed these themes, noting, “We stand firmly on the authority and inerrancy of scripture.” He went on to note that this commitment to evangelical faith simply made some academic subjects unfit topics for inquiry at the College. “If that means that I am not willing to play the deconstructionist, postcolonial, feminist, or Marxist game to get published, then I just won’t play those games. There are things that are just an intellectual and spiritual waste of my time.” In other words, while Sewall’s statement of faith did not prohibit the teaching of these subjects, this faculty member and his colleagues unofficially banned them from their classrooms.

As in the other case studies contained in this research report, the most compelling illustration of the relationship between religious and academic authority emerged in discussions about evolutionary biology. With its origins in the first third of 20th century, Sewall, like many evangelical Christian colleges, emerged amid controversies over the place of evolution in evangelical faith and public life. Controversies over evolution continued to characterize the College almost a century later.
Concern with the origins of life and matter evidenced itself even before I conducted my first interview on campus. Sewall’s main academic building included a natural history museum filled with taxidermies of lions, eagles, and other large animals. The museum included a number of fossils alongside specimens of extant species. Yet fossils included no dates reporting the time at which a particular species inhabited the earth. These omissions made the museum acceptable to a range of “young earth” and “old earth” creationists. At the same time, they proclaimed loudly to believer and unbeliever alike that faith commitments held sway over naturalistic evidence at Sewall’s natural history museum. The many banners inscribed with passages of Christian scripture extolling the glories of God as creator only emphasized this theme.

Sewall’s statement of faith made a direct reference to “creation as related in the book of Genesis” but included no prescriptions for individual belief about the processes of creation. A faculty member in the sciences even noted that, as a “young Earther” who believes that the planet itself was 6,000 years old, he had found himself surrounded by “old Earthers” who believed that creation took place over a much longer period of time. Some individuals stretched even further than the “old Earth” approach to creation. One dean told me that he embraced intelligent design, or “ID,” rather than traditional creationism. Many academic writers (e.g., Numbers, 2004; Tierney & Holley, 2008; etc.) identify ID with Christian apologetics rather than academic science, suggesting that this dean would find a ready home at Sewall. Yet, despite ID’s apparent sympathy with creationism, many evangelicals accuse intelligent design of capitulation to secularism because it emphasizes a “designer” rather than “God.” Reflecting this concern, this dean shared his ID beliefs with the president before accepting a position at Sewall out of a
concern that he might prove out-of-step with College belief. The president assured him, however, that ID proved consistent with Sewall’s position on evolution. These incidents suggested that College officials tolerated a range of beliefs on the origins of life and matter so long as these beliefs fell under the broad heading of “creationism.”

Despite the official tolerance extended by the lack of dates in the natural history museum and the general creationist language included in the statement of faith, Sewall faculty and staff tended to articulate an unofficial consensus around particular ideas on the subject of evolution. A faculty member who identified himself as a young earth creationist simply stated, “It seems pretty clear to me what’s in the Bible.” This statement, with its quasi-literalist interpretation of scripture and its assumption that Biblical authority exercised clear sway over academic knowledge, proved broadly consistent with the College’s symbolic economy of nondenominational, politicized evangelicalism. Further, it proved consistent with Sewall’s approach to teaching evolutionary biology in its general education curriculum. The College offered a science course without a lab for non-majors. In the words of one faculty member, this course highlighted “Christian perspectives on origins.” Rather than an in-depth consideration of evolutionary biology, the course primarily summarized “two big positions: creationism and theistic evolution.” In other words, the College’s primary approach to evolutionary biology consisted of the presentation of religious critiques and reformulations of that subject matter.

Despite this general pattern, a few individuals suggested that their engagement with evolutionary biology proved more nuanced than the simple assertion that natural selection and evangelical faith could not be reconciled. One faculty member told me that
he often found himself at odds with conventional evangelical portraits of evolutionary biology as “an atheistic, anti-God agenda propagated by liberals and other Godless, horrible people to try to destroy Christianity.” This opposition made it difficult for him to select a textbook to use when teaching evolutionary biology because, in his view, textbooks intended for secular audiences did not present creationist positions fairly, while most evangelical books did not consider evolution thoroughly. “We don’t use any of the standard creationist texts that just teach evolution-bashing,” he said. He continued, noting that such texts did not include the scientific content that students required in order to be prepared for medical or graduate school. “It would be utterly irresponsible of us to produce students who are utterly ignorant of basic evolutionary biology. Certainly that stuff is going to be on the MCAT.” This faculty member taught a required lab science course for biology majors. In the class, he reviewed many key principles of Darwinian biology, including “population genetics, selection theory, and all that kind of stuff.” This course retained the College’s evangelical faith framework by rejecting the possibility of evolution *ex nihilo*, yet presented doubt and discomfirmation more fully than did some other approaches to evolution on the campus. “When I present something, I’ll say, ‘Here’s this evidence and here’s that evidence. Here’s how an evolutionary biologist would interpret it, and it’s not obvious what it means to a creationist.’”

In the end, however, even these concessions to the authority of academic science tended to be couched in frameworks defined by evangelical belief. The College’s statement of faith frankly stated, “the origin of man was by fiat of God in the act of creation as related in the Book of Genesis.” Any discussion of evolution therefore operated on the level of explaining speciation rather than the origins of life. “It’s largely
changes within a species that we are talking about,” one faculty member told me. This view proved largely consistent with “creation biology,” which adopted a young earth creationist perspective from evangelical belief while acknowledging that evolutionary processes have occurred in the 6,000 years since the alleged creation event (Creation Biology Society, 2011). This approach offered some intellectual benefits relative to young earth creationism insofar as it can acknowledge the reality of the fossil record. Yet it also asserted that these fossils cannot be more than approximately 6,000 years old, regardless of the evidence of scientific dating techniques, because a particular reading of the book of Genesis suggested this figure as the earth’s age. As such, “creation biology” and its teaching at Sewall represented the clear establishment of religious authority over academic knowledge. This uneasy relationship manifested itself in the College’s natural history museum, which proudly displayed fossils and brief narratives explaining how the extinct species might have behaved, but which avoided any presentation of the dates during which the species inhabited the earth.

As the College’s approach to evolutionary biology suggests, Sewall’s general approach to the problem of integration proved broadly consistent with its symbolic economy. This symbolic system informally stressed alliance with conservative political causes, especially when, in the cases of the “green dragon” of environmentalism and the teaching of evolutionary biology, these causes conflicted with established scientific evidence. This adversarial position with regard to dominant academic norms informed the College’s response to the problem of integration. Rather than knitting academic knowledge and religious faith into a theological narrative or Christian practice, faculty and staff at Sewall used religious tenets as arbiters of what academic content could be
taught. This approach placed Sewall College at sharp variance with the secular educational establishment, including the research universities that trained its faculty members and the public school system that produced many of its tuition-paying students.

Providers of material resource providers and their demands

Although the sampling design employed in this research project identified Sewall College as a “high material resource” case, the College did not present a conventional portrait of financial prosperity. Initial indicators, such as tuition receipts per FTE and general subsidies provided to enrolled students from discretionary funds, suggested that Sewall attained above-median financial health relative to its CCCU peers. Yet on further investigation these figures appeared to represent ample cash flows rather than a surplus of funds; Sewall College, like many colleges and universities (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2003), saved very little of its revenues. One dean openly acknowledged these figures, stating, “We have $5.5 million in our endowment, which is less than a year of our total operating budget.” Sewall therefore occupied an ironic position in which it commanded relatively handsome resources, yet spent those resources as quickly as it accrued them. The dean went on to acknowledge that this fiscal model placed the College’s long-term material position in question even as it generated short-term prosperity. “I don’t mean to sound arrogant because this is really humbling,” he said, “but I think that God has sent me here to save the College.”

24 Unless otherwise noted, I calculated all descriptive statistics presented in this chapter using data provided by the Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity, and Accountability. I controlled all finance figures for inflation using the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI).
Sewall College’s “high cash flow, low savings” financial model meant that the College became heavily dependent on resource providers to sustain its annual operations. This tight connection between material resources and College operations meant that Sewall’s material and symbolic economies proved tightly linked to one another; Sewall required resources, which enabled resource-providers to exert substantial influence over the College’s operations in exchange for the provision of services or funds. I refer to this relationship as the “demand-side” conceptualization of Sewall College.

In essence, this demand-side model casts Sewall’s material economy as sustaining and shaping the College’s symbolic economy. Thus, although the pairing of “high material” and “low symbolic” dimensions might appear to be a contradiction, they actually fit together logically. Sewall’s symbolic resources might have offered little purchasing power in the field of higher education, but its beliefs and values proved consistent with a large and powerful segment of the broader evangelical movement. This symbolic economy therefore may have interfered with the pursuit of some resources, but enabled the pursuit of others. The very characteristics that made Sewall a “low symbolic resource” college therefore enabled it to raise a sufficient amount of money to become a “high material resource” school. One faculty member encapsulated these principles aptly. “I think that somehow there is a core of Biblical evangelical belief that there may be some changes in over time, but that has stayed enough the same that the College has had to stay faithful to its roots just to continue to appeal to its constituency,” he told me. This constituency’s interest in nondenominational evangelicalism and political conservatism kept the College committed to these elements of its symbolic culture despite the low esteem in which most of higher education held such commitments. He concluded, “there
may be a consistent enough belief system in evangelicalism that it has pulled us to stay on track.”

This section develops the “demand-side” concept through consideration of three resource avenues pursued by the College. The first relates to the College’s efforts to hire credentialed labor. The next two sections specifically treat Sewall’s pursuit of money. I begin by considering tuition receipts before turning my attention to gifts and grants. Each of these three topics reveals the close connections between Sewall’s material and symbolic economies. The expectations from a politically conservative student body and from the network of small donors who fund the College keep Sewall mission-focused because demonstrating nondenominational faith and political conservatism generates revenues. As such, these sub-sections constitute the basis of the “demand-side” model of interaction between the symbolic and materialist domains.

_Hiring personnel_

Interview participants at Sewall College repeatedly emphasized the importance of sound personnel decisions for College operations. In response to my question about what kept the College faithful to its mission statement in the absence of denominational authorities or funding sources, one dean replied simply, “Hiring.” Other employees seconded this assessment that individuals accepted the primary responsibility for keeping the College faithful to its evangelical mission. One staff member told me, “The president and the board of trustees” provided the College’s primary security against secularization. In this telling, individuals rather than foundational documents or administrative policies
provided the primary safeguard of the College’s mission. This reliance on personnel emphasized the importance of hiring and training qualified individuals at Sewall College.

Of course, faculty and staff at non-evangelical Christian colleges also might identify the hiring of personnel as a key organizational activity. Accordingly, part of the manner in which Sewall identified and selected employment candidates paralleled standard practices in academic hiring. One dean told me that he primarily weighed academic preparation when evaluating a candidate “I wanted a doctorate from the best university I could find,” he told me. “Frankly, I wanted a Research I institution or better” This dean believed that completion of a degree from a research-based university would yield a pool of candidates with greater academic abilities. Yet he also acknowledged that his College’s teaching-based focus would represent a departure from the work that these individuals had completed while training at research universities. As such, once he had identified the candidates with the most attractive academic credentials, he sought to discover which individuals might harbor the greatest interest in teaching undergraduates. “My primary investigation is, ‘Are you interested in research and writing, or in teaching and being part of the community?’”

Because College policies required all faculty and staff members to affirm Sewall’s statement of faith, search committees at Sewall did not simply seek academic credentials and a favorable disposition toward a teaching-based environment when searching for candidates. The College also required candidates who espoused evangelical beliefs. In the words of one dean, “We care about whether you take the Bible seriously, whether you are active in a local church, whether you are in prayer, and that sort of thing.” This dean readily listed those qualities in an interview, yet acknowledged that
they could prove elusive in a review of applications for employment. This elusiveness stemmed in large part from Sewall’s symbolic economy. The College’s nondenominational nature meant that hiring bodies could not simply ask candidates whether they belonged to a particular Christian denomination. Sewall sought religious qualities that proved non-specific and somewhat difficult to define.

Hiring bodies at Sewall College relied on two mechanisms to provide them with candidates who met these hard-to-identify religious requirements. First, the College sought to hire its own alumni and alumnae whenever possible. One faculty member told me that she had advocated the hire of a particular adjunct instructor because this individual had completed her BA at Sewall. Hiring recent graduates proved even more common for staff positions that did not require long training in research universities to complete the credentials required for faculty life. Two staff members told me that they had hired only College alumni since acceding to their positions at the College. A dean who oversaw both some faculty members and some staff positions echoed this approach. This individual told me that he felt comfortable with a recent hire because “he is an alum of the College, so I know that he knows us.” This mutual acquaintance filled the dean with confidence that the candidate shared the College’s official nondenominational evangelical beliefs. In other words, the candidate’s previous experience at Sewall identified him as a strong candidate for employment because “he doesn’t wear his theological commitments on his sleeve” in a way that might offend evangelicals from other denominational traditions. This proved a striking inversion with normative practices in secular higher education that discourage “academic inbreeding.” Ironically, the same fear that discourages the practice in the secular academy – that hiring one’s own
graduates leads to staleness – recommended it at Sewall. This practice highlighted the latent antagonism between Sewall’s symbolic economy and the dominant norms of secular higher education.

Of course, the College could not always identify an alumnus or alumna with the qualifications required to fulfill a particular vacancy. This difficulty became particularly acute in faculty searches, which could not be filled with recent graduates because these young alumni had yet to earn terminal degrees. In these cases, hiring bodies at Sewall tended to turn to a network of individuals who were familiar with the College and who supported its operations. One faculty member tersely summarized Sewall’s efforts to hire suitable individuals as reliant upon “personal connections.” A dean echoed these sentiments, telling me that he had not even posted a recent position seeking a faculty member with some administrative responsibilities. “Posting something would bring hundreds of resumes,” he said. Instead, because this position would teach classes in theology while assisting in the organization of chapel services, the dean “contacted six well-positioned people in worship. Some were professors, and some were pastors. All of the six know the College as well. I said, ‘This is what we’re thinking about doing. Who do you know and can recommend?’”

Another dean highlighted a specific instance of the College’s network providing it with suitable candidates for faculty and staff positions. In his testimony, the College relied particularly heavily on the input of evangelical ministers. “We require pastors to send us a letter of recommendation” before interviewing a faculty candidate, he told me. This reliance on pastoral evaluation continued into tenure and performance review. A tenure and promotion (“T&P”) system at most secular colleges and universities would
consider a candidate’s performance as a teacher, scholar, and campus citizen. The content of one’s work, in other words, would matter less than its quality. Such an evaluation system implicitly endorsed the American Association of University Professors’ (1940) model of academic freedom in which individual faculty members can teach and study without fear of reprisal from campus officials. Sewall’s T&P system differed sharply from this model by paying close attention to a candidate’s religious beliefs and practices. “We will ask for a new pastoral letter at every stage because we want to make sure that you remain engaged with your faith at every stage,” one dean told me. Dire consequences could follow for faculty members who did not demonstrate the level of religious fervor desired by College officials. “If you’re not [engaged with your faith],” the dean concluded, “you don’t belong here.” The use of pastoral letters reflected the importance of Sewall’s symbolic economy in personnel management by illustrating the role of evangelical faith in these decisions. That is, candidates secured tenure and promotion by demonstrating their religiosity, not by proving their merit as scholars.

Further, Sewall’s T&P policies indicated the particular kind of evangelicalism that dominated Sewall’s campus. The evaluation of a candidate’s religious commitments, after all, relied upon pastoral appraisal rather than denominational evaluation. Such, the identification of appropriate candidates for faculty and staff positions provided one instance of the demand-side connections between Sewall’s symbolic and material economies. Because the College’s symbolic economy rested on the dual planks of nondenominationalism and conservative beliefs, many candidates would prove unsuitable for employment at the College. At the same time, the characteristics that College officials defined as desirable could not readily be identified through the review
of formal credentials; the desired religious qualities proved ambiguous and difficult to assess. For this reason, the individuals who staffed College hiring committees often sought to identify suitable candidates through a network of personal contacts and referrals. The manner in which Sewall defined its religious dimension connected to the College’s search for credentialed labor through the referral network that helped hiring bodies to identify suitable candidates. This network, in other words, connected the College’s material and symbolic dimensions.

**Tuition-paying students**

The majority of small private colleges relied on tuition receipts for the bulk of their revenues (Desroches & Wellman, 2011; Toutkoushian, 2001). Sewall College proved no exception to this rule. From 1987 through 2007, the College secured 55% of its revenues through tuition and fees. This average actually under-states the extent of Sewall’s tuition dependence, however, because the College secured a greater proportion of its revenues from tuition by the 2000s than had been the case in the 1990s. From 2003 to 2007, Sewall derived fully two-thirds of its total revenues from tuition receipts.

Tuition dependence made Sewall’s budget vulnerable to fluctuations in total enrollment. One faculty member acknowledged this concern by noting that many prospective students would find the College’s evangelical commitments to be unattractive. “We have student life standards and curfews and things that we don’t allow: no drinking, no smoking, no extramarital sex.” He acknowledged that these behavioral restrictions could limit the College’s appeal to some students, thereby reducing its potential tuition revenues. “Those things are going to turn some people off,” he said.
Despite these concerns, Sewall’s total enrollment increased notably between 1987 and 2007. The College enrolled fewer than 400 full-time equivalency (FTE) students up to 1999. Over the following near-decade, however, Sewall’s enrollment increased markedly. A school that enrolled fewer than 400 FTE a mere decade before counted 635 FTE in 2005, 746 FTE in 2006, and 895 FTE in 2007. Figures from the College’s federal Fiscal Operations Report and Application to Participate (FISAP) reports indicated that, despite this growth, the proportion of students who would require some assistance in order to afford private college tuition remained relatively stable. From 2000 through 2007, approximately 15% of dependent students reported family incomes of less than $30,000. Increasing the family income threshold from $30,000 to $42,000, the next increment in FISAP reporting, indicated that between 25% and 30% of dependent students annually might require assistance affording Sewall College tuition.

Like many small colleges, Sewall utilized student financial aid in an effort to make its prices more attractive to individual students. Tuition discounting, or the practice of providing students with “scholarships” in an effort to lower the net price to a level that they would be willing to pay, has proven a particularly popular strategy among small colleges seeking to increase their enrollments (Breneman, Doti, & Lapovsky, 2001). Sewall certainly appeared to have engaged actively in tuition discounting. From 2000 through 2007, the only years for which data were available, more than 90% of students at Sewall received some form of institutional student financial aid. This average across an eight-year period did not simply reflect one or two particularly high years. Only once during this period did the figure dip below 85%, and even then the rate stood at 79%. By contrast, CCCU members other than Sewall awarded institutional aid to approximately
84% of enrolled students. Even in the years in which Sewall’s rate reached its lowest point, in other words, the percentage of students receiving institutional aid at Sewell remained above the mean rate for non-Sewall CCCU members.

College officials took forthright steps in 2010-2011 in an effort to limit Sewall’s “discount rate,” a figure reflecting the proportion of tuition revenues foregone in the name of tuition discounts. This strategy proceeded on two fronts. First, College officials sought to fund as many of their scholarship awards as possible. “Somewhere around $500,000 per year goes to scholarships for students,” one dean told me, because “we’re trying to stay away from that [tuition discounting].” This strategy meant that funds from other sources replaced the revenues foregone in tuition receipts. Second, the College sought to reduce its awards to highest-ability students in an attempt to provide awards to those who would be more likely to attend. One staff member noted that Sewall recently had committed a larger pool of funds to need-based aid for local students. These students, in the words of the staff member, tended to be “more conservative” than admissions candidates from other regions, and so offered a better fit with the College’s mission than might students with better standardized test scores but less firm evangelical commitments. A dean concurred, noting, “So far, our tuition payers are fairly conservative. We’re growing now, and so that may change, but I would say that the majority of our students are very conservative.”

The long-term effect of these initiatives on Sewall’s discount rate would not become apparent during the study period. The connection between Sewall’s tuition revenues and its symbolic economy did manifest itself, however, as suggested by the staff member’s and dean’s comments about recruiting “conservative” students. The College
relied on tuition payments from “conservative” students to fund its annual operations. As such, Sewall officials found themselves bound to the College’s symbolic economy by financial imperatives; any move away from existing cultural commitments threatened dire consequences in the form of lost tuition revenues. This provided another illustration of the demand-side explanation of Sewall’s operations. Without a denomination to provide ongoing financial support, Sewall proved dependent on tuition revenues. As a result, it proved even more anxious about the desires of prospective tuition-payers than did most other evangelical Christian colleges. College faculty and staff therefore could identify faithfulness to their tradition of conservative, nondenominational evangelicalism as both continuous with Sewall’s past and as likely to generate increased tuition revenues for its immediate future.

*Gifts, grants, and donations*

Like many private baccalaureate colleges, gifts from private sources constituted an important source of non-tuition income for Sewall College. Sewall’s overall commitment to fundraising reflected the importance of gifts receipts to the College’s operating budget. According to one dean, “Even at small colleges, a president should be raising somewhere between half a million and two million dollars per year.” After reflecting a moment, he concluded, “Really, that’s what the president does.” In this account, the president’s administrative responsibilities receded in importance when compared with his role as a raiser of gifts from private sources “The president is now your chief major gifts officer as well as being ultimately in charge of the College itself,” the dean summarized.
Of course, many colleges and universities share Sewall’s commitment to fundraising by chief executives. Yet Sewall’s symbolic economy, which contrasted itself with secular approaches to higher education through its embrace of nondenominational evangelicalism, limited the number of sources from which the College could raise funds. “I look for some sort of linkage,” a staff member in advancement told me. “There has to be some indication of what they know about the school.” As a result, Sewall’s fundraising efforts netted more modest returns than its relatively generous general subsidies would suggest. From 2003 through 2007, Sewall received an annual average of $3,316.91 per FTE in private gifts, grants, and contracts revenues. This figure placed Sewall below both the mean and median figures of other CCCU members during this time period. Further, because this figure proved smaller than the mean general subsidy per FTE, it indicated that Sewall’s largest non-tuition revenue source did not cover all of its extra-tuition contributions to educational costs. In other words, the rather generous general subsidies that Sewall offered to its students did not reflect the College’s successful fundraising operation. Instead, these figures seemed to indicate Sewall’s willingness to spend virtually every penny that it raised on annual operations.

In order to raise what funds they could secure from private sources, Sewall officials returned to the network of like-minded individuals and organizations from which the College also secured credentialed laborers and tuition-paying students. One staff member who worked closely with fundraising efforts summarized his work thusly: “I’m talking to people who have already raised their hands and said, ‘I believe in what you’re doing.’” In other words, this individual regarded most efforts to develop new sources of gifts as likely to yield little return. He instead spent his time cultivating further interest
among those who had already showed an inclination to support Sewall. He concluded, “there are enough people who identify with the school already that those are the ones we need to be working with.” A dean whose office partially relied on gifts from private sources echoed this assessment. This dean acknowledged that his office, which sought “to develop a creationist model of biology,” would never receive large grants from federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that tended to assume materialist explanations for natural phenomena. As a result, his center received most of its funding through small awards from individuals who wished to support the pursuit of supernatural explanations. “I get by on thousands of dollars now,” he said. “A big grant for me is $10,000.” Like credentialed labor and prospective students, these awards could prove difficult to secure due to the difficulty of identifying individuals and foundations that would be inclined to support a college like Sewall. This dean therefore expressed his reliance on “personal connections” to identify likely donors. “For the most part, the money has come from a handful of select donors who have given regularly to support our work. That’s our biggest source of funding right now.”

As in the case of credentialed labor and tuition-paying students, Sewall’s efforts to identify gifts from private sources relied upon a network of personal connections that could identify sources that would be more likely to support the College’s activities. In keeping with the demand-side model, these resource providers then exerted some control over the College’s symbolic dimension. The advancement official who solicited funds from Sewall’s existing network of friends and alumni reported that College supporters often viewed their gifts as expressions of support for the status quo. “We might have a conversation about a granddaughter, grandson, or other family member, or about things
that are happening at a secular school,” he told me. “They can lament and say, ‘Tell me that’s not happening here.’” The dean who oversaw a center that sought “to develop a creationist model of biology” reported a similar pattern in which funding sources reinforced the College’s symbolic dimension. This dean solicited funds from foundations and individuals that favored his research projects. The receipt of donations from these sources increased the likelihood that his center would remain committed to creationist biology in the face of pressures from secular biologists and public funding agencies.

Discussion

Summary

The network of evangelical Christian organizations in which Sewall positioned itself grew dramatically in both size and influence during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s (Lindsay, 2007). This growth generated greater interest in and demand for Sewall’s offerings. Faithfulness to the College’s traditional mission of evangelical commitment, in other words, proved highly compatible with increasing revenues; cultural narratives pointed to material resources. Yet Sewall College, like virtually any other organization, could become reliant upon its funding sources for its continued existence. In this regard, then, the demands of tuition-paying students and individual donors – most of whom espoused the practical evangelicalism of neo-Calvinism and the conservative social and political attitudes of the Christian Right – shaped the College’s symbolic dimension. In this respect, materiality reinforced culture. The demand-side explanation of Sewall College elegantly explains the apparent irony of College that possesses a relatively
plentiful supply of money while maintaining a symbolic economy that is openly hostile to the dominant normative structures of secular higher education.

**Theoretical implications**

The case of Sewall College provides little support for rational choice theory (RCT). This body of theory tends to stress the causal role of deregulated and innovative providers (Stark & Finke, 2000). This emphasis on supply-side explanations offers little insight into the demand-side phenomena that characterize Sewall College.

I then turn my attention to neo-institutional theory. Neo-institutional theory derived from DiMaggio and Powell (1983) also tends to offer a supply-side explanation. Indeed, in neo-institutional theory, cultural factors that extend even beyond suppliers, such as the social logics in which suppliers find themselves embedded, tend to play a causal role. For this reason, I highlight a body of neo-institutional theory that emphasizes the times in which conflict between two institutionalized fields (Friedland & Alford, 1991) or material imperatives such as dire financial straits (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996) explain colleges’ behavior. These insights prove more useful in the explanation of Sewall’s symbolic economy because they retain neo-institutionalism’s culturalist orientation, meaning that social logics and institutionalized myths continue to explain organizational behavior. At the same time, these models cast colleges as responsive to the demands of resource providers, and so acknowledge that cultural determinants may be multifaceted, partial, or even contradictory. This explanation therefore builds upon the detailed discussion of neo-institutional theory provided in the theory chapter. As in this discussion, neo-institutional theory provides the possibility that a college positioned at
the intersection of two major social institutions – religion and higher education – might respond more fully to resource providers than would other colleges.

Finally, the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu provides insight on the College’s position relative to other schools in the analysis. Bourdieu (1993a, 1993b) casts society as a three-dimensional space in which actors are situated based upon their financial resources and social connections. Organizations and individuals that share spatial proximity to one another have similar statuses, and tend to adopt similar cultural practices. As discussed at length in the chapter on social theory, this explanation offers a materialist corrective to the culturalist assumptions of neo-institutional theory. Further, and of special interest for the case of Sewall College, Bourdieu’s ability to cast cultural practices as an effect of shared space and status explains the College’s symbolic economy as a necessary but non-causal component of its financial dependence upon politically conservative evangelicals.

This cursory review of theoretical implications admittedly falls short of the level of analytic refinement typical of a case study. This limitation reflects the nature of the research project, which seeks to compare multiple cases to one another. The research questions posed in this study, particularly those related to the problem of stratification, assume a base of comparison among different cases. As a result, this brief discussion merely highlights some themes on which I will draw in the discussion chapter that follows. These themes provide the basis of the more general analytic framework that this project seeks to develop.
CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Three preceding chapters present findings from qualitative case studies undertaken at evangelical Christian colleges. These studies illustrate particular ways in which growth in the number of adherents (Pew Survey, 2008a) and scope of resources (Lindsay, 2007) allied with evangelical Christianity brought this social movement into contact with the nominally secular field of higher education. The accumulated resources associated with evangelicalism allow this movement to interrupt dominant logics of higher education through religious challenges. Studied colleges transmit academic knowledge and recruit students and faculty members in ways that differ systematically from practices typical of secular colleges and universities. Because this interruption of dominant educational practices constitutes the background for this study, I pay only scant attention to it in this closing chapter. Instead, I conclude with an emphasis on the results of this interruption, and on the implications of those effects for theorizing about higher education organizations.

I begin with a review of qualitative findings and their implications for the two general thematic areas – the integration of faith and learning, and stratification along material and symbolic axes – around which I organize this research project. I situate these reviews in the context of the two theoretical frameworks, neo-institutionalism and Bourdieu’s critical theory, that guide this analysis. The third section builds upon these problems and theoretical frames to posit a more general explanation for the phenomena
of evangelical Christian colleges and their place in contemporary US higher education. By way of conclusion, I consider general implications for the study of colleges as organizations. I also suggest areas of future research.

The problem of integration

In general, “classic” neo-institutional theory provides the best explanation of the problem of integration. Neo-institutional theory casts individuals and organizations as participants in one or more “fields,” a term indicating a set of participants who share similar opportunities and constraints in their pursuit of similar goals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, 1983; Friedland & Alford, 1991). Each of these fields entails its own logic about how an organization ought to behave and what solutions an organization should pursue when it faces particular problems. Evangelical Christian colleges sit at the nexus of two institutionalized fields, evangelical religion and higher education. From the vantage of neo-institutional theory, then, college officials must craft a mechanism by which to accommodate these different and sometimes conflicting logics. Further, if officials wish to access resources from both educational and religious sources, the response to conflicting logics must appear legitimate in both institutionalized fields.

Thus, a general neo-institutional framework provides a useful lens through which to interpret responses to the problem of integration. Many variants of neo-institutional theory exist, however, and each of these different iterations of the theory interpret the general framework presented above in slightly different ways. I now consider three of these variations in a first step toward providing theoretical illumination for the case studies presented in chapters four, five, and six.
Classic neo-institutional theory

The neo-institutional explanation, as applied in higher education studies, traces its roots to classic texts by Meyer (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). These and other foundational neo-institutional texts posit that shared cultural practices drive agents toward similar decisions. In other words, institutionalized logics provide frameworks through which organizational actors both interpret problems and posit solutions. These taken-for-granted “scripts” therefore constitute a kind of symbolic resource, for they allow individuals both to understand and to shape the organizations in which they participate (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Jepperson, 1991). In short, neo-institutional theory casts cultural practices as a set of limited alternatives that entail both symbolic and material consequences for individuals and organizations.

The image of a script as a particular means of framing and responding to a problem provides a useful prism through which to view evangelical Christian colleges. These schools face cultural constraints both from their religious constituencies and from the dominant normative structures of higher education. College officials may choose from among options considered legitimate alternatives in either field. However, wholesale invention likely will prove unacceptable in both fields, and so will entail losses of resources such as money and credentialed labor. As such, neo-institutional theory provides a viable metaphor through which to interpret the challenges that I have termed “the problem of integration,” by which I indicate the difficulties inherent in positioning a college in two distinct institutionalized spheres simultaneously.

While neo-institutional theory’s emphasis on cultural practices proves a useful means of framing the problem of integration, classic neo-institutional texts do not provide
an ideal basis through which to interpret colleges’ responses to the problem of integration. On the most basic level, the theory’s tendency to stress sameness of organizational forms proves problematic for a research project that takes an unusual group of colleges as its subject matter. This concern highlights a broader problem in many studies that employ this theory. Classic neo-institutional theory can be deterministic and simplistic in its assumptions about the power of institutions to shape social life. Such accounts tend to minimize, or even ignore, the individuals who work within organizations. Agency disappears behind a veil of social determinism (Scott, 1995; Scott & Davis, 2007).

The deterministic streak discernible in classic neo-institutional texts likely would yield the interpretation that evangelical Christian colleges eventually will succumb to the logics of either church or education. Indeed, this proved to be the case with Protestant colleges during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the majority of which minimized or abandoned their religious heritage to become *de facto* secular organizations (Marsden, 1994; Reuben, 1996). Yet the college officials and documents studied in this research project openly professed commitment to religious faith, meaning that a simple explanation of isomorphic convergence on secular organizational forms could not explain the problem of integration at these colleges. To rely solely on classic neo-institutional texts, in other words, would entail the assumption that the future holds great changes for these colleges.

Because I am unwilling to proceed on such an assumption in the face of extant counter-evidence, this research project requires a mechanism by which to explain the current state of evangelical Christian colleges as organizations situated at the junction of
two institutionalized fields. Classic neo-institutional theory, with its tacit social
determinism, is unlikely to yield such a mechanism. I therefore turn my attention to more
recent work in the neo-institutional tradition. I draw explicitly on “microfoundations” and
demand-side institutional theory. These two strains of neo-institutional thought pay
explicit attention to the limitations of classic neo-institutional theory in an effort both to
draw upon the culturalist insights of those texts and to make the theory more applicable
to empirical studies of social life.

*The “microfoundations” of social institutions*

Classic neo-institutional theory tends to posit organizational structure in a
deterministic manner; colleges simply reflect the pre-existing cultural order rather than
shaping it (Scott, 1995; Scott & Davis, 2007). This tendency toward determinism
minimizes the role of individuals because the causal role of pre-existing structures leaves
little room for creativity or resistance. Colyvas and Powell (2006; Powell & Colyvas,
2008) draw attention to the “microfoundations” of social institutions in an attempt to
address this oversight. As its name implies, this strain of neo-institutional thought
examines the role of individuals as micro-level actors who shape existing cultural
practices. People, in this account, develop creative responses to organizational dilemmas
rather than simply following dictates of habit. This approach therefore retains the classic
neo-institutionalist insight that broad cultural patterns shape organizational activities
while simultaneously acknowledging that change and differentiation can occur.

The microfoundational variant of neo-institutional theory proves particularly well
suited for the study of evangelical Christian colleges because microfoundations become
apparent when an organization sits at the junction of two or more social institutions. For example, university departments that intersect both education and market, such as the applied life sciences, constitute social spaces in which no single normative structure attains hegemony. Individuals working within such settings may assume increased importance because no single normative structure proves dominant at the juncture of two domains. Accordingly, Colyvas and Powell (2006) identify the work of research scientists and intellectual property officials as crucial mediators of the relationship between education and market at Stanford University. Individual faculty members and administrators developed particular organizational structures, rationales, and narratives that both formalized and legitimated the relationship between university and market.

Much as the applied life sciences at Stanford University sat at the intersection of education and market, evangelical Christian colleges operate under the logics of both religious and educational bodies. These colleges therefore seem likely to manifest the scripts and logics of two different social institutions, with neither achieving dominance. As a result, evangelical Christian colleges offer opportunities for individuals to rearrange elements of institutionalized scripts into creative solutions to organizational problems.

Although the exploration of microfoundations emphasizes the creative role of individuals in shaping cultural patterns, this body of theory also highlights the importance of institutionalizing and routinizing novel responses. New social arrangements often face great scrutiny. As such, they distract resources from other organizational activities. Routinized solutions, by contrast, consume relatively few organizational resources because they are taken-for-granted and non-controversial. Colyvas and Powell (2006) offer the example of Minnesota Public Radio, which engaged in market-like retail
activity for many years. Eventually, this technique spread to other public broadcasters, who also began to utilize commercial activities to subsidize revenues from public sources and private gifts. This story highlights an important way in which the microfoundational approach, despite its attention to individuals, remains a fundamentally culturalist and institutionalist body of thought. Like most other variants of neo-institutional theory, the microfoundational approach values a taken-for-granted script more highly than a novel solution (Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

Because microfoundational neo-institutional theory continues to value a routinized and taken-for-granted response to organizational dilemmas, this body of theory predicts that a college whose officials develop and maintain a consistent solution to the problem of integration is relatively likely to prosper. Conversely, a college whose officials offer a partial or inconsistent response to this problem may devote resources to this problem on an ongoing basis, and so may neglect other activities. The example of Minnesota Public Radio further suggests that successful responses to organizational dilemmas may be adopted by other organizations. Thus, in keeping with classic texts such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983), this body of thought suggests that officials who craft partial or less consistent solutions to the problem of integration may imitate the techniques of organizations that they perceive to be successful.

The microfoundational approach to neo-institutional theory adeptly explains two of the studied colleges’ responses to the problem of integration.

*Credo College.* Microfoundational neo-institutional theory emphasizes the ways in which individuals rearrange preexisting cultural scripts into novel solutions to organizational problems (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). As such, this theory highlights the
particular response to the problem of integration developed by officials at Credo College. Deans, faculty, and staff members at Credo generally respond to the problem of integration by invoking the theological narrative of “creation, fall, redemption.” Much like the technology transfer offices and intellectual property practices developed at Stanford University (Powell & Colyvas, 2008), this use of existing cultural scripts responds to the dilemma of an organization that exists in two institutionalized fields simultaneously. The Reformed theological narrative holds intrinsic value for many evangelicals because it emerges from a religious source. Yet, with its emphasis on human frailty, this narrative also proves valuable in the field of education. The theological approach favored by Credo officials facilitates a form of engagement with academic material by insisting that any apparent contradictions between religious certainties and academic knowledge reflect humans’ limited capacity for knowledge rather than actual contradictions. Thus, faculty members at Credo College may teach the principles of evolutionary biology under certain conditions, provided that they acknowledge that they remain convinced of a creationist account even if they cannot explain how these two explanatory mechanisms coexist. In the microfoundational interpretation, Credo’s theological narrative becomes a powerful symbolic resource because it provides a response to the problem of integration.

This resource proves particularly powerful because it is routinized. Much as Minnesota Public Radio officials normalized a set of commercial activities by a non-profit broadcasting station, Credo officials have routinized a particular interpretation of Calvinist theology, complete with a particular set of scripted responses to the problem of integration, to such a great extent that this narrative may be taken for granted by members
of the College community. The “creation, fall, redemption” narrative appears in campus architecture, chapel sermons, and every conversation that I had with campus deans, faculty, and staff members.

Routinization establishes this theological script as a powerful resource for organizational life. Because all Credo officials with whom I spoke take this narrative for granted, they employ it casually to channel on-the-ground responses into familiar, legitimate channels. For example, the theological metanarrative provides guidance to individual instructors who face the task of reconciling academic content with religious belief in the classroom. Instructors may simply refer to human fallenness as a means of explaining apparent contradictions, so that conflicts between academic content and religious propositions serve to reify rather than to discredit faith commitments. Beyond the individual classroom, the theological metanarrative provides a coherent framework for identifying and training faculty members, for appealing to prospective students, and for interpreting the College’s financial position. In short, Credo’s theological orientation serves the purpose that neo-institutional theory predicts such cultural resources will serve. Theology constitutes the taken-for-granted backdrop of everyday life, and provides a recognized, legitimate script by which individual actors can respond to everyday problems.

Green Valley College. Although it also supports the microfoundational interpretation of neo-institutional theory, Green Valley College contrasts sharply with Credo College. Where Credo’s theological metanarrative permeates almost every aspect of the College’s operations, GVC emerged from the Bible college tradition that placed little emphasis on theological refinement or organizational management (Brereton, 1991).
This heritage provides GVC with no single symbolic resource to which it can turn when organizational actors face dilemmas. Some individuals espouse a Bible college mission, in which academic disciplines provide insights that can make pastors and missionaries more effective in their efforts to secure converts to the faith. Other individuals echo Credo’s emphasis on a theological metanarrative that guides the interpretation of academic content without the *a priori* dismissal of academic ideas.

The coexistence of these two responses of integration contrasts sharply with the uniformity of responses at Credo College. In a playful resignification of Colyvas and Powell’s (2006) term, GVC’s “microfoundation” appears fractured rather than coherent. Different instructors employ different means of addressing conflicts between academic content and religious faith. Individual departments identify and hire faculty members based upon their own, often idiosyncratic, standards. Training for these new faculty members lasts for a single term, and even this brief focus on the problem of integration relies upon the initiative of individual deans rather than upon a College-wide curriculum. Where Credo’s Provost met weekly with new faculty members to instruct them in the application of Reformed theology in their classrooms, GVC’s provost worked with new employees for shorter, less regular periods of time. In short, where individuals at Credo College can turn to a coherent narrative that has attained official status, those at GVC must solve dilemmas locally, individually, and as they arise.

To be sure, this reliance on micro-level decisions created a sense of possibility at GVC. Interview participants spoke almost uniformly of their excitement about the wide range of possibilities they could undertake. Yet this absence of a coherent script also appears to cost GVC dearly. GVC pays far higher tuition discounts than does Credo, and
attracts a less academically distinguished student for its efforts. These characteristics may be of little concern to GVC officials, yet they matter to most individuals in the field of secular higher education, where financial solvency and admission selectivity often stand as proxies for college quality (Astin & Lee, 1971; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Karabel & Astin, 1975; Litten & Hall, 1989; Paulsen, 1990). In other words, GVC’s symbolic economy may suit the desires of its employees, but does not appear to situate the College in the fields of education and religion simultaneously. This idiosyncratic approach to the problem of integration therefore appears to provide a less adequate solution than does that adopted by officials at GVC. As I discuss in the following sections, these different responses to the problem of integration suggest implications for Credo’s and GVC’s material positions.

A demand-side approach to social institutions

The determinism inherent in classic neo-institutional theory suggests that all organizations that share a field will become more like one another over time (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Yet manifestly isomorphism does not always occur. After all, the three cases studied in this report differ intentionally and notably from non-evangelical colleges. Insofar as existing cultural practices determine the shape of organizations in an institutionalized field, why do some organizations behave differently than do others? That is, why do organizations manifest heterogeneous structures and practices even when they face similar institutionalized pressures? Existing constraints upon operations provides one response to these questions. Put simply, organizations simply cannot comply with all
demands made upon them. Evangelical Christian colleges face a clear constraint on their ability to become like secular colleges in the form of demands made by religious authority (DiMaggio, 1998). Thus, the question of isomorphic processes becomes resignified. Insofar as studied colleges respond to institutionalized logics in patterned ways, do they reflect the logics of education or of evangelical religion?

In general, organizations respond more fully to demands made by institutionalized logics allied with resource providers. Brint and Karabel (1991, 1989), for example, illustrate the ways in which two-year colleges changed over time in response to pressures from employers, governments, and four-year colleges and universities. In other words, early two-year colleges existed at the nexus of multiple institutions – market, government, and education – much as do contemporary evangelical Christian colleges. The founders of two-year colleges initially professed their intention to build schools that provided liberal arts study. In other words, officials at these colleges sought to chart isomorphic courses in which their organizations imitated existing four-year colleges. Yet two-year college officials found few opportunities to send transfer students into established four-year schools. This in turn called the standing of the two-year schools into question in the field of education. Unable to become legitimate providers in the field of education, two-year college officials shifted their focus to workforce preparation. This allowed the colleges to access material resources provided by governments and businesses, and provided the colleges with the imprimatur of legitimacy in these fields that they struggled to attain in the field of education. In other words, in the case of two-year colleges institutionalized processes did not cause organizational convergence, but made these organizations different from established educational bodies.
I refer to this model as a “demand-side” approach to neo-institutional theory. In this account, institutionalized cultural practices continue to hold normative authority. Yet, because organizations often face demands from more than one institutionalized field, these cultural structures do not shape organizational operations in a straightforward way. College officials may respond to the requirements and preferences of resource providers such as tuition-paying students rather than to the demands of the institutionalized field that provides fewer resources.

To be sure, this “demand-side” account echoes resource dependency theory, which posits that organizational structures and behaviors reflect the demands of resource providers rather than attempts at efficient operations (Froelich, 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource dependency theory shares neo-institutionalism’s emphasis on the organizations’ relationship with its environment, yet these two theoretical traditions do not always coexist easily. Indeed, Kraatz and Zajac (1996) and Tolbert (1985), among others, have offered the resource dependency account as an alternative rather than a complement to neo-institutional theory.

Despite their obvious and important similarities, the difference between demand-side neo-institutionalism and resource dependency proves crucial to the understanding of evangelical Christian colleges. Resource dependency suggests that college officials will respond to incentives that resource providers place before them. Private colleges that rely on tuition build large staffs dedicated to the recruitment and retention of tuition-paying students (Tolbert, 1985). Demand-side institutionalism differs from this formulation by beginning with the presupposition that an organization faces demands and secures resources from multiple fields of activity. When faced with potentially conflicting
normative structures, college officials will prefer the demands from the institutionalized field that provides the larger share of the college’s resources. Thus, demand-side neo-institutionalism uses resource dependency-type analysis to provide a kind of weathervane indicating in which direction institutionalized processes may direct college officials. Insofar as isomorphic processes occur, evangelical Christian colleges will become more like church bodies if they draw their resources from religious sources, and more like secular colleges if they derive resources from secular providers.

*Sewall College.* The demand-side approach to neo-institutional theory provides substantial analytic purchase on Sewall College’s response to the problem of integration. I initially selected Sewall College for inclusion in this study due to the College’s generous general subsidies. These awards appear to indicate a relatively high level of material resources. Further investigation reveals that these subsidies instead reflect high levels of spending and low levels of saving. Sewall College actually possesses lower levels of non-tuition resources than do Credo College or GVC. As such, Sewall occupies a slightly more financially vulnerable position than do either of the other studied colleges. Accordingly, as predicted by a demand-side model, Sewall’s response to the problem of integration closely resembles the preferences of its resource providers.

Despite its official nondenominationalism and broad evangelical charter, Sewall’s unofficial ethos proves closely linked to conservative politics. Conservatism of this sort proves only a minor character at Credo or GVC. At Sewall, by contrast, it recurs in documents and conversations. Individuals note their efforts to identify conservative students to attend the school, and tend to identify with “young earth” creationist positions that appeal to evangelical faith. Where faculty members at Credo and GVC exercise
caution on political topics, chapel speakers at Sewall issue politicized jeremiads questioning the validity of climate science.

Such positions tend to be more hostile to the dominant normative structures of higher education than are the beliefs espoused at Credo or GVC. Why would officials who claim to position their college at the nexus of educational and religious fields pursue activities that characterize one field while transgressing the norms of the other? Demand-side neo-institutional theory calls attention to Sewall’s reliance on funding sources such as tuition-paying students and individual donors. These resource providers identify the College with politically conservative causes as well as evangelical faith. By so doing, Sewall’s resource providers reinforce the school’s existing variant of evangelical commitment. Despite its formal independence from denominational interference, Sewall remains captive to the demands of its relatively small base of resource providers. This mirrors a process of resource dependency, but it exhibits neo-institutional consequences. Sewall deans, faculty, and staff behave less like their peers at secular colleges than do individuals at Credo and GVC. Insofar as Sewall exhibits isomorphic tendencies, it begins to look less like a secular college and more like a parachurch organization such as an evangelical publishing house or political lobbying agency. As such, college officials appear to disregard the normative standards of the field of education whenever these structures conflict with the demands of religion, the institutionalized field that provides the majority of Sewall’s resources.

The problem of stratification
While I employ neo-institutional theory in order to respond to the problem of integration, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory provides a fuller explanation for the problem of stratification. The usefulness of Bourdieu’s theory for this problem stems from neo-institutional theory’s reliance on cultural causality. In neo-institutional explanations, taken-for-granted beliefs, values, and narratives explain organizational behavior and success. Material resources become a dependent phenomenon to be explained by symbolic systems (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). This approach proves extremely helpful for the problem of integration, which specifically explores the manner in which a college’s response to two conflicting logics shapes that college’s operations. The problem of stratification, by contrast, explicitly assumes that both cultural and material domains shape college activities. Bourdieu’s theory, which draws cultural elements from 20th century continental philosophy together with material elements from Marxian thought, provides a useful basis from which to respond to research questions exploring the problem of stratification along these two axes (Wacquant, 1993).

While Bourdieu’s theory provides the primary theoretical basis through which I interpret the problem of stratification, Bourdieu’s usefulness does not render neo-institutional theory devoid of value on this topic. Indeed, neo-institutional theory can provide an important corrective to the manner in which most US-based scholars interpret Bourdieu’s theory. American social scientists tend to interpret Bourdieu in a manner that echoes traditional “base and superstructure” Marxism, in which cultural practices depend wholly upon material relations (Wacquant, 1993). Such an interpretation tends to cast “cultural capital” as a portable resource that belongs to individuals (e.g., McDonough, 1997, 1994). While useful, this interpretation of Bourdieu’s work ignores the
fundamentally relational dimension of his thought. For Bourdieu, agents interact with structures, organizations participate in broader social patterns, and status derives from a complex interaction of social connections, cultural practices, and economic wealth. An individual cannot take status or cultural capital with him/her as s/he moves through society, because status and cultural capital exist only in specific contexts. Capital is relative; in a different context, the individual may be endowed with different levels and kinds of resources. Thus, religious bodies may hold a college in great esteem and may endow it with substantial funds, while educational observers may question the symbolic and even material resources of that same college. The college itself need not change if its reference group has changed substantially. Neo-institutional theory, which explicitly emphasizes relationships between organizations and external bodies, serves as a powerful reminder that Bourdieu’s theory rests upon a foundation of relationality rather than individuation (DiMaggio, 1988).

Bourdieu (1984) provides a particularly useful metaphor through which to interpret the relational dimension of his thought when he casts social status as position in three-dimensional space. In this account, individuals and organizations derive their status from the simultaneous relationship of their material resources, cultural practices, and social connections. The third of these three terms proves muted in this study. In general, despite explicit attention to interstitial and intermediating social bodies in the interview protocol, qualitative data provide far greater support for the importance of cultural and material axes in determining organizational shape and behavior. I return in the question of social capital in the concluding portion of this chapter.
The most intuitive relationships between cultural practices and material resources involve the pairing of “high” or “low” measures along both axes. Thus, for example, the leisure activities, cuisine, and artistic endeavors of the wealthy tend to legitimate the social privilege accorded to these groups. Much of Bourdieu’s (1984) empirical research studies the relationship between culture and materiality in 20th century Paris. This society, in Bourdieu’s analysis, values restraint and refinement, by which he indicates the ability to distinguish which among various cultural products carried the imprimatur of legitimacy. Bourdieu follows this line of thought to a fairly granular level, arguing that 20th century France features upper classes who eat small portions of intricately-prepared dishes, while members from less affluent strata of society eat larger, heartier meals. In other words, Bourdieu’s studies of 20th century France suggest that cultural activities that mark high status correlate with substantial economic wealth. Just so, cultural activities signaling lower status correlate with material poverty.

Green Valley College

Bourdieu’s pattern of paired cultural and material axes explains Green Valley College’s position in stratified social space. As measured by Winston’s (1999) concept of general subsidy, GVC controls lower levels of material resources than do Credo or Sewall Colleges. Table two indicates that GVC’s general subsidy also falls substantially below the mean figure for CCCU members that were not included in this study. This table also provides supporting figures such as GVC’s mean gifts raised from private sources per FTE. Here again, GVC falls below the level of material resources belonging to Credo or Sewall. GVC also attracts an approximately average number of low-income
students, yet offers a substantially below-mean scholarship, or “tuition discount,” to those students. When compared with Credo, Sewall, and the mean of non-studied CCCU members, GVC appears to occupy the position of a low material resource organization. This College simply possesses less money than do most of its peers.

GVC’s symbolic economy proves similarly impoverished when measured by the dominant normative conventions of secular higher education. With its roots in the Bible college movement of the early 20th century, GVC reflects a religious heritage that explicitly rejects the importance of instruction in the academic disciplines. Instead, Bible colleges such as GVC tend to emphasize practical instruction for ministers, missionaries, and other church workers (Brereton, 1990). This orientation may provide tremendous benefits in certain religious contexts. Yet, as Bourdieu’s relational understanding of cultural capital indicates, these benefits may not be transported to other social settings. Emphasis on practical evangelism and pulpit ministry likely produce conflicts when the context shifts from religious spaces to secular higher education.

Viewed through the prism of Bourdieu’s theory, the pairing of low material resources and a symbol system with limited purchasing power in the field of higher education seems likely to reproduce GVC’s existing position as a low status college. This reproductive function proves fairly intuitive in the case of material resources. Any

25 These data, drawn from FISAP, employ a definition of “low-income” as a household earning less than $30,000 annually. Raising or lowering the income threshold will of course change the proportion of students classified as “low-income.” However, it does not substantially change the position of these schools relative to one another. Setting the income threshold at $42,000 per household, for example, continues to cast GVC and Sewall as enrolling approximately CCCU-average proportions of low-income students, while Credo enrolls a far lower percentage. Because Bourdieu emphasizes the position of social actors relative to their peers, and because relative position does not change substantially with changing definitions of the term “low-income,” I consistently employ the threshold of $30,000.
individual or organization that possesses financial wealth faces the possibility of higher yields upon that wealth than does a comparatively impoverished agent.

The same pattern occurs with reference to GVC’s symbolic resources. The College emerged from the Bible college movement of the early 20th century, whose supporters generally ignored the academic disciplines in a single-minded effort to train ministers and other church workers (Brereton, 1990). While many deans and faculty members seek to implement a “Christian liberal arts” approach that would rely upon theological refinement rather than upon preparation for ministry, this symbolic system seems unlikely to supplant Bible college influences. As discussed in the previous section, this coexistence leads to a lack of a coherent symbolic system at GVC.

The coexistence of these two models within a single organization evokes enthusiasm from many members of the GVC community. Yet it receives a less enthusiastic reception in other social settings. In particular, prospective faculty members and students appear to find the College a relatively unappealing destination. Even faculty members who accepted positions at the College reported their apprehensions upon first contact with GVC officials. Put more formally, GVC struggles to articulate a symbolic system that it can reliably deploy in efforts to recruit credentialed labor and tuition-paying students. Efforts on these fronts remain local to departments or even individuals. Accordingly, GVC’s symbolic economy reinforces its low levels of material resources by complicating the College’s efforts to attract resource providers.

Table two: Selected descriptive statistics of studied colleges, 2002-2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>General subsidy per FTE</th>
<th>Mean tuition discount per FTE</th>
<th>Gifts from private sources per</th>
<th>Proportion of dependent</th>
<th>Proportion of applicants granted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>students who are low-income</td>
<td>admission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credo College</td>
<td>$4,464.95</td>
<td>$5,962.80</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Valley College</td>
<td>$1,823.66</td>
<td>$4,193.80</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewall College</td>
<td>$5,764.56</td>
<td>$4,815.60</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCU Average</td>
<td>$4,825.67</td>
<td>$5,405.81</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability.

Sewall College

At first glance, Sewall College appears to disrupt Bourdieu’s schematic. This organization possesses limited cultural resources yet seems to control substantial material wealth. A closer examination of Sewall’s financial position explains this apparent paradox. I selected Sewall as a “high material resource” school due to its above-average general subsidies per student. Further scrutiny, however, revealed that these subsidies reflect aggressive spending patterns rather than College wealth. Sewall officials raise fewer funds via private gifts than do their peers at Credo College, and fall well below the average fundraising marks of non-studied CCCU members. Further, as more than one interview participant notes, the College controls relatively few capital assets. Sewall’s label as a “high material resource” college therefore proves misleading. Its generous general subsidies reflect its willingness to spend rather than its accumulated financial resources.

This fuller understanding of Sewall’s material resources casts Sewall as an organization whose position in stratified social space largely parallels that of GVC. Like
Green Valley College, Sewall possesses limited material resources. To be sure, Sewall proves in better material position than does GVC, and this difference cannot be ignored wholly. Because Bourdieu casts status in stratified space as relative, that Sewall appears moderately better-off than GVC is not insignificant. Relative comparisons prove dependent upon the entire comparison group, however, and GVC and Sewall begin to look much alike when compared to other schools rather than to one another. Relative to CCCU averages both colleges appear short of funds.

Sewall’s symbolic economy reinforces this low material resource position by explicitly emphasizing the College’s history of antagonism with secular higher education. College officials generally assert the authority of religious belief over academic conventions, as in the widespread, if unofficial, support for “young earth” creationism. The College’s main administrative building houses a museum of life’s origins and a center devoted to origins research alongside the offices of faculty members, deans, and senior managers. To be sure, this strong creationist position seems to hold great appeal to a group of prospective students, employees, and donors who hold politically and socially conservative positions. As indicated in the discussion of demand-side neo-institutional theory, this appeal accounts for Sewall’s tendency to behave more like a parachurch organization than like a secular college. The converse of this appeal to resource providers in the institutionalized field of religion seems to be a lack of appeal to other potential resource providers. Sewall’s antagonism toward the dominant norms of secular higher education limits the pools of candidates from which officials can seek needed material resources. Faculty members and donors cannot be recruited widely, and must be pursued through personal connections.
As such, Sewall’s material position appears relatively fixed by its symbolic economy. The College may control slightly greater funds than does GVC, and this relative wealth likely reflects Sewall’s strong hold over a small, dedicated group of resource providers. Yet this effective use of a narrow base of support complicates the ability of campus officials to expand or develop the College’s resource base. In order to appeal to existing resource providers, Sewall officials articulate a symbolic economy that espouses suspicion of the dominant normative structures of secular higher education. This cultural position prevents access to resources from secular providers, and so increases dependence upon the very resource providers who are most heavily invested in maintaining the College’s political conservatism.

*Credo College*

GVC and Sewall College fit relatively neatly within a schematic in which cultural and material resources parallel one another. Yet the relationship between cultural practices and material resources does not always prove so straightforward. Bourdieu (1993a, 1993b) also suggests that these axes may relate to one another in unexpected ways, particularly in the field of intellectuals, by which he indicates artists, musicians, writers, and academics. Bourdieu illustrates the potentially quixotic relationship between financial and cultural capital through an archetypal example of two writers. One of these individuals authors a bestselling novel, while the other pens poetry that few read. The poet, he suggests, possesses greater symbolic resources in the social space shared by other intellectuals, for he or she receives wide regard as an artist. Even so, the poet remains poor in material terms. By contrast, the novelist attains a measure of material
wealth that the poet cannot match. This economic wealth likely saps the novelist of his or her cultural standing among other writers, meaning that his or her cultural capital is diminished in the social space of intellectuals. For Bourdieu, then, the successful intellectual becomes a minor member of the dominant group. He or she stands removed from the class of intellectuals due to increasing economic wealth and declining cultural authority in the context of the field of intellectuals; the successful writer has too much money and too little cachet to be counted prominently among the intellectuals. At the same time, however, the successful writer possesses great cultural prestige but little material wealth relative to the members of the upper classes in which he or she now circulates.

In many ways, Credo College resembles Bourdieu’s image of the bestselling novelist. Much as that writer’s cultural product netted a comfortable income, Credo officials translate the College’s chief cultural resource into a measure of material wealth. The novelist sells his or her book. Credo officials capitalize on Reformed theology, using this routinized response to the problem of integration to attract credentialed labor, prospective donors, and tuition-paying students. The chapter on Credo College provides extensive evidence of success in recruiting skilled labor to campus. Table one offers some measures of Credo’s successes in the endeavors related to gifts and tuition. Credo’s fundraising yields outstrip both other studied colleges and non-studied CCCU members. Officials achieve similar results in their efforts with students. The College admits a lower proportion of student applicants than do its peers, yet manages to enroll a larger total student body than do GVC or Sewall. In other words, relative to its peers many students apply to attend Credo College. When interpreted in the context of interview and
documentary evidence indicating the uniform articulation of the Reformed theological narrative at Credo College, these data points suggest that Credo officials manage to translate the College’s symbolic wealth into material resources. The ability of Reformed theology to serve as a kind of solution to the problem of integration allows Credo officials to achieve a measure of what might be called “upward mobility.”

Two additional data points in Table one add precision to this general statement. I initially identified Credo as a “low material resource” case due to its below-mean general subsidy per FTE. This figure provides an important qualifier to the conclusion that Credo officials have discovered a mechanism by which to monetize their symbolic resources. General subsidy provides a useful measure of organizational resources because it represents discretionary dollars spent in a particular activity. General subsidies require real funds (Winston, 1999). Targeted subsidies – that is, student financial aid provided by the college – often represents an unfunded price discount, meaning that these “scholarships” often consist of foregone revenues rather than collected revenues from other sources. This use upon tuition discounts offers the distinct advantage of allowing administrative staff to target particular students for its awards rather than spending on all students equally (Breneman, Doti, & Lapovski, 2001) Placing general subsidies and targeted subsidies alongside one another therefore further illuminates Credo’s material position by illustrating the extent to which Credo’s “upward mobility” consists of real funds (general subsidy) and of foregone revenues manipulated in an effort to achieve desired organizational ends (targeted subsidies).

26 Though often, and rightly, considered pessimistic about the prospect of mobility in stratified space, Bourdieu acknowledged that a few cases of mobility would occur, and would serve to legitimate the immobility of the majority (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).
While Credo remains below the mean of non-studied CCCU members in general subsidy, it offers above-mean targeted subsidies. This reflects the limitations of Credo’s apparent prosperity. Credo officials seem either unable or unwilling to spend real dollars on general subsidies. For this reason, mean student aid expenditures per FTE remain dramatically lower at Credo than at other CCCU colleges. As reported in the findings chapter on Credo College, from 2002 through 2007 Credo’s mean student aid expenditure per FTE stood below $900. This figure suggests that the vast majority of Credo’s institutional student aid awards consists of unfunded price discounts rather than real dollars. Credo officials may have secured a degree of upward mobility for their college, but the financial rewards gained by attempts to monetize their symbolic resource have been modest.

This important caveat situates Credo, like Bourdieu’s bestselling novelist, as a “dominated member of the dominant class.” Credo possesses symbolic resources that other evangelical Christian colleges do not possess. In some respects, then, campus officials prove successful in their efforts to convert these symbolic resources into material wealth. Yet this success remains partial and incomplete. Credo remains richer in ideas than in financial resources. Credo may prosper relative to GVC and Sewall, but it remains unable to raise enough real funds to offer large general subsidies.

Evangelical religion, educational norms, and material wealth

Throughout this research report, I have treated the problems of integration and stratification as relatively distinct topics. This approach confers the analytic advantages of allowing data and theories to be paired with one another neatly. Convenient though it may be for the analyst, however, this assumption of independence simply does not hold at
the colleges themselves. Colleges occupy status positions in a stratified society even as they respond to the problem of integration. Just so, negotiated responses to the problem of integration help to shape a college’s status. In this section, I attempt to repair the analytic distinction between integration and stratification in an effort to develop a more general explanation for the phenomenon of evangelical Christian colleges.

*Credo College: The theological narrative*

As highlighted by microfoundational neo-institutional theory, Credo College’s response to the problem of integration draws heavily upon the Reformed theology of its founding denomination. Faculty members emphasize human sinfulness and resulting inability to understand Divine structures. This emphasis allows faculty members to present apparent conflicts between evolutionary biology and creationism as a by-product of the theological conviction that humans cannot fully apprehend reality. Doubtfulness about human capacity gains purchase both in the field of religion and in the field of higher education. Religiously, theological roots make this narrative legitimate almost by definition; the College’s response to the problem of integration emanates from religious convictions rather than academic ones. With regard to higher education, faculty members stress commonalities between their theological positions and elements of postmodernist thought that also emphasize the limits of human knowledge. College officials therefore respond to the problem of integration by presenting academic knowledge – such as the principles of evolutionary biology – alongside caveats about the inability of humans to reconcile these principles with accepted religious truths.
This response to the problem of integration proves inextricably linked to Credo’s position in stratified social space. Reformed theology, the symbolic resource that allows Credo officials to craft this solution, is allocated asymmetrically. Credo College officials operate in close proximity to this resource because of the College’s denominational sponsorship. Individuals at other colleges cannot draw upon it so readily. To be sure, faculty members and deans at other colleges may attempt to borrow from this resource as proves to be the case both with those advocating a “Christian liberal arts” approach at GVC and with the influence of “neo-Calvinist” thought at Sewall. However, deans and faculty members who employ Reformed theology at these two colleges benefit neither from denominational support nor from formal college structures. Credo officials, by contrast, can access both of these structural advantages. What an individual or group of individuals may advocate at another college proves taken-for-granted at Credo. Access to the advantages conferred by this symbolic resource proves unequal, meaning that Credo’s position in stratified social space informs its response to the problem of integration.

Credo’s response to the problem of integration also reinforces its position in a stratified field. Both potential employees and students appear to find Credo’s theological narrative to be an appealing solution to the problem of integration. The College employs many faculty members and deans who both hold terminal degrees from prestigious research-based universities and who talk openly about the advantages of such degrees. These individuals presumably have more options in choosing an employer than do candidates who hold advanced degrees from evangelical Christian universities. When prompted, they report that they chose to work at Credo due to the College’s efforts to integrate faith and learning into a holistic theological narrative. Just so, Credo’s students
appear drawn to the College due to its symbolic dimension; Credo boasts the largest enrollment and the most selective admissions practices of the three cases. These pieces of evidence suggest that Credo officials can translate its symbolic resource into material goods such as credentialed labor and tuition-paying students. In other words, just as Credo’s advantaged position in a stratified symbolic economy allows College officials to craft their response to the problem of integration, the appeal of that solution to a range of resource providers allows the College to improve its status position.

Responses to the problems of integration and stratification therefore appear doubly linked at Credo College. An organization with a symbolically advantaged position translates that position into a distinctive solution to the problem of integration. By so doing, it both consolidates its position of symbolic advantage and appears to advance its more modest trove of material resources. Resources appear to flow from one dimension of the organization’s existence to the other, and advantage accumulates.

_Green Valley College: The “two colleges” model_

As at Credo College, responses to the problems of integration and stratification demonstrate fairly intuitive links at Green Valley College. The College’s response to the problem of integration proves local and idiosyncratic. Some deans and faculty members respond to the problem of integration with a “Christian liberal arts” approach that self-consciously evokes the theological emphasis of Reformed schools such as Credo. Others draw upon GVC’s Bible college heritage, whose emphasis on vocational training casts academic knowledge as valuable only when it offers insights that might improve ministerial practice.
Microfoundational neo-institutional theory suggests that this lack of consensus illuminates the connection between the response(s) to the problem of integration and GVC’s position in stratified social space. Founded by a small denomination, GVC fills neither its personnel nor its student body with members of its sponsoring church. Instead, it draws from a broad variety of evangelical faiths. This diversity of viewpoints reinforces the lack of consensus on the best model by which to respond to the problem of integration. So long as the College relies upon members of many evangelical groups to populate its faculty, staff, and student bodies, it seems likely that GVC will produce unit-specific responses, rather than a single College-wide response, to the problem of integration. GVC’s response to the problem of integration, in other words, may be understood in part as a consequence of its position in materially and culturally stratified social space. The College possesses too few financial resources and insufficient numbers of credentialed laborers to pursue either symbolic strategy at the expense of the other. Just so, it possesses no single taken-for-granted symbolic resource that officials could leverage in their pursuit of financial or human resources.

As at Credo College, the relationship between integration and stratification proves dual at GVC. The College’s low status shapes the response to the problem of integration, and that response reinforces GVC’s the low status position. Deans and faculty members at GVC do not endorse a single solution to the problem of integration, and many of them proclaim their intellectual excitement about the tensions created by the coexistence of different educational models. Yet their enthusiasm does not appear to extend far beyond the campus’ bounds. Deans report difficulties in attracting qualified applicants for faculty and staff positions the College. GVC also appears to struggle to recruit adequate numbers
of tuition-paying students, and the resulting financial strain resulted in the dismissal of several staff members during the course of my fieldwork. For all the dynamism and excitement reported by current members of the College’s faculty and staff, this optimism does not appear to extend to tuition-paying students, credentialed laborers, or other potential resource providers whose contributions could help to improve GVC’s material position. GVC’s approaches to the problem of integration cannot be translated into material or cultural resources. As such, GVC’s symbolic economy reinforces its low material status in a stratified field.

Sewall College: A demand-side organization

Sewall College’s response to the problem of integration draws upon the College’s heritage as a nondenominational evangelical school established at the height of the evolution controversies of the first quarter of the 20th century. This response reflects the practical concerns that evangelicals share across the many doctrinal differences that divide them (Smith, 2000). Thus, for example, deans, faculty, and staff at Sewall tend to advance what they term “conservative” positions, as in the widespread endorsement of “young earth” creationism. These positions cast academic knowledge as subordinate to religious faith. To be sure, the insights of modern science may raise problems whose solutions, in the words of one dean, prove “not obvious” for the evangelical believer. However, in his judgment as well as the testimony of others at the College, this lack of obviousness should not undermine certainty in the tenets of the faith. Uncertainty about academic truths instead should reinforce the zeal with which college members assert religious certainties in the face of doubts. This approach to the problem of integration
highlights the difference between the symbolic economy of Sewall College and that of Credo. Where Credo officials suggest that doubt reinforces religious belief by demonstrating the limits of human capacity, Sewall officials insist that belief should endure unchanged despite doubt.

The final sentence of the previous paragraph indicates the strong relationship between Sewall’s response to the problem of integration and its position in a symbolically stratified economy. Credo College’s faculty and deans could draw upon the College’s theological heritage in order to conscript doubt into the service of religious faith. Doubt provides evidence of human frailty which, at Credo, constitutes evidence of divine sovereignty and human fallenness. At Sewall, by contrast, doubt might be tolerated as a necessary by-product of intellectual honesty, but should not be celebrated. This reflects Sewall’s roots in non-denominational evangelicalism, which tends to stress practical points of belief and commonality rather than theological refinement. Such points of commonality tend to yield concrete solutions to particular dilemmas such as the teaching of evolution (Lindsay, 2007; Smith, 2000).27

This emphasis on concrete solutions rooted in religious authority proves widespread at Sewall College. Sewall, as a nondenominational body, espouses a formal faith statement that offers greater latitude than comparable documents at Credo or GVC. Yet Sewall’s unofficial ethos seems restrictive relative to those of the other two schools. The majority of Sewall’s deans, faculty, and staff members with whom I spoke endorse

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27 Of note, one dean expressed the precise converse of this position in strongly worded terms. He had recently hosted an event at which he encouraged College faculty and staff members to share their own doubts with students. However, he acknowledged that this event had provoked some controversy. Accordingly, I interpreted his testimony as evidence for the role of doubt as antagonist rather than as a counter-indicator.
“young earth” creationism, regardless of the difficulties that it poses for scientific analysis, because this explanation proves consistent with the dominant mode of Biblical interpretation on campus. The campus museum silently reinforces this interpretation, as curators present the College’s collection of fossils without offering estimated dates during which the extinct creatures roamed the earth. Such dates, if offered, would provide clear cause for division between the larger “young earth” faction and the smaller, though still present, “old earth” group. That Sewall’s response to the problem of integration reflects an internecine evangelical conversation indicates the nature of integration at this college. As indicated by the demand-side neo-institutional explanation, religion seems to set the course for Sewall College. In this spirit, interview participants frequently referred to the school as “conservative” relative to other evangelical Christian colleges.

At first glance, the link between Sewall College’s response to the problem of integration and its position in a materially stratified economy proves difficult to identify. How could the case whose symbolic economy proves most overtly hostile to the dominant norms of secular higher education also prove the most materially prosperous? As detailed in previous sections, this difficulty stems from the problematic nature of labeling the College as “high material resource.” Sewall College spends money as if it possessed a great deal of it. In fact, however, the College’s revenues prove no greater – and, in some cases, even more meager – than those of Credo or GVC.

When interpreted with a more nuanced understanding of Sewall’s material position, the connections between its responses to the problem of integration and its status in stratified space become apparent. Sewall appears to operate with very little material surplus; the College spends almost every dollar that it raises, leaving few
resources for saving. Because Sewall operates with very little slack in its budget, it relies heavily upon its revenue providers to meet annual outlays. These revenue providers appear to be at least as “conservative” as College officials. Deans, faculty, and staff members often refer to the social and political conservatism of Sewall’s tuition-payers, while College officials who raise funds through private gifts report heavy reliance on small gifts from a group of dedicated supporters who approve of Sewall’s heritage of hostility to dominant academic norms. Reliance on these “conservative” sources of material resources appears to inform Sewall’s response to the problem of integration.

College officials place religious belief above academic knowledge in a manner that they believe will evoke approval from conservative resource providers. The College remains reliant upon familiar resource providers, and these providers exact a familiar solution to the problem of integration in return for their material support.

As at Credo and GVC, the relationship between Sewall’s solution to the problem of integration and its position in a stratified social space proves two-directional. That is, the solution that Sewall officials craft to the problem of integration partially informs Sewall’s levels of cultural and material resources. Sewall pairs evangelical faith and “conservative” political attitudes more tightly than do the other studied schools. This model of integration limits the places from which Sewall can draw material resources. College officials betray little optimism that they can generate new donors or candidates to join Sewall’s faculty, and specifically tailor their student recruitment strategies to areas that they hope will share the College’s unofficial view of the relationship between faith and learning. Sewall officials certainly increase the yield that they glean from these limited fields. Ultimately, however, the College’s financial position faces a stark upper
bound in the form of Sewall’s inability to generate new sources of support. Sewall’s model of integration therefore not only reflects the College’s available symbolic and material resources, but reinforces those levels by simultaneously limiting access to other providers and increasing dependence upon existing funding sources. The College’s model of integration, in other words, makes it unlikely that Sewall’s low status in stratified space will change over time.

Implications and limitations

Actors, organizations, institutions, and change

As discussed extensively in the chapter on research methods, qualitative research demonstrates its significance through refining existing concepts and theoretical explanations. Thus, a well-crafted study may demonstrate implications beyond the narrow bounds of its subject matter. Yet a study’s subject matter constitutes the ground from which any more general insights have sprung. As such, generalization even to concepts must acknowledge that new insights are conditioned upon the data and phenomenon investigated.

Despite these important cautions, however, I suggest that this study may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the organizational dynamics of US higher education. Taken together, the three case studies presented alongside a review of neo-institutional and Bourdieu’s theories suggest that casual readings of classic neo-institutional texts such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) do not necessarily provide an accurate account of all sectors of US higher education. Simple accounts of isomorphic processes suggest that all organizations will converge toward stability and conformity.
Yet this simplicity proves at odds with the simplest level of observed reality, for at least a few colleges house individual actors who choose to steer their organizations in counter-normative directions. Microfoundational neo-institutional theory helps to explain the role of individual actors while continuing to acknowledge the importance of institutionalized scripts and logics as partial determinants of social activity (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Further, rather than the static hierarchy suggested by isomorphic processes, some colleges can improve their status by capitalizing upon their available resources when circumstances become advantageous. Bourdieu’s (1993a, 1993b) image of the intellectual who becomes financially successful finds its analog in Credo officials who capitalize, with partial success, on the College’s theological tradition. Finally, when isomorphic processes do occur the nature of these processes should not be assumed. The demand-side understanding of neo-institutionalism indicates that, much as two-year colleges came to provide vocational instruction for workforce training rather than liberal arts education (Brint & Karabel, 1991, 1989), evangelical Christian colleges may become like parachurch organizations rather than like secular four-year colleges.

At the same time that it deals a rebuke to deterministic interpretations of neo-institutional theory, however, this analysis operates within a realm in which institutions and dominant cultural practices matter greatly. After all, some individuals at GVC sought earnestly to create a “Christian liberal arts” college modeled closely on schools like Credo. Just so, many at Sewall elevated “neo-Calvinist” rhetoric to a position of de facto authority on campus. These efforts indicate the broad influence of existing cultural patterns on all of these colleges. Some cultural scripts connote advantage in a particular social space, and Reformed theology appears to be a valuable cultural resource in the
space inhabited by evangelical Christian colleges. Accordingly, deans, faculty, and staff members sought to navigate these institutional realities. Individuals therefore did not simply invent a new cultural narrative in an attempt to marshal greater supplies of material resources; they sought to borrow and adapt an existing narrative, in a manner predicted by classic neo-institutional texts such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Further, they did not select a cultural script haphazardly, but inclined toward Reformed theology, which seemed to promise advantage in the space. In other words, although the efforts of individuals shaped these organizations, actors operated within already-defined cultural horizons. This general template proves consistent with the outline of subsequent revisions of neo-institutional theory, particularly those that stress the “microfoundations” of social institutions (Colyvas & Powell, 2006) or those that emphasize the role of resource providers in maintaining institutional logics (Brint & Karabel, 1991, 1989; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Further, as DiMaggio (1988) indicated more than two decades ago, an iteration of neo-institutional theory that includes a nuanced understanding of individual agency and social changes converges with Bourdieu’s model of social life. People conduct their activities within organizations that are themselves nested within a culturally- and materially-delimited social space.

Ultimately, then, successful organizational change like that undertaken at Credo College proves rare and elusive. Savvy individuals must find some resources at hand – such as a theological narrative – that they can translate into needed material wealth. Credo’s theological narrative may appear to an outsider, but proves to be just such a resource in this social space. This theological account provides a framework in which believers can reconcile academic and religious demands.
Importantly, however, cases like Credo prove anything but common. More often, dominant cultural patterns and substantial material constraints overwhelm individual effort. Those who sought to develop a “Christian liberal arts” college at GVC seemed to have something like the Credo model in mind. Without the resource of taken-for-granted theology, however, GVC continued on its local and idiosyncratic path. Inertia overwhelmed change. Sewall attained a greater level of material prosperity than did GVC, yet did so by becoming ever more reliant upon a small base of supporters motivated by political, economic, and social conservatism. No one at Sewall seemed to want to make that school more like Credo; instead, Sewall officials steered that school on a course that paralleled a parachurch organization such as an evangelical publishing house. Even if they had desired to imitate Credo College, however, their efforts likely would have failed, for dramatic cultural changes would have exacted an enormous material price.

In the end, then, change appears to be a function of opportunity as much as ingenuity. Status is dearly won and not readily abandoned. Further, the nearly overwhelming forces of accumulative advantage conspire to keep an organization in its present place in a given status hierarchy. It is rare indeed to find an opportunity during which to alter that status, and rarer still for these efforts to succeed. Finally, when those efforts do succeed, they may vault an organization’s relative position only in the space that it occupies. Even Credo, when all goes well, becomes what Bourdieu might have termed either the dominant member of a small space or the dominated member of a larger, wealthier group. Credo will never become Williams College, and neither will it become the enormous and enormously wealthy Willow Creek Community Church.
Limitations and future research

Throughout this chapter, I have spoken of the social space in which evangelical Christian colleges operate. Classic versions of both neo-institutional (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and Bourdieu’s (1977) theories articulate such space as three-dimensional. Individuals and organizations embody material, cultural, and social positions. In this report, however, I have written extensively about material and symbolic resources. What of social networks?

I have adopted a culture-and-materiality-centered approach for two reasons. First—temporally, at least—I contend that networks constitute atheoretic mechanisms. One account may cast a network as an undifferentiated space in which individuals exchange goods and services freely, while another views a network as a channel through which some can band together to exploit their social proximity for mutual gain. Such conceptual heterogeneity suggests that networks do not explain social life. Instead, they rely upon a theoretical framework to give meaning to them. To over-state the case, networks constitute phenomenona to be explained rather than an explanation for phenomena (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007). As such, attention to networks might help to map the terrain of evangelical Christian colleges more accurately, but would not help to explain their responses to particular problems.

Second, I have minimized the role of social networks in an effort to be faithful to interview testimony. As indicated by the interview protocol included as Attachment A, I asked almost every participant about the role of interstitial bodies in hiring faculty members and recruiting students. These questions returned no evidence that bodies such
as the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) influenced the colleges. Instead, networks appeared only locally, as channels through which resources and personnel flowed to a single campus. Thus, while none of these schools participated in a general network of evangelical Christian colleges, each relied heavily upon particular local networks, such as Credo’s denomination or GVC’s conservative base of support. In keeping with the understanding of networks as atheoretic mechanisms (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007), networks therefore seemed less significant as explanations of organizational behavior than as mechanisms for the delivery of material resources and the transmission of cultural practices. Accordingly, I relegated an analysis of social networks to subordinate status in this research report.

While I believe that this orientation proves defensible, my lack of attention to networks constitutes a clear limitation of my analysis. An alternative analysis that explicitly emphasized network theory (Powell, 1990) might unearth a more profound relationship between networks and organizational activities. The potential for different results would increase greatly if such an analysis took all evangelical Christian colleges as its sample rather than studying only a limited sample as have I. Accordingly, a study primarily concerned with the networks in which organizations operate should extrapolate from this study only with great caution.

A second limitation also presents an intriguing area for future research. Case studies are bounded both spatially and temporally (Merriam, 1998). As such, I have studied these colleges at only one point in time. This means that I offer limited insight into patterns of departure from these organizations. Again as evident in Attachment A, I asked interview participants about former faculty and staff members who had left the
colleges. I had hoped that responses to these questions would illuminate broader patterns by suggesting that individuals left a college due to incompatibility with one or more of its salient characteristics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, answers to these questions proved fairly guarded. I therefore gathered very little data about former employees.

An alternative research design could identify faculty and staff members who have departed from the college for participation in the study. Such an analysis would indicate the position of this social space relative to other spaces within the field of US higher education. That is, if faculty and staff members left to pursue employment at a church body or another evangelical college, future research might conclude that evangelical higher education remains almost wholly distinct from other educational endeavors. By contrast, if they accepted positions at non-evangelical colleges and universities, then employment patterns would indicate that the boundary around the social space of evangelical Christian colleges is perhaps more permeable than it might appear.

Departing individuals could also pursue a third option, which is to work in a field other than higher education. Should future research unearth this pattern, it would provide surprising and fascinating illumination for a fundamental question on the relationship between religious belief and the academic profession. Brint (1994) argues that professions such as medicine, law, and the professoriate define themselves by demonstrating monopolistic expertise over a set of complex problems. Evangelical religious faith, as discussed many times throughout this report, makes similarly exclusive demands of its adherents. Insofar as faculty and staff depart higher education completely when they leave the employ of evangelical Christian colleges, these individuals may
indicate that the antagonism between religious and academic demands proves irresoluble, at least for some.

This consideration of evangelical belief on the most general level raises a final area for future research. I undertook this project expecting to learn something about the ways in which evangelical belief modifies academic authority structures. Such an approach proves entirely consistent with the study of higher education, and with an interest in the ways in which unusual circumstances can reshape organizational forms. Accordingly, this report provides an extensive catalog of the ways in which evangelical Christian colleges differ from the dominant norms of secular higher education, and offers a theory-derived explanation for these differences.

Notably, however, such an approach implicitly neglects a second question that is perhaps just as interesting. Evangelical Christianity often casts academic knowledge as a manifestation of a hostile secular world. In what ways does participation in the field of higher education reshape belief? Findings provide tantalizing glimpses of what an understanding of “belief in the academy” might entail. Belief, I posit, would be reshaped in particular ways by particular circumstances. The believer who accepts employment at Sewall College likely will become more politically conservative over time. One who works at Credo will become more interested in theology, while the believer at GVC may find himself or herself little challenged due to the intense localism of that organization’s symbolic culture. To be sure, these thoughts represent only gestures toward an explanation of the phenomenon of belief in the academy. A full exploration of this subject awaits further study.
Conclusion

The theory and qualitative data utilized in this research report suggest that evangelical Christian colleges are simultaneously cultural and material organizations. The word “simultaneously” suggests some implications that this work can exhibit for the study of higher education organizations generally. That is, I argue that colleges do not simply exist in both material and symbolic dimensions, but that these two dimensions appear distinct only for analytic convenience. Thus money, and the sources of that money, assume an important cultural dimension. The sources from which a college derives its funds indicates something important about that college. Credo appeals to large numbers of students relative to its peers, and Sewall appeals intensely to a small but devoted group of resource providers. This same principle appears to hold on the subject of labor, the other material resource considered explicitly in this report. Sewall, a college that derives a large share of its money and labor from a politically conservative base seems likely to behave differently than a college that gathers funds from a group of theologically-minded believers who believe that governments and political parties, like all human endeavor, are inevitably corrupted.

This report also offers a cautious but firm revision to the ways in which higher education researchers tend to employ neo-institutional theory. The classic texts, cited previously, presume that colleges and universities belong to a single, undifferentiated field. By assuming that these organizations share a single set of normative cultural practices, these accounts reduce culture to a meaningless category of analysis. If there is no variation – that is, if officials at all colleges and universities think the same way and strive toward the same organizational form – then culture does not matter. The casual
application of neo-institutional theory therefore finds itself in the absurd position of
arguing irrelevance based on universality even as it touts the importance of “myth,”
“ritual” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and other cultural forms in the causation of material
prosperity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

To be sure, these points are not new. Early in the history of neo-institutional
theory, DiMaggio (1988) argued that organizational studies should retreat from the more
enthusiastic claims of the classic texts in an effort to explore individual agency and the
role of economic demand. Consideration of these pathways makes neo-institutional
theory more similar to Bourdieu’s work. Just so, the relationalism inherent in neo-
institutional theory’s concept of the field cautions that Bourdieu’s understanding of
economic and cultural capital also proves relational (Wacquant, 1993). Organizations
cannot take their resources from one social space to another. Yet, despite their lack of
novelty, these injunctions are widely ignored, and that neglect provides the theoretic basis
for this project.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview protocol

1. Please tell me about your education and training.

2. A person of your credentials would have many choices when selecting a place to begin/continue your career. What factors led you to choose to work here?

3. When selecting a college at which to teach/work, how important was the college’s religious identification in your decision-making?

4. Please tell me about your religious background.

5. Please tell me about a typical “day in the life” of your work at the college.

6. Have you taught or worked elsewhere?
   a. If so, please contrast that organization with the college.

7. How is work different at the college than it would be at another institution?
   a. Teaching?
   b. Scholarship?
   c. Professional organizations?

8. How would you characterize the religious beliefs of the college’s faculty and staff?

9. Can you think of a faculty or staff member who has left the college recently?
   a. Why do you think they left?
   b. Where did they go?

10. Why do you think students choose to enroll here?
11. What careers or advanced degrees do most of your students go on to pursue?
   
a. What challenges do you think these students will face in the world beyond the college?
   
b. How do you prepare students to face these challenges?

12. What do you perceive as the college’s mission?

13. Do the religious and academic elements of the college’s mission reinforce one another?
   
a. If so, how?
   
b. Can you give a specific example?

14. Can you remember an occasion on which interpretations of religious and academic elements of mission led to conflict at the college?

15. How there been occasions on which you felt that you did not fit with the college’s mission?

16. Secularization has been the norm in American higher education for roughly 100 years. Are there advantages to having an intentionally Christian mission?
   
a. Are there disadvantages?

17. Is the college’s mission particularly suited to the organizational form of an undergraduate baccalaureate college rather than, say, a research university?
   
a. If so, why?

18. Although we have covered a great deal of ground in this conversation, we may have missed something important. Are there other things that I should know?

19. In conclusion, would you tell me about an occasion on which you felt most a part of the college’s mission?
Appendix B: Descriptive and thematic codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Agreed-upon, non-controversial place of religious values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Agreed-upon, non-controversial place of academic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Academic rigor of the College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Agreed-upon, non-controversial place of administrative/”business” values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Faculty’s academic credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Nature of administrative authority at the College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Role of BOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Bible college heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Tensions between Bible college heritage and Christian liberal arts model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Insistence on being both Bible college and Christian liberal arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>This story illustrates how BROKE the College is, financially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Conflict between academic and religious values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Contrasting this College with other Christian colleges and/or traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>The cost (in lost faculty members, students, dollars, etc.) of religious mission in a secular field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Contrasting the College with non-Christian colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Conflict between religious and administrative or “business” values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>Conflict over interpretations, not core, of religious values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Conflict between the College and the denomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8</td>
<td>Strain on curriculum (number of subjects/hours) per trying to do so many things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D1 Departure (of faculty, staff, or students) as evidence of mission prevalence and distinctiveness (as in Burton Clark’s Reed College)

D2 Sounds like the Kuh-Schuh-Kinzie DEEP project

E1 Relation of College to evangelical movement (strength)

E2 Relation of College to evangelical movement (limitation)

E3 Fundamentalistic denominational distinctives place college at odds with broader evangelicalism

F1 Academic freedom at the College

F2 How do you fit it all in (academics, Bible college, liberal education of “whole person,” etc.)

G1 Bible and worldview courses at core of general education curriculum

H1 Religious values in ascent over academic values

H2 Religious values evident in hiring practices

H3 College as a “holistic experience”

H4 Hiring and personnel (not structures) as a vital safeguard of religious mission

H5 How does your college identify suitable faculty or staff members?

I1 The role of educational/secular interstitials: accreditors, professional organizations, student aid, etc.

L1 The College conflicts with Labaree’s (1996) “private good” model of HE

M1 Conflicts related to mission centrism (degree completion, recruiting ample numbers of students, etc.)

M2 “The multiplication effect” (changing the lives of students who go forth and engage with the world in a manner shaped by the College’s values)
M3 Concerns about money: will we have enough?

M4 Deepening our commitment to Bible college model will address money woes

M5 Deepening our commitment to Christian liberal arts will address money woes

M6 Mission and money, generally (how do we make ends meet given our mission)

O1 Role of the organizational form of the baccalaureate college

O2 Orientation and training for new faculty/staff

P1 Religion’s place not just at the College, but in the post-secular, post-modern “tournament of narratives” (J&J, 2008; Ream & Glanzer, 2007)

P2 Christian professional organizations that exist parallel to secular ones (CBFA, CCCU, CHEA, etc.)

P3 Paradox resolved mystically (apparent paradox, 1+1=3, etc.)

P4 Practice as the reconciliation of religious and academic values

P5 Difficulty identifying a pipeline of qualified faculty/staff

P6 Physical space (campus and building descriptions, etc.)

R1 Religious values reinforcing academic values

R2 Reformed theology not the be-all, end-all for this College

R3 Research de-emphasized

R4 Restructuring 2009 (GVC only)

S1 Issues of human sexuality

S2 Student and residence life as manifestations of mission

S3 “It’s all sacred:” general revelation, academic processes, etc., “belong to Jesus”

S4 Student motivations: religious

S5 Student motivations: academic
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S6</th>
<th>Senior Integration Project (SIP), parallel to faculty T&amp;P papers integrating faith and discipline (Credo only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Tenure and promotion process (religion, scholarship, and other considerations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Theology and worldview as the reconciliation of religious and academic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>Benefits of mission centrism (in retained faculty members, students, dollars, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>Wow! That’s a great quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>Issues of gender roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>Faculty work: Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>Faculty work: Research and publication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>