

**Alumni Research Team  
Annual Report  
Fall 2014-Spring 2015**

This is a summary of our accomplishments and findings from the fall of 2014 to date during which we met with alumni throughout the US to discuss their ongoing life purpose journey and the extent to which their Pepperdine University education has helped them with their personal faith and life-purpose journey. This report is the second report on our work and is additive to the first report, which reviews our work beginning in the fall of 2013 through the summer of 2014. This represents the work of Drs. Cindy Miller-Perrin and Don Thompson and their undergraduate research assistants Lexi Howerton and Danielle Shilling.

We wish to express our gratitude to President Benton for supporting our work over this year and the three years to come. We maintain a research email address for any and all queries:  
[alumni.research@pepperdine.edu](mailto:alumni.research@pepperdine.edu).

**2014-15 Highlights**

We held one focus group dinner: November 15th, 2014 in Thousand Oaks at Tuscany II Ristorante.

Our November event brought a group of 13 Alumni and guests out to the restaurant. We enjoyed dinner together followed by a taped 80 minute focus group session. Three days after our event, we sent the attendees a follow-up spiritual autobiographical survey invitation, which 3 alumni completed.

In addition to planning these events, we launched the Christian Spiritual Research Institute (CSRI) website this spring. Several core pages have been built, however, the website is still being developed and will be continuously updated as our work progresses. To check out the development so far use the following link: <http://community.pepperdine.edu/spirituallife/research-institute/default.htm>

Extensive data analysis is continuously in progress and the beginning stages in developing a publication are being conducted. The following summary highlights the data gathered at the November event.

**November Focus Group Discussion Themes**

There were several major themes that emerged during this focus group through the context of several different questions. The five major questions discussed were as follows:

1. What are the major “turning points” you have experienced along your life purpose journey?
2. Please describe any moments of crisis or confusion as well as moments of joy and clarity along your past life purpose journey.
3. What are the experiences that have either affirmed your sense of calling or shaken your sense of calling?
4. Please name any friends, mentors, or individuals who have contributed either positively or negatively to your life purpose development?
5. Are there any things you wished you knew during your undergraduate years? If you could give a current undergraduate student advice what would you tell them?

## Major Themes

### Relationships

- *“It’s people, you know, that you are actually working with, working next to, and helping them with their life and I think that after that, after I left Seaver Admissions, and I worked at these other large organization ... and these are people that they have their life, you have your life, and you have to work on project together sometimes but it’s not that dire. Connection: that is what gets me energized.”*
- *“I think [I would emphasize] the importance and the value of being grounded. Find it somewhere because I was fortunate to have found it when I first graduated and you know that was a part of Pepperdine and I still live in the same place that I lived when I was working there. I couldn’t live in LA, I think, without getting grounded somewhere.”*
- *“I’ve actually worked at my company for almost 15 years and I’ve only worked 16 years so I’ve been there a long time, and what’s kept me there is the relationships. I can do accounting anywhere but it’s the people and we really try to hold a culture together where we care about each other and we get to know each other.”*
- *“I wish I would have know that relationship can take you anywhere. Like everything is relationships and like below the surface relationships not just I meet you, what’s your name, what do you do for a living, and that’s it. Relationships can get you jobs, can save you when you have an emergency, when you have family crisis, anything, and so having those relationships from undergrad through whether you go into another you know univeristy, affiliate program, or out into life would be great.”*

### Mentors

- In regards to Mark Davis: *“I grew up in a non-christian home and ... he employed me as a spiritual leader in the university and that was the first time that I was like, “wow, you can actually be a leader and be trusted to be in a role like that when I’m surrounded by people where that is all they know, they’ve grown up, they know the bible so much more than I do.” It’s just what he taught me and how he empowered me.”*
- Also in regards to Mark Davis: *“Mark Davis, at the end of the meeting actually offered me a job being the webmaster for the internal site. That particular opportunity actually was how I got started in the industry that I am in and so I started moving from there, got to you know do a startup ... so obviously very impactful in terms of my career and direction.”*
- In regards to Jody Semerau: *“It’s hard because there are a lot of people that stress out around me because we have deadlines and we have money to be accounted for but after going through what I’ve gone through and after having Jody as a mentor, and I go and talk to her, it’s working out. I would not be here, I would not have gotten through that if she, if I had not picked up the phone and called her and six months later she gave me this position.”*
- In regards to Carla Anderson: *“Mine was Carla Anderson who was the manager of Student Employment when I was there. I was a student with only a part time job but it was so much more than that because she turned it into a leadership role. She had us brainstorm ideas of who we could make that place better. She just fostered all of these things where I’m thinking that’s probably why I am the way I am at my job. It’s not about the actual social work, it’s finding ways to turn it into something else and make it something better.”*
- Several comments about the influence of Pepperdine classmates and friends were made; here is one of those comments: *“[When] I started at Pepperdine, I was in Pepperdine for two years, I really wanted to move to UCLA. UCLA had a better computer science program and I really wanted to graduate from UCLA. So I started taking classes there, and for a year I took classes, but I finally came back to Pepperdine ... because of the people, it was because of the class size, it was because of the professors. I made a few handfuls of very, very close friends and when we were there we were like hey, “in 10 years, 15 years, we are going to have kids, our kids are going to play with each other, and you know let’s commit and lets look at that.” One of my friends I’m very close to and you know we meet every year with the kids and we take trips on our own, just the boys. One of my friends is my business partner. The people that I met at Pepperdine were very, very influential, even the people that I’m not in*

*touch with for years and years, whenever I get in touch with or I hear their name, like Ryan, it just brings memories of frosh follies. I think it is one of the biggest take homes that I take, the value I got from Pepperdine.”*

#### What Alumni wish they had known

- *“I wish I knew that life would take care of itself. Don’t be in such a hurry. I had so many plans and goals and I got there or I didn’t get there. Things weren’t what I expected to be and I had to deal with the repercussions of my decision, but I love where I am now.”*
- *“I wish I would have know that I didn’t have to to have my whole life’s career plan locked down before I had that diploma in my hand. The other thing I wish I would have know is that you know real identity and purpose is not about what’s on your business care. I mean that’s incidental and that’s an indication of what you are doing in the moment but your identity is something much deeper and it is about where your heart is and the legacy you’re leaving on the world. The impact you are leaving on issues and people.”*
- *“Let your life take you where it wants to take you. Don’t get stressed out so much and laugh as much as you can. Enjoy it!”*

#### Alumni-undergraduate interactions

- *“I think a part of it is maybe making the connection between alumni and active students a little tighter. Right now I think it is a fairly weak relationship and even the alumni relations themselves. You talk about the community you have at Pepperdine and that stops when you leave. So i think helping bridge that gap and then helping take the alumni experience and help utilizing that in helping mentor students would be helpful.”*
- *“If there were more connections to alums, if that was more visible, if there was [a way] to make it a little bit more accessible, ... but also really encourage [students] or have something built into the curricula where they are interacting with alums or something outside of Malibu because you know you finish Pepperdine and its like do I, Do I want to go to LA now or do I want to go home. USC, UCLA, I mean all of those guys have an awareness of LA.”*
- *“Just coming out of Pepperdine, if there had been a network of Pepperdine grads who had just finished their first year of law school or who were lawyers that I could reach out to and say, “okay, what can I expect of what can I not expect.” That would have been great. I think it also fosters more staying in touch with contributing faculty in the university, if that, if that relationship never stops then you want to come back, you then want to be involved in more events.”*

#### What We Have Learned about Alumni

They want to connect with undergraduates and they wish that as undergraduates they had connected with alumni. They feel this connection, however, isn’t as strong as it could be.

They like to get the chance to spend time together discussing life after college, comparing notes on life experiences and life changing events.

They appreciate the university reaching out to them for feedback. It is gratifying for them to have the chance to give back to their alma mater.

Each one has a unique story that they want to share with us and university.

Pepperdine makes a significant impact on them - through their faculty mentors and their international programs experiences.

The question of life purpose never disappears. We deal with it throughout our entire lifespan

## **2014-15 Plans**

As stated in our last report we are now working closely with Matt Ebeling in the Seaver Alumni office in order to plan and conduct focus groups for the coming year. The first event we planned with this office as the Ventura County Alumni Research event that occurred November 15, 2014 as described above. This Saturday, March 21st, 2015 we will be in Dallas hosting another event, and in the early summer of 2015 we will be hosting our third event with this office in San Diego, CA. Though no definite plans have been set yet, we fully expect to plan a fourth event through this office in the fall of 2015. Prospective areas include the San Francisco Bay area, the Denver, Colorado metro area, the Phoenix, Arizona metro area, and Orange County, California.

We are currently beginning work on a publication proposal, which will continue into the summer. Pending the richness and quantity of the data collected during upcoming events we intend to submit this publication no later than than spring of 2016.

Lastly, we will continue to update and expand the CSRI website. We are planning to add several pages over the course of the summer including the following: an Undergraduate Student Life Purpose page, a Faculty Spiritual Autobiography Project page, a Faculty Retreat Project page, and a Graduate Student Life Purpose page.