

**University of Dayton
Program for Christian Leadership
Assessment of the Chaminade Scholars Program**

**Focus Group Discussion with
Chaminade Scholars**

**Research Sponsored By
Dr. Maura Donahue and the Program for Christian Leadership**

**Research Conducted By
Dr. Rebecca Wells
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And

**The Business Research Group
School of Business Administration
University of Dayton**

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Program for Christian Leadership Assessment of the Chaminade Scholars Program Focus Group Discussion with Chaminade Scholars

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

The following major topics were addressed during this discussion.

- Perceptions of the Chaminade Scholars Program, including general reactions, reactions to specific courses, reactions to program augmentations, and impact of the program on the UD community.
- Influence of the program on the students' career choice.
- Influence of the program on the students' understanding of vocation.
- Conclusions regarding the specific goals of the Chaminade Scholars Program established by the Program for Christian Leadership.

The Business Research Group (BRG) at the University of Dayton administered the focus group. Ten participants came together for this discussion on April 4, 2005 in the BRG research facilities in the School of Business Administration at the University of Dayton.

The key findings are:

- The participants in the focus group have a strong positive disposition toward the Chaminade Scholars Program and agree that the most valuable aspect is the opportunity to build long-lasting relationships with those in the class. It is through these relationships, developed during the program, that the participants experienced personal growth and vocational understanding.
- Individual career choices were influenced by a variety of factors beyond the Chaminade Scholars Program. The interpersonal relationships built through the program, however, were instrumental in helping the participants understand and accept the complexities involved with such choices.
- Yes, the program enriched the participants understanding of vocation and their understanding of the ways in which their faith influences all aspects of their lives.
- Based on this conversation, it appeared that all the specific goals of the Chaminade Scholars Program were, to varying degrees, achieved by this first class.

Program for Christian Leadership

Assessment of the Chaminade Scholars Program Focus Group Discussion with Chaminade Scholars

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH ISSUES

The purpose of this research was to assess the Chaminade Scholars Program relative to the goals established by the Program for Christian Leadership. Students who were members of the first class of Chaminade Scholars were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss their experiences, their beliefs about the personal and professional impact of the program, and their recommendations for the future of the program.

The following major topics encompass the research issue:

- Perceptions of the Chaminade Scholars Program, including general reactions, reactions to specific courses, reactions to program augmentations, and impact of the program on the UD community.
- Influence of the program on the students' career choice.
- Influence of the program on the students' understanding of vocation.
- Conclusions regarding the specific goal of the Chaminade Scholars Program established by the Program for Christian Leadership.

The discussion of the findings presented in subsequent sections of this report will be organized around these topics. The specific issues encompassed in each area will be detailed in that discussion as well.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Business Research Group (BRG) at the University of Dayton administered one focus group designed to address these research issues. The focus group was conducted on April 4, 2005 in the BRG research facilities in the School of Business Administration at the University of Dayton.

Dr. Maura Donahue, Director of the Program for Christian Leadership, identified the students who were members of the first class of Chaminade Scholars. Invitations to participate in the focus group were extended from BRG, with BRG and Dr. Donahue providing follow-up communications.

A list of those participating appears in Appendix A.

Rebecca Wells, a faculty member in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Dayton, prepared the focus group guide (found in Appendix B), moderated the discussion and prepared this summary report. Comments from the discussion are aggregated, so none are attributed to any individual participant. Quotes, when used, are paraphrased, not verbatim.

GENERALIZATION OF THE FINDINGS

Qualitative research provides a valuable source of information to clarify issues and generate ideas, and to give direction to future research. Although participants were recruited from the group of interest, they were not selected on a statistical basis. Therefore, the information provided through this research should be valued for its insightfulness, but should not be generalized to others.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The content analysis discussed in this section is organized around the four major research issues.

- Perceptions of the Chaminade Scholars Program, including general reactions, reactions to specific courses, reactions to program augmentations, and impact of the program on the UD community.
- Influence of the program on the students' career choice.
- Influence of the program on the students' understanding of vocation.
- Conclusions regarding the specific goal of the Chaminade Scholars Program established by the Program for Christian Leadership.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHAMINADE SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Discussions of the participants' perceptions of the Chaminade Scholars Program included the following specific areas:

- General reactions
- Reactions to specific courses
- Reactions to program augmentations
- Impact of the program on the UD community

General reactions

Overall the participants in the focus group had a strong, positive reaction to the Chaminade Scholars Program. This disposition was grounded in the value of the relationships formed among those in the class. Time after time participants noted the importance of the associations that had been formed with each other

and concluded that this was the most meaningful aspect of the program. Some comments included the following:

The most important accomplishment of the program is the feeling of a strong community. This is intangible and difficult to articulate and measure.

There has been a lot of personal support from people in this group.

We are united.

These are the people who are my friends; we go beyond the professional relationships that exist with others outside this group.

The participants, as expected, feel a personal investment in the program and want to see it not only continue, but improve. Building on the understanding that they were members of the very first class of Chaminade Scholars, they offered a variety of observations and suggestions.

- The Chaminade Scholars program was, in general, different from the program the students expected when they were admitted. They expected more opportunities for shared experiences and time together. Given that they value the relationships with each other, this is understandable, and is a theme that emerged throughout the discussion.
- The group held a common desire for service and would have valued additional opportunities for service activities and projects. While there were some limited opportunities offered in classes, the group would have welcomed more help and guidance in their pursuit of a service project involving everyone in the class.
- On a related topic, the participants expected the program to help them find opportunities for Christian Leadership, but found they were on their own to accomplish this. While they appreciated the opportunity to participate in diverse activities, they felt disconnected from the program in these efforts.
- Again, since personal relationships were so important, the participants expressed the desire to have opportunities to get to know the Chaminade Scholars in the other three classes.
- Continuity across all four years was important. This group felt they lost touch with the program and with each other during their sophomore year and that this diminished their experience.
- The program should focus on Christian faith, not just the Catholic faith.

- Continuing with the notion that participants value the development of interpersonal relationships, they discussed their desire to have a stronger, more interactive, professional, and respectful relationship with the Director of the program. They would like the program Director to participate in the retreats, to come to some of the classes, and to be easily accessible. They suggested that perhaps this means another staff person needs to actually administer the program, while the Director is responsible for the courses, the augmented features of the program, and all other aspects of the students' experience.
- The participants welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the program, but would prefer to offer anonymous feedback directly to the Lilly Advisory Council.

Specific courses

The participants were asked to discuss the three courses included in the curriculum for the Chaminade Scholars. On multiple occasions the participants identified ASI 358, Christianity, Citizenship, and Society, as the single most valuable course (senior year, fall semester).

This course really opened my eyes. It helped me to recognize importance of self-reflection and helped me to actually understand the entire program.

Vocation and citizenship were connected in this class. It showed us all kinds of ways to make this happen, the things we can do.

Appreciation for the other two classes (ASI 356 Christian Traditions of Prayer, and ASI 357 Vocation and the Arts) varied based on the participant's individual interests. The group did agree, however, that the courses could have been better organized, coordinated one with another, and customized for the program.

We are competent students, here to learn, and we appreciate organization.

They had mixed reactions to the courses that were not exclusively designated for the Chaminade Scholars. While they seemed to prefer having exclusive courses, they did appreciate the value added by having other students in the courses.

Program augmentations

A variety of program augmentations were discussed, including the retreats, the trip to Florence, mentors, thesis, and portfolios. The participants explained that while the retreats and the trip were highly valuable, the plan to develop mentoring relationships, the thesis, and the portfolio did not come to fruition.

By far the most value program augmentation was the trip to Florence. This trip solidified their friendships, strengthened their sense of self-confidence, and taught them to rely on each other's abilities.

The retreats, likewise, provided opportunities to solidify relationships and to engage in intellectual discussions. The group expressed the desire to have more opportunities such as these.

While they expected a mentoring program, a thesis requirement, and the building of a portfolio, these augmentations were not actively incorporated in their program. Of these, it was only the mentoring program that was requested by the participants. They agreed this would be valuable to incorporate in the future.

They also suggested incorporating in the program more social events during their first semester together and a specific event for Chaminade Scholars during reunion weekend.

During reunion weekend we want some kind of Chaminade Scholars program – something just for us.

Impact of the program on the UD community

An expectation of the program is that Chaminade Scholars will have an impact on the UD community, for example by influencing the quality of campus liturgies. The participants did not directly discuss the impact of the program on the UD community, but suggested that their participation in a wide variety of service activities gave them the opportunity to make significant contributions.

INFLUENCE OF PROGRAM ON CAREER CHOICE

In order to investigate the impact of the Chaminade Scholars Program on the participants' career plans, they were first asked to discuss their career choices unaided by any reference to the program. At this point they described the choices they had made, including choices to attend graduate school, to travel, and to pursue careers, but when asked what influenced those choices they referenced personal interests and long-standing desires.

When asked specifically to discuss the influence of the program (aided) on their career choices, they did not talk about their specific choices, but rather about how they helped each other to understand and accept the uncertainty associated with career choices. Their interaction with each other gave them perspective and the opportunity to understand that they have the opportunity to incorporate faith in any career path they select. They also found it difficult to differentiate the

impact of the program from the impact of their other UD experiences. Some of their comments follow.

In committing to a life as a lay Marianist, I am making a formal commitment to career and to life choices that are grounded in the philosophy of “hand, heart, and head.” This comes from my experiences with the Marianists, not just the Chaminade Scholars program.

I learned that vocation means I can work in any secular area; it doesn’t have to be ministry, and that I can still bring Christ into all aspects of my life.

A holistic life is a faith life that is broader than the church. I can use my gifts and talents to serve others. I learned to celebrate the diversity of our different majors because we are all using our unique gifts and talents.

I redefined my understanding of vocation and personal life. It helped me to understand that I can be an artist and utilize Christian themes without being bound by a major in Religion.

UNDERSTANDING OF VOCATION

The participants believe they do have a better understanding of vocation than when they started the program. Several confided that they had not yet identified their vocation, but that the program had provided a foundation for reflection and personal development that would lead to that identification. As one participant noted:

The best part of the program was not understanding vocation, but that I learned more about myself through these people and watching these people interact with each other.

Others commented that they had changed on a personal level over the four years, but that it was not due specifically to the program, but rather to the totality of their UD experience.

SPECIFIC GOALS OF THE CHAMINADE SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The specific goals of the Chaminade Scholars Program were established by the Program for Christian Leadership and address the following:

- Understand and value what it means to be committed to living in a way that is consistent with your faith.

- Understand your life in a theologically informed way, including understanding Christian vocation and being willing to make choices based on that understanding.
- Prepared to assume leadership roles in your community, church, and profession.
- Understand how your religious convictions relate to your life's work.

All of these goals were addressed and considered at various times during the discussion and it was apparent, based on the focus group conversation, that those in this first class of Chaminade Scholars have, to varying degrees, achieved them all. Beyond these goals, the most important part of this program is the opportunity to establish long-lasting relationships with others who share common values.

**APPENDIX A
PROGRAM FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP
FACULTY PARTICIPANTS IN FFVE FOCUS GROUP
APRIL 11, 2005**

PARTICIPANT	MAJOR(S)
Sonibel Acosta	Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Sociology minor
David Breckwith	Chemical Engineering, Bioengineering minor
Anna Coleman	General Studies, Psychology minor, Religious Studies minor
Melissa Diemunsch	Psychology, Religious Studies
Abby Doss	Music Education
Katie Lackermann	Mechanical Engineering Technology, Military Science minor
Ann Marie LeQuyea	Music Therapy, Psychology minor
Maureen O'Rourke	Adolescent to Young Adult Education Social Studies, Women's Studies minor
Robert Short	English
Elizabeth Tomber	Human Rights International Studies

**APPENDIX B
PROGRAM FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP
CHAMINADE SCHOLARS FOCUS GROUP GUIDE
APRIL 4, 2005**

**Program for Christian Leadership
Chaminade Scholars Focus Group Discussion Guide
Monday, April 4, 2005, 6:00 p.m.**

University of Dayton, BRG Focus Group Facility

Introductions: Moderator, facility, observers, video recording

Topic: We are here this evening to talk about your experiences as a Chaminade Scholar, the impact of the program on you, and your recommendations for the program. Information from our discussion will be shared with those responsible for the design and implementation of the program.

Participant Introductions: Please introduce yourself by giving me your name, your major and any minors or other majors that you are studying. Also, please verify that you are graduating soon – this term? Next term?

1. I'm sure you're all looking forward to graduation, so let's talk about your plans. What will you be doing after graduation? What has influenced your choice? How did you decide what to do? What impact, if any, did Chaminade Scholars programs have on your decision?
 - a. Did you think of pursuing the ministry? Why or why not?
 - b. Did you consider graduate programs? Which ones and why?
2. If you were asked to describe to me the Chaminade Scholars program, what would you tell me? Suppose you were trying to convince me to apply to the program, what would you say to me? Now, suppose you were trying to convince me not to apply to the program, what would you say?
3. Thinking of all those things we just talked about, what were the best, or most meaningful to you and why? What changed you the most?
4. Now, what were the worst parts and why?
5. What about the General Education Cluster? What are the positives? The negatives? What is your opinion of the specific courses? ASI 356 Christian Tradition of Prayer? ASI 357 Vocation and the Arts? ASI 358 Christianity, Citizenship, and Society?

6. What about the workshops? The portfolio? Your mentor?

7. When you reflect on your understanding of vocation when you were a first year student compared with your understanding now, how is it different? What does vocation mean to you now?

8. Now I'm going to ask you to react to some very specific issues. These issues are directly related to the goals of the Program for Christian Leadership. We have talked about some of them already, but I want to really focus on them now.
 - a. Do you feel, as a result of the program, that you understand and value what it means to be committed to living in a way that is consistent with your faith?
 - b. Do you, as a result of the program, better understand your life in a theologically informed way? Has your sense of Christian vocation changed? To what extent are you willing to make choices based on these understandings?
 - c. Do you feel prepared to assume leadership roles in the community, the church, and your profession?
 - d. What is your understanding of how your religious convictions relate to your life's work?

9. What, in your opinion, has been the impact of Chaminade Scholars on the UD community? What, if anything, has made a difference? Influence on the quality of campus liturgies?