

Cultivating Institutional Identity and Mission Within a Shared Governance Structure in
Theological Schools: An Exploration of the Governing Board's Role and Processes

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By

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Title of dissertation: CULTIVATING INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY AND MISSION WITHIN
A SHARED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE IN THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS: AN
EXPLORATION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD'S ROLE AND PROCESSES

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I certify that I have read this manuscript, and, in my judgment, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my first political science professor, Dr. Lyman (“Bud”) Kellstedt, who planted the seed for doctoral work early in my college career, and to my grandmother, Virginia Holst, whose zeal and love for learning, for Jesus, and for people marked all the years of her life.

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To my beloved husband, David, all I can say is I love you and thank you. For the office you built me, the patience you've shown me, and your constant love and support. Yes, I am [finally] a doctor now.

This journey has been different than I envisioned in my college years, but it has been the one given to me by my heavenly Father, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He has provided me with everything I needed at every step. To Him to be all the glory. May He use this effort and my future endeavors to further His kingdom in this world.

Abstract

Acting within a complex authority structure marked by shared governance, the governing boards of higher education institutions serve as the legal body holding ultimate responsibility for the institution's identity, mission, and institutional health. The past and current experience of Protestant theological schools has revealed institutional leaders, particularly the governing board, must pay attention to their identity and mission to continue to meet the needs of their religious communities. This study focused on the reality that governing boards of theological schools must cultivate the school's identity and mission despite various pressures. This research conducted a multiple instrumental case study to explore how the governing boards of seven Evangelical Protestant theological schools cultivate institutional identity and mission within the school's governance structure amid current challenges. Using data collected from in-depth interviews and document analysis, the research findings are presented in seven individual cases and a thematic cross-case comparison to reveal how governing boards sought to fulfill their responsibility to cultivate the institution's mission. The research uncovered governing boards that reflected a deep commitment to the mission and a willingness to adapt structure, processes, programs, wording, culture, roles, and networks as they addressed challenges through the lens of identity and mission within a shared governance structure. The ability of governing boards to adapt their structure, processes, and practices and encourage mission-appropriate flexibility and adaptation within the institution is a crucial way to help cultivate institutional mission and identity.

Keywords: theological schools, governing boards, organizational identity, organizational mission, faith-based higher education institutions, shared governance

Table of Contents

DEDICATION.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
ABSTRACT.....	7
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	8
LIST OF TABLES.....	16
LIST OF FIGURES.....	17
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.....	18
Background and Significance of the Study.....	19
Cultural Pressures.....	20
Educational Pressures.....	23
Financial Pressures.....	24
Theological Challenges.....	25
Cultivating Identity and Mission.....	26
Governance.....	28
Purpose of the Study.....	30
Research Questions.....	31
Primary Research Question.....	31
Subquestions.....	31
Theoretical Framework.....	32
Defined Terms.....	34
Faith-Based Higher Education Institution.....	34
Governing Board.....	35
Higher Education Institution.....	35
Hybrid Organization.....	35
Mission Drift.....	35

Organizational Identity	35
Organizational Mission.....	36
Shared Governance	36
Theological Schools.....	36
Research Design and Methodology	36
Case Study	37
Specific Research Design	38
Data Collection Methods	41
Limitations.....	44
Dissertation Overview	46
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	48
Organizational Identity	50
Identity: Central, Enduring, and Distinctive	50
Identity: External Legitimacy	52
Organizational Image.....	53
Hybrid Organizations.....	54
Religious Organizations as Hybrid Organizations.....	56
Organizational Mission.....	61
Organizational Mission and Nonprofit Organizations	62
Organizational Mission for Higher Education Institutions.....	64
Organizational Mission Drift.....	71
Identity Drift	72
Concept of Mission Drift	73
Faith-Based Organizations.....	73
Faith-Based Higher Education Institutions.....	75

Theological Schools.....	84
Origins.....	85
Colonial Schools.....	86
Independent Theological Schools.....	87
Academic and Scientific Theological Education.....	88
Practical Ministerial Education.....	89
The Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting.....	91
Statement of the Purpose of Theological Schools	91
Broadly Accepted Standards.....	93
Challenges Facing Theological Schools.....	93
Cultural Pressures	94
Educational Pressures	96
Financial Pressures.....	97
Theological Challenges.....	98
Governance in Higher Education.....	100
Organized Anarchy.....	102
Loosely Coupled Systems.....	103
Professional Bureaucracy/Adhocracy.....	104
Models of Governance.....	105
Shared Governance.....	107
Faculty.....	108
Administration	108
Governing Board.....	109
The Governing Board and Its Work	110
Purpose and Role	111

Fiduciary Governance.....	112
Strategic Governance.....	112
Generative Governance.....	113
Models for Governance	113
Policy Governance.....	114
Governance as Leadership.....	115
Board Effectiveness.....	117
Obstacles to Effectiveness	117
Contextual.....	118
Educational	119
Interpersonal	119
Analytical.....	120
Political.....	120
Strategic	120
Board Structure and Processes.....	121
Distinctives of Governing Boards of Theological Institutions.....	122
Governance as Calling and Practice	123
Discernment	124
Stewardship.....	125
Faithfulness.....	126
Governance in Theological Schools	127
Chapter Summary	129
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	132
Research Paradigm	132
Positionality Statement.....	134

Research Method	136
Case Study in Subject-Specific Literature	136
Case Study	138
Specific Study Design.....	139
Time Period.....	140
Population and Sample	141
Sample.....	143
Data Collection	145
Document Collection and Analysis	145
Interviews.....	146
Trustworthiness of Data.....	149
Credibility	150
Transferability.....	151
Dependability	151
Confirmability.....	152
Data Analysis.....	152
Organizing and Managing the Data	152
Reading and Memoing Emerging Ideas.....	153
Describing, Classifying, and Interpreting the Data.....	153
Case Report.....	154
Ethical Considerations	154
Voluntary Participation and No Harm	155
Confidentiality	156
Data Security and Storage.....	157
Analysis and Reporting.....	157

Chapter Summary	158
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS.....	160
Sample	161
Data Collection	161
Case Studies.....	163
School 1	163
School 2	171
School 3	179
School 4	186
School 5	194
School 6	201
School 7	208
Thematic Cross-Case Analysis	215
Actions by Governing Boards.....	215
Governing Board Structure.....	217
Denominational Influence.....	219
Governing Board Role	221
Governing Board Culture.....	223
Pressures and Challenges.....	224
Chapter Summary	225
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	226
Discussion and Interpretation of Findings.....	227
What Pressures Does the Institution Face That Challenge Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 4/Theme 6)	227
How Does the Institution’s Governance Structure Affect Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 2/Themes 3 and 4).....	234

How Does the Governing Board’s Role Within the Governance Structure of the Institution Affect What It Does to Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 3/Themes 4 and 5).....	243
What Does the Governing Board Do to Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 1/Themes 1 and 5).....	252
How Does the Governing Board of a Theological School Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission Within the Institution’s Governance Structure Amid the Pressures Faced by the School?	262
Recommendations for Further Research	267
Implications for Practice.....	270
Be Aware of and Engaged With the Challenges.....	270
Consider the Influence of the Denomination/Religious Community	270
Consider Board Structure.....	271
Engage in Strategic and Generative Leadership Appropriate to Policy Governance	272
Cultivate Open Communication and Transparency Among Stakeholders	273
Develop and Follow Robust New Board Member Processes	273
Commit to the Identity and Mission While Recognizing a Need for Flexibility.....	273
Embrace Spiritual Practices	274
Conclusion.....	274
REFERENCES	278
APPENDIX A – PARTICIPATION REQUEST.....	309
APPENDIX B – RESEARCH SUMMARY.....	312
APPENDIX C – ORGANIZATIONAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT	315
APPENDIX D – INFORMED CONSENT.....	316
APPENDIX E – DOCUMENT REVIEW GUIDE.....	319
APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	321
APPENDIX G – PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER	324

APPENDIX H – JOHNSON UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER..... 326
APPENDIX I – CITI CERTIFICATION 327

List of Tables

Table 1. Theological Schools Included in Sample.....	161
Table 2. Sources of Data by School.....	162
Table 3. Actions Taken by Governing Boards.....	216
Table 4. Tightness of Board Structure	218
Table 5. Types of Denominational Influence	220
Table 6. Strength of Denominational Influence.....	220
Table 7. Level of Policy Governance Exhibit by Board.....	222
Table 8. Level of Board Involvement in Affairs of School Related to Mission/Identity	223
Table 9. Pressures and Challenges Faced by Schools.....	225
Table 10. Responses to Denominational Decline	237
Table 11. Type of Leadership Exhibited by Governing Board.....	247
Table 12. Board Actions Characterized by Competency.....	253
Table 13. Adaptations and Learnings by Boards.....	264

List of Figures

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework	33
Figure 2. Markers of Culture	224
Figure 3. Mission Involvement and Board Structure.....	242

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Mission and governance are two fundamental factors considered in the accreditation of higher education institutions (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b; Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-b; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, n.d.; New England Commission on Higher Education, n.d.). Within higher education institutions, governance is a complex activity involving several decision-making groups; however, the governing board is the legal body ultimately responsible for the institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Theological schools are a subset of faith-based higher education institutions, functioning as hybrid institutions with one part of their identity and mission centered in the church and the other part centered in higher education, with their viability closely connected to the viability of the religious communities they serve (Aleshire, 2008). These institutions currently face many cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures that impact their mission, requiring sophisticated governance led by an effective governing board (Aleshire, 2008, 2021; G. T. Miller, 2014). The past and current experience of Protestant theological schools in North America has revealed attention to their identity and mission by institutional leaders, particularly the governing board, is required for them to continue to meet the needs of their religious communities (Aleshire, 2021; González, 2015; G. T. Miller, 1990, 2007, 2014).

This research focused on the reality that governing boards of theological schools must cultivate the school's identity and mission despite various pressures. This key role of the governing board is often fulfilled within a shared governance structure, which may hinder its effectiveness. This introductory chapter sets forth the background for and significance of this research, the purpose of the study, the specific research questions, and a brief overview of the

key concepts and framework used in this study. It concludes by describing the specific research design and methods and recognizing the study's limitations.

Background and Significance of the Study

In his reflection on the state of theological schools early in the 21st century, Aleshire (2008), former Executive Director of The Association of Theological Schools, concluded:

Theological schools need governing boards that understand how integral these schools are to the vitality of communities of faith and how critical communities of faith are to a society that needs moral understanding translated into social witness, religious commitment translated into a winsome religious voice, and mercy translated into acts of service. (p. 166)

Theological schools, the focus of this study, are institutions specifically founded to educate religious leaders and provide intellectual support to a Christian community (Aleshire, 2008). As a unique type of institution reflecting the goals of the church and the academy, the theological school brings together the people and the materials necessary for deep consideration of all facets of the Christian faith, whether objective or subjective (G. T. Miller, 2007). Theological schools exist to equip the mission of the church and, ultimately, the mission of God in this world (Aleshire, 2021). Thus, a fundamental part of their identity and mission is defined by their unique role as the intellectual center for the church (Niebuhr, 1956).

Theological schools are also academic institutions, subject to the standards of the academy and federally recognized accrediting agencies (Aleshire, 2021). These schools are a group of faith-based higher education institutions typically offering graduate-level professional education. They are most often accredited by specialized accrediting agencies federally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, such as The Association of Theological

Schools (ATS), both an institutional accreditor and a programmatic accreditor, as well as federally recognized institutional accrediting agencies, such as the Higher Learning Commission or the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, to name a few.

By their very nature, theological schools are hybrid institutions, with one part of their identity rooted in the church and the other in higher education (Aleshire, 2021). As such, they are subject to the pressures applicable to religious organizations and higher education institutions (Aleshire, 2008). This group of higher education institutions has found itself under cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures, which have required them to give more intentional focus to their identity, mission, and governance to survive and thrive (Aleshire, 2008, 2021; González, 2015; Hufman, 2022b; Kuan, 2023; G. T. Miller, 2014; Newman, 2020). Indeed, the historical purpose of these schools to serve as “the intellectual center of the Church’s life” (Niebuhr, 1956, p. 107) has been significantly challenged over the last several decades, leading to calls for “no less than a radical transformation in theological education . . . grounded in a renewed vision” (González, 2015, p. 144). These challenges come from multiple sources, highlighting the hybrid nature of theological schools. As discussed in the following section, some of these sources include cultural pressures related to changes in religious, moral, and ethnic demographics; educational pressures caused by changes in curricula, pedagogy, and delivery methods; financial pressures caused by enrollment challenges and decreased funding from denominations; and theological pressures caused by varying hermeneutical interpretations of Scripture and less allegiance by students to specific denominational particularities.

Cultural Pressures

A significant influencing pressure is changes in the broader culture. In recent decades, considerable changes have occurred in the religious landscape of the United States, including a

decline among most Christian denominations (Nadeem, 2022). Data collected by the Pew Research Center (2021) reflected this decline, with 90% of the U.S. population identifying as Christian in 1972 but only 64% in 2020. Declines have occurred within Protestantism, with 52% of the U.S. population identifying as Protestant in 2007 and only 40% identifying the same in 2021. Similar decreases have been reported among those identifying as evangelical: 30% in 2007 but only 24% in 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2021).

The decline among Christian individuals, churches, and denominations has led to a decrease in the enrollments of many theological schools, with 55% of ATS member schools reporting a decrease in enrollment over the last decade (Meinzer, 2021). Christianity no longer holds the public cultural standing and privilege it held in earlier decades, denominations have become weaker, and society has become increasingly disinterested in religion (G. T. Miller, 2014). In 1972, only 5% of the U.S. population identified as having no religious identity; in 2020, this figure had grown to 30% (Pew Research Center, 2021). Furthermore, in 2021, only 37% of Americans held high confidence in the church (Gallup, 2021).

The demographics of American Christianity have also changed as society has become more diverse, the changes reflecting a decrease in white Christians. The 2016 *American Values Atlas* noted a reduction in white Protestant Christians from 55% in 1976 to 30% in 2016, with a similar decline among white evangelical Christians from 23% to 17% over the same period (Cox & Jones, 2017). Following a similar pattern, 2011–2021 saw a 7% decrease among white pastors but an 11.6% increase among African American pastors, a 0.6% increase among Asian pastors, and a 17.8% increase among Hispanic pastors (Zippia, 2021). Theological schools historically have been institutions serving primarily white churches and denominations; however, in the last few decades, these schools have experienced enrollment growth primarily from nonwhite

students, particularly among African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics (González, 2015). Data gathered annually by the Association of Theological Schools reflected a 34.9% decline in white student enrollment in Mainline Protestant schools from 2011–2021. During this same period, Evangelical Protestant schools experienced a 46.5% increase in enrollment by nonwhite students and a 4% increase among white students (Olsztyn, n.d.). Theological schools have been experiencing and responding to the increased focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity within society and higher education (E. S. Brown, 2018).

In addition, cultural changes in acceptable sexual and moral practices have required a response from theological schools (G. T. Miller, 2014). Historically, Christian teaching held to a traditional definition of marriage as between a man and woman, discouraged divorce, adultery, and sexual practice outside of marriage, and considered the practice of homosexuality as sinful (G. T. Miller, 2007). However, as changes in the larger culture have led to acceptance and legalization of divorce, cohabitation, homosexuality, LGBTQ+ rights, gay marriage, and transgenderism, the church and its schools have wrestled over their stance on these issues as well with certain denominations and schools accepting and embracing the change in sexual ethics and other groups and schools rejecting such changes (G. T. Miller, 2014).

Changes in the culture can necessitate institutional changes, as seen in the case of New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). NYTS made several significant institutional adjustments, including delivering classes in multiple languages, offering classes in the evening and on Saturdays, and creating partnerships with accredited undergraduate programs to enable ethnic minority students lacking undergraduate education to obtain the necessary academic credentials required for enrollment in the graduate-level seminary (González, 2015). Despite these changes, NYTS has planned to merge with another seminary after June 2024 (Walrond, 2023).

Educational Pressures

As higher education institutions, theological schools are accountable to standards that provide the basis for judgment of the quality of the school and its program (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b). These standards include, among others, the quality of faculty, the size and quality of library resources, endowments and financial resources, the quality of the physical campus, educational delivery methods, and the outcomes demonstrated in the employability and placement of graduates (Aleshire, 2021). To maintain accreditation and continue to attract students, schools must adequately meet the standards and expectations set by the higher education community. Although considerate of the broad type of educational institution, accreditation standards have a “homogenizing influence on institutional forms” (Aleshire, 2021, p. 60). Criteria for accreditation for higher education center on institutional mission, but changes within the field of higher education can challenge an institution’s identity and mission by requiring institutions to respond to changes in curriculum, enrollment, pedagogy, and outcomes (Aleshire, 2021; Huffman, 2022b).

The impact of these pressures has been seen in the creation of new degree programs, such as the Doctor of Ministry, and professional master’s degree programs, such as counseling, which require institutional resources beyond the traditional Master of Divinity degree (G. T. Miller, 2014). Within Evangelical Protestant schools, enrollment in a professional Master of Arts degree program increased 38.8% over the 10 years 2011–2021, with a similar increase of 32.8% in Doctor of Ministry enrollments over the same period among the same group of schools (Olszty, n.d.).

A similar trend among theological schools has been the decrease in requirements for the Master of Divinity degree, which may be a cause of the 34% decline in enrollments in the Master

of Divinity degree among Mainline Protestant schools between 2011–2021, as well as the slight 5.7% increase in the same degree program over the same period within Evangelical Protestant schools (McKanna, 2022; Olsztyn, n.d.).

Furthermore, theological education has traditionally occurred on residential campuses through in-person classes; however, a key trend in higher education has been the increased use of distance delivery and digital learning tools to engage students who need or prefer more flexible educational programs (S. L. Miller & Scharen, 2017; Tanner, 2017a, 2017b). The COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated the transition to digital learning for most schools, requiring decisions about the fulfillment of the goals of theological education using new methods (Aleshire, 2021; Saunders, 2022).

Financial Pressures

Historically, theological schools have faced significant financial pressures largely due to their dependence on supporting churches and denominations (G. T. Miller, 2014). As private, independent institutions of higher education, theological schools receive financial support from private sources, such as the financial gifts of individuals, churches, and denominations, and from tuition paid by enrolled students either directly or subsidized by federal student loans. These schools must maintain similar faculties, facilities, resources, and programs to those of universities without the benefit of the significant resource base available to universities from endowments and state and federal funding (G. T. Miller, 2014). Denominational funding of schools has increasingly declined over the last few decades, and the schools have struggled to maintain sufficient student enrollment to bring in adequate tuition (Aleshire, 2021).

Evangelical schools mainly rely on private donor contributions and tuition income because their endowments are much smaller than mainline Protestant schools. Endowment per

full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment among Mainline Protestant schools was \$705,682 in 2021, while endowment per FTE enrollment among Evangelical Protestant schools was only \$95,718 (Olsztyn, n.d.). Giving per FTE enrollment among Evangelical Protestant schools declined by 4.8% during 2011–2021. In contrast, revenue from net tuition per FTE enrollment increased by 6.7%, and revenue from scholarships per FTE enrollment increased by 46.5% over the same period (Olsztyn, n.d.). Financial challenges have caused many schools to consider their identity and mission and make changes necessary to meet financial problems, which can include decisions to close the school, sell a campus, merge with another institution, or open the school to faculty and students from other religions (Huffman, 2022a; MacKaye, 2009; Nelson, 2013; Ries, 2015; Tajanlangit, 2022). Since 2010, over 45 ATS member schools have closed, merged, or withdrawn (Gin, 2020).

Theological Challenges

The challenges to biblical authority that began with the introduction of the historical-critical scientific study of the biblical text in the late 1800s have continued to increase over the last several decades (G. T. Miller, 2014). Along with the divide between liberal and conservative theological convictions over biblical inerrancy, further deconstruction of the biblical text and classical theology has occurred by scholars and theologians who apply a liberationist, feminist, critical race, or queer hermeneutic to biblical and theological studies (G. T. Miller, 2014). The question of biblical inerrancy led to significant transformations in the governing board, administration, and faculty at several leading seminaries, including Fuller Seminary, Princeton Seminary, Concordia Seminary, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Highsmith, 1999; G. T. Miller, 2014).

Historically, theological schools were primarily established by a specific denomination or religious group to train their leaders consistent with the particularities of their confessional tradition (G. T. Miller, 1990). However, in the current environment, relationships with supporting denominations have weakened, confessional particularities have become less important, and students often choose to study in schools different from their denominational background (G. T. Miller, 2014). These changes were reflected in the 33.9% decline in student enrollment over 10 years in traditional Mainline Protestant schools versus the 22.1% increase over the same period among the Evangelical Protestant schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). The resulting impact of these diverse theological perspectives has challenged the mission and identity of theological schools as they respond to new perspectives and welcome students from different confessional traditions (G. T. Miller, 2014; M. Young, 2023).

Finally, the profession of pastoral ministry has seen significant challenges over recent years, particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic (McConnell, 2021). A recent study by the Barna Group revealed a 20% decrease in satisfaction levels among current pastors during 2015–2022 and an overall decline of 28% in confidence in their ministerial calling during the same period (Barna Group, n.d.). However, this decline in satisfaction levels has not changed the average quitting rate among pastors, which was estimated to be approximately 1.5% annually (Green, 2015; McConnell, 2021).

Cultivating Identity and Mission

In response to these cultural, educational, financial, and theological trends, “theological schools have needed to devote increasing attention to their institutional mission” (Aleshire, 2021, p. 61). The past and current experience of Protestant theological schools in the United States has revealed attention to their identity and mission by institutional leaders, particularly the governing

board, is required for them to continue to meet the needs of their religious communities (Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 1990, 2007, 2014). A key theme in the literature on faith-based colleges and universities, many of which began as church-related schools with a mission to educate people of the church for service both within and outside the church, was the difficulty of cultivating or even maintaining their religious identity and mission over time (Arthur, 2008; Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Cuninggim, 1994; Dovre, 2002; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Schuman, 2010).

The history of some faith-based schools revealed that the conflicting tensions between the religious community and the secular academy led to a weakening of the school's religious identity and mission in what has been described as mission drift, or "the process through which the organization's goals can be deflected or sacrificed in the interests of organizational survival, or as the result of a loss of focus" (Minkoff & Powell, 2006, p. 592). Yet, in other faith-based schools, the religious identity and mission have been maintained and even strengthened, leading scholars to consider how the various institutional stakeholders might further cultivate the religious identity and mission (Benne, 2001; Dovre, 2002; Glanzer et al., 2017a, 2019; Kaul et al., 2017; O'Connell, 2002; Rine et al., 2013; Simon, 2003; VanZanten, 2011). For faith-based higher education institutions, "the reality of the situation and therefore the fundamental urgency . . . is that these institutions must be distinct and translate that distinctiveness into a religious institutional academic mission" (O'Connell, 2002, p. 70).

Unfortunately, the literature on higher education institutions, including the substantial literature on faith-based colleges and universities, has largely ignored theological schools in favor of focused attention on colleges and universities of all types. Thus, the current study sought to extend the conversation of identity and mission within faith-based higher education

institutions to theological schools to assist these institutions as they respond to challenges through greater attention to institutional identity and mission.

Governance

Cultivating identity and mission requires attention by leaders involved in institutional governance, which accrediting agencies recognize through the governance standard criterion (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b; Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-b; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, n.d.; New England Commission on Higher Education, n.d.). Governance and mission work together in higher education institutions. Governance of these institutions is recognized as particularly complex because the responsibility and authority are distributed among many groups, and the processes for ordering and implementing this structure are difficult to manage, leaving decision-making processes unclear (Birnbaum, 1991; Lewis, 2009).

Studies of governance of higher education institutions have led to various models used as a lens through which to analyze an institution (Birnbaum, 1991; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Manning, 2018; Tierney, 2008). Yet, it has been noted that most of the writing about governance has remained theoretical and “based in neither qualitative nor quantitative methodologies . . . [Indeed], only a handful of studies have utilized explicit theoretical tools to diagnose a particular area of inquiry such as the role of the faculty senate” (Tierney, 2008, pp. 150–151). Despite the complexity of an institution’s structure and process, governance ultimately begins and ends with the governing board (Aleshire, 2008; Pierce, 2014). The governing board of an educational institution serves as its legal and ultimate authority. Its fundamental role is fiduciary (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2015). It is ultimately responsible for the institution’s administration, ethos, mission, identity, and resources (Houle, 1989).

The governing board's work invites leadership as it guides the institution through "informed decision making and by critical and creative thought" (Aleshire, 2008, p. 98). This work begins by discerning, defining, and articulating an institutional mission consistent with its identity, values, and history and then continues through the implementation of the mission (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Implementing the mission involves setting the strategic direction through attainable goals and empowering the administration and faculty to take action to fulfill the mission by achieving the goals (Aleshire, 2008). Board work then ends with ensuring that this mission is maintained over time through proper oversight and evaluation of the president (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

In the process of its work, the board appoints, supports, monitors, and evaluates the president, ensures the financial solvency of the institution, serves as the connection between the institution and its community, and assesses its performance (Nason, 1982). Conceptually and practically, the governing board is the guardian of the institution's identity, mission, values, resources, and reputation (Chait et al., 2005; Kerr & Gade, 1989). Boards are often overlooked members of the shared governance process; yet, they serve influential roles in the institution's overall success through their fiduciary, strategic, and generative work (Aleshire, 2008; Chait et al., 2005; Novak & Johnson, 2005).

The literature on the governance of nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions has similarly ignored theological institutions except to extend the prescriptive and experience-based recommendations offered by consultants to their governing boards (Wheeler, 2002, 2015). Indeed, In Trust Center for Theological Schools, a leading consulting group serving theological schools, spent the last 5 years engaging the governing boards of more than 40 theological schools:

To address one of the most persistent challenges to good governance: making decisions. . . . It seems that many boards—despite being presented with data on enrollment, costs, market trends, and finances—find it difficult to move from information-gathering to decision-making. (Kardash, 2023, p. 3)

As much as good governance practices informed by experience may be helpful to theological school trustees, governance in faith-based higher education institutions includes more than the practices of good governance offered by the governance literature available to nonprofit and higher education institutions. Governance in theological schools finds its foundation in the unique calling and mission given to it by God, and it is conducted as a communal effort to serve God by fulfilling the mission and calling of the institution (Aleshire, 2008; Hester, 2000). Trustees who practice governance live out their faith in God, help the institution fulfill God's purposes, and remember that the institutions and the persons involved are ultimately accountable to God (Hester, 2000; G. T. Miller, 2007; Niebuhr, 1956).

In response to these gaps in the literature, this study addressed the following research problem: the governing board of a theological school must cultivate institutional identity and mission amid various pressures, and it often does this within a shared governance structure that may hinder its effectiveness. The ability of a governing board to do this well matters because, ultimately, as the intellectual center of the church, these institutions and the leaders thereof are accountable to God for their work in furthering his purposes for his church in this world (G. T. Miller, 2007; Niebuhr, 1956).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple instrumental case study was to explore how the governing boards of several Evangelical Protestant theological schools cultivate institutional identity and

mission within the school's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. The research considered how a governing board understands the institution's identity and mission, how recent circumstances affecting the school influence identity and mission, and how the governing board understands its role and effectiveness within the institution's governance structure. Furthermore, the research described what each governing board did during 2012–2022 as it addressed challenges through the lens of identity and mission within the context of the institution's governance structure. It was anticipated that the findings of this research can be helpful to governing boards and administrations of theological schools and faith-based higher education institutions more broadly as they wrestle with how to govern effectively within a shared governance structure and faithfully steward the identity and mission of the institution in the current environment.

Research Questions

The research study described in this dissertation sought to address the following research questions.

Primary Research Question

How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school?

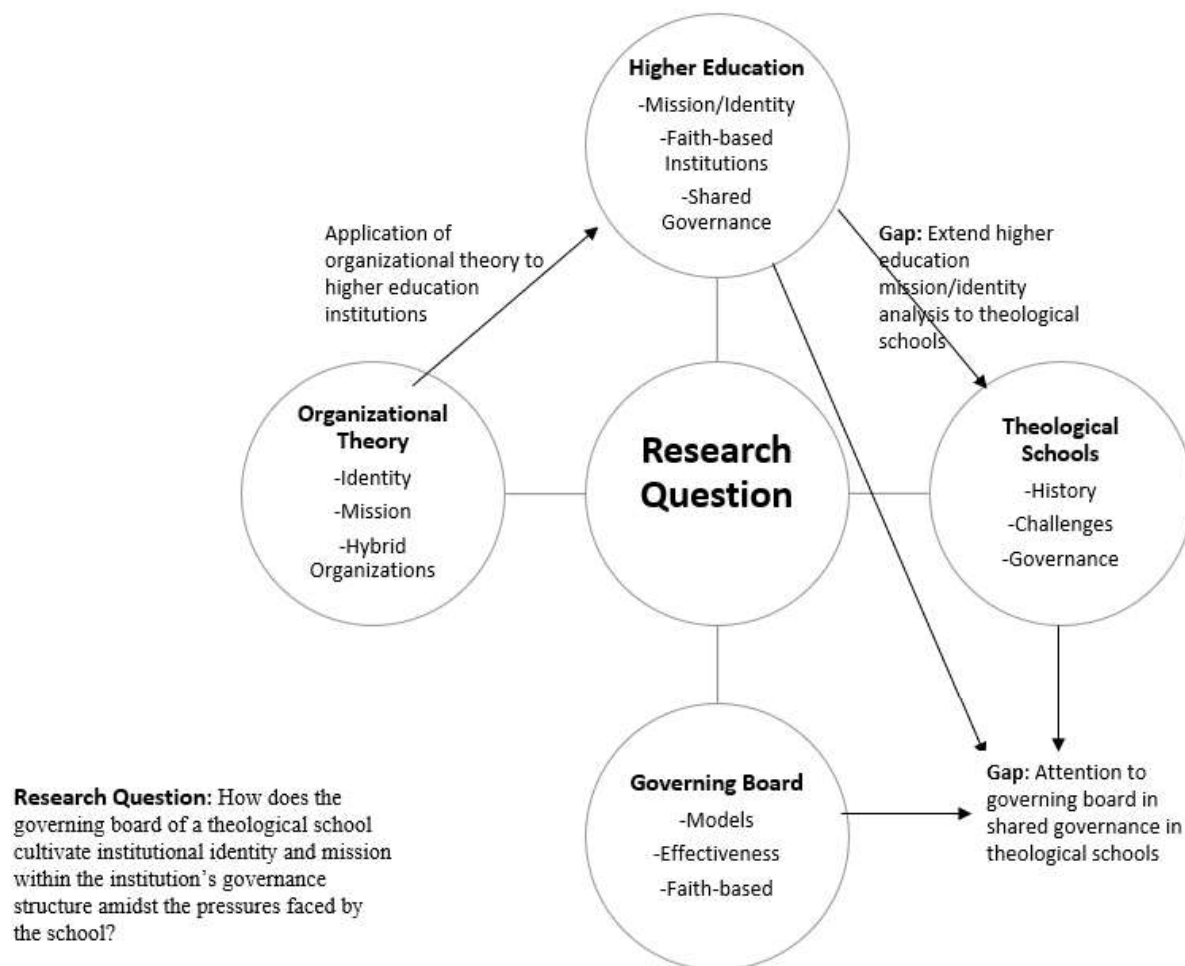
Subquestions

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution's governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board's role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?

4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 of this study combined four distinct streams of literature that interconnect to address the research question. Figure 1 depicts these four streams of literature and their connections to the research question. Exploration of the theoretical framework started with a review of the organizational theories of identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2013; Glynn, 2008), mission (Crotts et al., 2005; Grimes et al., 2019; Oster, 1995), hybrid organizations (Battilana & Lee, 2014), and mission drift (Greer & Horst, 2014; Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Then, a review of the literature applying these organizational theories of identity, mission, and hybridity to higher education institutions is included, including faith-based institutions (Henck, 2011; Hinings & Raynard, 2014; Morpew & Hartley, 2006; Seeber et al., 2019; Zenk & Louis, 2018).

Figure 1*Theoretical Framework*

A key theme in the literature related to faith-based higher education institutions is the ability of an institution to maintain and even cultivate its religious identity and mission over time, and the theoretical framework developed for this study includes discussion of the complexity found in pursuing institutional identity and mission consistency (Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Glanzer et al., 2019; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Rine et al., 2013; Schuman, 2010). The theoretical framework notes a gap in the literature related to the application of

identity and mission to theological schools and extends higher education mission and identity analyses to theological schools by providing a brief discussion of the identity and mission of theological schools over time (Aleshire, 2008; G. T. Miller, 1990, 2007, 2014).

A final key piece of the theoretical framework is the governance structure of higher education institutions, specifically the governing board's role (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Governing boards are legally and ultimately responsible for an institution's identity, mission, ethos, and financial health (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 1993, 2005). However, the literature has focused little on the role of governing boards in cultivating institutional identity and mission (Kezar, 2006; Tierney, 2008). Accordingly, the current study was situated in this gap by exploring the relationship between institutional identity and mission and institutional governance structure and governing board actions.

Governing board actions involve decision-making processes, and the theme of decision making is present throughout much of the discussion in Chapter 2. However, this study was not intended to focus specifically on decision-making practices by governing boards. As a result, a review of decision-making literature has been limited to literature discussing decision making within the context of shared governance or as part of governing boards' roles and actions. This specific focus is included in Chapter 5 as an avenue for further research.

Defined Terms

Definitions of key terms used in this study follow.

Faith-Based Higher Education Institution

A faith-based higher education institution is a higher educational institution that combines religious beliefs with an academic mission (Benne, 2001). These institutions have also

been called church-related schools (Cuninggim, 1994) and religious schools (Dovre, 2002; O'Connell, 2002). This study focused on only evangelical Protestant Christian institutions.

Governing Board

An institution's governing board is the legal fiduciary lay governance body that is ultimately responsible for the institution (Houle, 1989; Kerr & Gade, 1989). In educational institutions, this body is most often referred to as the board of trustees (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

Higher Education Institution

A higher education institution is an educational institution, such as a college, university, or similar institution, that provides accredited postsecondary education to individuals (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Manning, 2018)

Hybrid Organization

A hybrid organization is an organization that "combines and makes sense of" (Battilana & Lee, 2014, p. 397) multiple identities, activities, forms, processes, and meanings into its overall structure and functions, creating tensions that internal members must manage (Hinings & Raynard, 2014).

Mission Drift

Mission drift is defined as organizational movement away from the foundational identity and mission of the organization (Hersberger-Langloh et al., 2021; Jaquette, 2013; Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity comprises the central, enduring, and distinctive attributes the organization uses to understand who it is and legitimate itself in its broader environment (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Glynn, 2008; Whetten, 2006).

Organizational Mission

The organizational mission is the fundamental purpose and reason for being of the organization, encompassing what it does (Drucker, 1973; Morphey & Hartley, 2006; Oster, 1995).

Shared Governance

Shared governance refers to the complex decision making and authority processes of higher education institutions in which the governing board, administration, faculty, students, and other stakeholders have a role (Basinger, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Pierce, 2014).

Theological Schools

Theological schools are faith-based higher education institutions, also known as seminaries and divinity schools, specifically developed to educate religious leaders and provide intellectual support to a Christian community through accredited graduate-level education (Aleshire, 2008).

Research Design and Methodology

This study used a qualitative multiple instrumental case study design to address the guiding research questions. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when a researcher wants to understand the context in which the participants act and how this context influences their actions. It is also suitable to uncover the participant's perspectives on the phenomenon in focus, collect data from multiple sources, use inductive and deductive reasoning in the analysis process, and present results in a literary, flexible format (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). A particular strength of this paradigm is in "getting at the processes that led to the outcomes" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30) and creating a holistic account of the complexity of the processes and events under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, qualitative research is also helpful in improving “existing practices, programs, or policies” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 32). As described more fully in Chapter 3, researchers have used qualitative methods to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of how higher education institutions and their leaders wrestle with institutional identity and mission (Benne, 2001; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Schuman, 2010; Swezey & Ross, 2012; Zenk & Louis, 2018). This section describes the adoption of case study as this study’s specific research design, briefly presents the population, sample, and data collection methods, and discusses the study’s resulting limitations.

Case Study

A case study design allows a researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context. It is particularly well-suited for research that asks “how” or “why” questions but in which the researcher cannot manipulate the participants’ behavior because the phenomena are occurring or have occurred in a real-life context (Yin, 2018). Case study is also appropriate for questions focused on uncovering organizational processes (Yin, 2018).

A case study is a specific bounded system defined by parameters such as time, place, or occurrence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These studies can either be intrinsic, in which the researcher desires to learn about the particularities of a specific case, or instrumental, in which the researcher uses a particular case to learn something about another broader concept (Stake, 1995). Although case studies always consider the context in which the specific case is located, they may be holistic and focus on a single unit of analysis, such as one organization, or use an embedded design, whereby the researcher focuses on more than one unit of analysis, such as both the organization and a particular subset of the organization (Yin, 2018).

If more than one case is involved in the study, the method is considered a collective or multiple case study (Stake, 1995). Multiple case studies allow the researcher to analyze the individual case in detail and conduct cross-case comparisons to identify common themes across cases to address the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995, 2006). Multiple case study designs often provide more compelling evidence and are “therefore regarded as being more robust” (Yin, 2018, p. 54).

Specific Research Design

As discussed more fully in Chapter 3, this research study design was a multiple embedded instrumental case study. The primary research question of this study asked how the governing board’s role and processes were applied in a specific context to cultivate institutional identity and mission. The primary phenomenon under investigation was the governing board’s role and processes used in cultivating institutional identity and mission. The case was the theological school and its specific identity and mission, and the embedded unit of analysis was the governing board and its activity within the school’s governance structure.

Time Period

This study considered the school’s interaction with its identity and mission over a 10-year period (2012–2022). It focused specifically on the governing board’s engagement with issues of identity and mission during these 10 years. The range of 10 years was selected because it is a typical length of time an accreditor uses to evaluate an institution for re-affirmation of accreditation (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020a; Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-a). It is acknowledged that the last 2 years coincided with the COVID-19 global pandemic, which significantly disrupted normal operations for all higher education institutions globally. Accordingly, data specific to 2020–2022 may not represent normal organizational operations.

Research focused on leadership and decision making in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 global pandemic has been emerging (de Yarza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Although this emerging research has recognized the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, it has acknowledged that the pandemic, in many ways, exacerbated the already-present struggles and pressures on higher education institutions (Bebbington, 2021; Ramlo, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022).

Furthermore, emerging research has noted the importance of institutional identity, mission, and values in decision making during the COVID-19 global pandemic (de Yarza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022). Indeed, emerging research has noted the need for these institutions to review, reevaluate, and potentially adjust their missions and their operations to better prepare for the postpandemic environment and future crises (Bebbington, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Because crises test commitment to identity, mission, and values, data from 2020–2022 were included even though these years did not reflect normal operations.

Population

This study focused on Evangelical Protestant theological schools accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS. As described in Chapter 2, ATS is a membership organization created by theological schools to provide a network for improvement and growth within the United States and Canada. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS is separate from ATS and is the body that accredits ATS member schools. ATS has more than 270 member schools across three ecclesial families: Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic/Orthodox (Olsztyn, n.d.). As of 2021, 45% of the ATS member schools were Evangelical Protestant, 33% were Mainline Protestant, 22% were Roman Catholic or Orthodox,

and 0.37% were Jewish. In addition, 55% of member schools were denominational, representing over 70 denominations; 23% were independent, and 22% were Roman Catholic or Orthodox.

In 2022, Evangelical Protestant schools enrolled 71% of students in ATS member schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). Furthermore, from 2011–2021, Evangelical Protestant schools experienced a 22.1% increase in student enrollment, whereas Mainline Protestant schools experienced a 33.9% decrease in student enrollment schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). These data show theological students were more interested in studying in institutions identifying as Evangelical Protestant than in any other type of school. For this reason, the specific population for this research was ATS member schools accredited by ATS and identified as Evangelical Protestant.

Sample

Instrumental case study research focuses on the particularistic aspects of a case for two reasons: to understand the case and to learn about the broader phenomenon of interest through the experience of the case (Stake, 1995). In this type of research, the generalization sought is analytic generalization rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). The goal of analytic generalization is to provide evidence related to theoretical concepts or principles, thereby allowing the particularistic nature of a case study to empirically inform a more general understanding of a phenomenon occurring across situations (Yin, 2018). In this way, case study research uses the particular to inform a broader generalization of theoretical concepts or principles (Yin, 2018). Because of the goal of analytic generalization, case study research requires a purposeful sampling procedure rather than the random sampling procedure used in many quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling of cases for study is done to “maximize what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4), requiring the researcher to ask which cases can provide the greatest understanding of the phenomenon being considered.

This research explored how governing boards of theological schools cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure. To allow for theoretical replication (Yin, 2018), the schools selected came from different denominations, different regions of the United States and Canada, and were of various sizes. Another influential factor is whether the theological school is free standing or embedded in a larger institution, as its structure significantly affects the governing board's role (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). As noted previously, multiple case studies are more robust (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this research studied seven schools. Schools were selected from a pool of Evangelical Protestant schools representing a broad cross-section of the ATS member school population.

Data Collection Methods

The study used two data collection methods, which is an advantage of the case study research method (Yin, 2018). These methods included document analysis and in-depth interviews.

Document Collection and Analysis

Document analysis involves the review of written documents pertinent to the research question, which can include organizational documents, public records, personal communication, and a research reflection journal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research gathered and used documents for two distinct purposes: contextual information and triangulation.

Contextual Information. The institution's website, the data published in the ATS annual data tables for 2012–2022 related to the institution, and the ATS directory information regarding the institution's accreditation history and current accreditation cycle status were collected and reviewed. The institution's website provided public source data about the school, specifically its denominational affiliation, history, identity, mission, values, leadership, faculty, and academic

programs. The ATS data provided historical data related to enrollment, faculty headcount, expenditures, long-term investments, tuition and fees, and accreditation. These data were used as presented to prepare an institutional profile for each school to create context and allow for thick description of each case.

Institutional Documents. The following documents for each school were requested: (a) current bylaws plus any previous versions used during 2012–2022, (b) current board handbook and any prior versions used during 2012–2022, (c) board member demographic data, (d) most recent accreditation reports (e.g., self-study sections responding to criteria related to mission and governance), and (e) any other relevant documents related to institutional mission and governance provided by the institution. Subquestions 1, 2, and 3 asked about the governing board’s activities, role, and structure. These organizational documents contained written information addressing these aspects of the governing board.

Interviews

In-depth interviews are one of the primary data collection methods used in qualitative research, including case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method is used to gather as much data about a phenomenon from the perspective of the expert interviewee as possible in a short time frame (Morris, 2015). The current board chair and the president were interviewed for five of the seven schools. The current board chair could not participate in the interview process in two of the seven schools. In these cases, a former board chair who served during 2012–2022 and the president were interviewed. The current board chair, a former board chair, and the president were interviewed for one school.

Board Chair. The board chair is authorized to speak for the governing board and often publicly represents the board. In addition, the board chair oversees the governing board

processes, practices, and agenda and knows the role played by the board in the overall governance structure of the institution (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 1993; Houle, 1989).

Accordingly, the board chair was an appropriate person from whom to obtain data intended to answer the primary research question and all subquestions.

President. In addition, the institution's president was interviewed to gather data specifically related to Subquestions 2, 3, and 4. The president understood the overall governance structure of the institution and could provide data related to the specific role played by the board within this structure to address Subquestions 2 and 3. Furthermore, the president was attuned to the institution's particular pressures and could provide relevant data for Subquestion 4. Finally, the president, being part of the institution's administration and the direct employee of the governing board, also allowed for data triangulation by providing a knowledgeable yet different perspective on the governing board's activities and effectiveness in cultivating institutional identity and mission.

Additional Individuals as Needed. In some cases, the board chair did not serve in the role or even on the governing board during the entire period under study (2012–2022). In addition, in some instances, the board chair or the president suggested someone with knowledge who would help answer the research questions. For three schools, a former board chair was interviewed as part of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Key themes from these case studies were identified and used to conduct a cross-case analysis to determine what can be learned about effective board governance related to the institutional identity and mission of faith-based higher education institutions. A within-case strategy was first used to analyze each case to thoroughly understand how each case addresses

the research questions using categorical aggregation of data toward the organizing themes. Following the individual review of the cases, a cross-case analysis was conducted and organized based on the themes identified in the analysis of the particular cases (Yin, 2018).

Limitations

Qualitative and case study research are limited in generalizability (Yin, 2018). Case studies can permit analytic generalizations by allowing the particularistic aspects of an individual case to apply to different contexts through the way they inform the broader concepts and principles (Yin, 2018). The study included analysis of the governing board processes in only seven Evangelical Protestant theological schools, thereby limiting the generalizability of its findings among the broad spectrum of theological schools or other faith-based higher education institutions. However, the sample of schools purposefully allows for theoretical replication by selecting schools reflecting differing denominations, sizes, and locations. In this way, each case is informed by its unique context yet provides input on the broader theoretical concepts and principles impacting all similar institutions (Yin, 2018). Every theological school must attend to identity, mission, and governance as a requirement for accreditation and survival as a viable institution. The narratives used in this case study report were designed to allow the reader to determine whether the findings “can be transferable to other participants or situations” (Terrell, 2016, p. 174).

In addition, the research collected interview data from two people per institution, thereby limiting the data to the perspective of the individuals interviewed. Although other individuals within an institution, such as faculty and staff, have a perspective and role in the governance of an institution, this study deliberately limited its focus to the two positions carrying the most significant authority over and responsibility for the institution: the president and the board chair.

Furthermore, the perspective of the board chair provided robust evidence of the governing board because governing boards were to act as a unified body with one voice, with the board chair appointed to act as the official representative of the governing body as a whole (Carver, 2006; Houle, 1989).

It was assumed that the information the president and board chair shared was truthful and transparent. However, this assumption may have been inaccurate. The level of transparency offered by the individuals interviewed influenced the study findings, and the study design is thereby limited in this respect. To partially account for these limitations, this study included document analysis of key institutional documents as another data set to inform the research questions and provide a means of data triangulation (Yin, 2018). In this way, the data collected through the interviews of the president and the board chair, as informed by document analysis, can be considered as solid evidence of governing board processes.

This study recognized each of the seven institutions had a motive for participation in the study, which influenced the information shared. For example, interviewees shared several success stories related to effective board governance, which could have affected the overall findings by portraying boards as more effective than they truly are. To account for this limitation and to provide for triangulation, the sample included seven institutions with differing sizes, locations, and denominations. It also included two in-depth interviews and analysis of documents.

Finally, the scope of this study was limited to the governing board's role, structure, and actions as they relate to institutional identity and mission during a defined time. Historical case studies included in Chapter 2 highlight the complexity involved with cultivating institutional identity and mission over time, and the literature on governance of academic institutions revealed

the multiple constituencies involved in shared governance (Benne, 2001; Birnbaum, 1991; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Pierce, 2014; Schuman, 2010; Tierney, 2008). This study was purposely limited in its focus, seeking to respond to the claim that “only a handful of studies have utilized explicit theoretical tools to diagnose a particular area of inquiry such as the role of the faculty senate” (Tierney, 2008, pp. 150–151). This study focused on the governing board’s role in cultivating institutional identity and mission during 2012–2022 among seven Evangelical Protestant theological schools.

Dissertation Overview

The purpose of this research was to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates the institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. This introductory chapter established the background for and significance of this study, presented the problem to be addressed by this study, and included the research questions guiding the current study. A brief discussion of the specific research design and proposed methods followed, concluding with a discussion of the study’s limitations, scope, and delimitations.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews key literature to develop the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 1 and demonstrate the gaps the study intends to address. Chapter 3 reviews the methodological literature to justify the specific research design. Chapter 3 also includes an overview of the research design, specific data collection methods, procedures for data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 describes the sample, the data collection methods used, and the data sources obtained for each school. It then presents the research findings using seven separate case narratives to describe the results for each school. Following the individual case narratives,

Chapter 4 concludes with a thematic cross-case analysis of six themes found across the seven cases.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the findings and shows how the evidence from the case studies answers the guiding research questions. It then offers suggestions for further research and implications for practice before providing a conclusion to the study.

In sum, this research sought to assist governing boards of theological schools as they cultivate well the institutional identity and mission of their institution because, ultimately, as the intellectual center of the church, these institutions and the leaders thereof are accountable to God for their work in furthering his purposes for his church in this world (G. T. Miller, 2007; Niebuhr, 1956).

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Mission and governance are two fundamental factors considered in the accreditation of higher education institutions (Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-b). Within higher education institutions, governance is a complex activity involving several decision-making groups; however, the governing board is the legal body ultimately responsible for the institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Theological schools are a subset of faith-based higher education institutions, functioning as hybrid institutions with one part of their identity and mission centered in the church and the other part centered in higher education, and their viability is closely connected to the viability of the religious communities they serve (Aleshire, 2008).

These institutions have faced many cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures that impact their mission, requiring sophisticated governance led by an effective governing board (Aleshire, 2008, 2021; G. T. Miller, 2014). The past and current experience of Protestant theological schools in the United States has revealed that attention to their identity and mission by institutional leaders, particularly the governing board, is required for them to continue to meet the needs of their religious communities (Aleshire, 2021; González, 2015; Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 1990, 2007, 2014). This research focused on the reality that governing boards of theological schools must cultivate the school's identity and mission despite various pressures. This crucial role of the governing board is often fulfilled within a shared governance structure, which may hinder its effectiveness.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates the institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. I sought to answer the following questions.

Primary Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution's governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board's role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to the key themes in these research questions to develop the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 1 presented in Chapter 1. First, this literature review discusses the theory of organizational identity. Second, the review considers the theory of organizational mission and how it applies broadly to higher education institutions and faith-based higher education institutions. Third, the discussion of organizational mission includes a discussion of mission drift, a common theme in the literature related to the religious identity and mission of faith-based organizations, including higher education institutions.

After providing an overview of key themes related to changes in religious identity and mission in faith-based higher education institutions, the literature review includes a short history of the identity and mission of a particular subset of Christian higher education institutions—Protestant theological schools—and provides a brief overview of current challenges faced by

these schools. Finally, the last section of the literature review gives attention to the governance of higher education institutions, focusing specifically on the governing board's role. The literature review finishes with a review of key governance literature related to theological schools. Methodology literature is distributed throughout the following review and mainly discussed in Chapter 3. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the theme of decision making is present throughout this literature review. However, review of decision-making literature is limited to literature discussing decision making within the context of shared governance or governing boards' roles and actions.

Organizational Identity

Organizations undergo a fundamental process that involves forming and determining the organization's identity. Identity formation occurs as an organization increasingly identifies and absorbs specific values into its structure and functions through the commitments it makes, such that it develops a distinct defining identity (Selznick, 1957). Once formed, "institutional survival . . . is a matter of maintaining values and distinctive identity" (Selznick, 1957, p. 63).

Organizational identity, along with the closely related construct of organizational image, is used by internal and external members of organizations to create an understanding of the essence of an organization (Whetten, 2006). This section presents the theory of organizational identity and image from essentialist and social constructivist perspectives.

Identity: Central, Enduring, and Distinctive

An essentialist perspective on organizational identity argues that identity can be determined by looking at the aspects of an organization that are central to the organization's character, endure over time, and distinguish the organization from others (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Attributes considered central to an organization's character are reflected in its values,

practices, principles, and mission and serve as self-defining markers that begin at an organization's founding and provide continuity throughout its history as an organization (Whetten, 2006).

Central identity markers are what internal members view as essential to understanding the organization, and these central attributes direct decision making and organizational action by serving as a guide for organizational behavior (Albert & Whetten, 1985). These identity markers are also those that have continued over time, withstand the changes required by organizational survival, and are perpetuated by members of the organization (Whetten, 2006). Central and enduring attributes have been made "irreversible commitments" (Selznick, 1957, p. 40); are embedded in the organization's policies, procedures, and practices; and have become part of the organization's character. Thus, the identity attributes are structural; built into an organization's core processes, procedures, and structures; and act as guides for decision making when the organization faces identity-defining situations (Whetten, 2006).

Distinctive attributes define the type of organization yet make it unique from other similar organizations. These attributes are functional and used by an organization to distinguish itself from others, to determine ideal patterns and behaviors, and to respond to questions of organizational action (Whetten, 2006). These attributes distinguish the organization from similar organizations and help organizational members evaluate circumstances impacting the organization's identity, particularly in situations requiring difficult decisions (Whetten, 2006). These identity attributes answer the question of "who we are" as unique organizational actors. Thus, when considering an organization's identity, it is common to look at those attributes that are central, enduring, and distinctive (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006).

These core identity attributes include what organizational theorists have termed the organization's ideology (Collins & Porras, 1997; Lodahl & Mitchell, 1980). Ideology, like identity, captures the organization's enduring aspects and comprises the organization's fundamental values, ideals, and purpose, which serve as the "bonding glue that holds the organization together" (Collins & Porras, 1997, p. 221). In this manner, the ideology fulfills the substance and sense-making role of the organization's identity as organizational leaders and members use it to interpret the organization's response to the multiple demands found in its environment (Collins & Porras, 1997; Lodahl & Mitchell, 1980; Whetten, 2006). The process whereby this ideology begins to permeate the sense-making, practice, function, and structure of the organization is called institutionalization (Selznick, 1957). When an organization has coalesced around a core ideology, it is institutionalized and now carries an identity that defines it (Kimberly, 1980; Selznick, 1957).

Identity: External Legitimacy

Another perspective on organizational identity argues that it is socially constructed as a symbolic representation intended to address the demands of the organization's environment (Glynn, 2008). In this understanding, identity is both self-defining and self-reflective and used by members of the organization to define what the organization is in the context of its organizational space and to provide a guide for how the organization should act in that environment (Gioia et al., 2013). Internal members construct the organization's identity to gain legitimacy in its broader organizational space; therefore, identity claims exist within the organization itself and within a wider context of meaning arising from its environment (Glynn, 2008). Identity construction occurs as organizations seek to distinguish themselves as unique yet secure legitimacy with other social actors. Symbols, meanings, and narratives become important

tools used by internal members to communicate an organization's identity to other actors within the organization's space (Glynn, 2008).

This perspective adds social legitimacy to the essentialist perspective of organizational identity. It broadens the theory of organizational identity to include the influence of and response to the demands of the organization's environment on what was initially theorized to be primarily an internal process of identity construction (Gioia et al., 2013). The symbols, meanings, and narratives serve as "self-descriptors/identity claims [which are] used by an organization for purposes of specifying what is most central to the organization that is also most enduring (continuous) and/or most distinctive about the organization" (Whetten & Mackey, 2002, p. 410).

In this dissertation, organizational identity is defined as the central, enduring, and distinctive attributes of an organization used by the organization to understand who it is and legitimate itself in its broader environment.

Organizational Image

Organizational identity differs from but is tied to organizational image (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; D. R. Young, 2001). Internal members use organizational identity to understand and make sense of "who we are as an organization" (Whetten, 2006, p. 220). On the other hand, organizational image primarily refers to how outsiders perceive the central and distinctive aspects of an organization (Gioia et al., 2010). It can also refer to how internal members believe people outside the organization perceive the organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Studies following this latter understanding of organizational image have looked at how internal members use their perceptions of organizational image to inform their individual identities (Dutton et al., 1994) and how leaders of an organization may manipulate its image to accomplish specific purposes (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; D. R. Young, 2001). A key aspect of organizational image is

that it reflects the perception others have about the identity of the organization, and this perception creates expectations in both internal members and external audiences for how the organization should act in its broader environment (Grimes et al., 2019). In this manner, organizational identity is self-defined and interpreted by others, and a change in image can result in an actual or perceived change in identity and vice versa (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; D. R. Young, 2001).

This research sought to uncover how the concept of organizational identity, as more broadly informed by the concept of organizational image, is understood by those agents of the organization uniquely responsible for them—the governing board. As discussed later in this chapter, a vital role of the governing board is to serve as the fiduciary of the organization (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 1993; Houle, 1989; Kerr & Gade, 1989). This fiduciary role encompasses not only the organization’s financial health but also, ultimately, the essence of the organization—who it is as defined by the organization’s identity and what it does as defined by the organization’s mission (Chait et al., 2005; Kerr & Gade, 1989). However, clarity of identity and mission can be challenging to maintain, particularly for hybrid organizations (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2010, 2013).

Hybrid Organizations

Complex organizations have multiple identities, requiring different images and ideologies (Albert & Whetten, 1985). These organizations are considered hybrid organizations because their identity comprises multiple types. Early conceptions of hybrid organizations divided them into ideographic and holographic forms (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Ideographic forms clearly separate the parts of the organization that differ into separate units, with one identity remaining dominant, thereby mitigating any conflict among members. On the other hand, the holographic

form blends the multiple identities into every aspect of its structure, thereby often creating conflict among internal members as they seek to respond to the challenges of the organization's environment (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

More recently, hybrid organizations are considered to be those organizations that “make sense of and combine” (Battilana & Lee, 2014, p. 397) multiple objectives, activities, structures, forms, processes, and meaning. Although the term hybrid organization has been applied most often to social enterprise organizations that combine charitable and business purposes, the challenges faced by hybrid organizations apply to all organizations that combine multiple and potentially competing objectives while navigating a rapidly changing environment (Grimes et al., 2019).

The study of how organizations combine multiple identities has led to a burgeoning field of theoretical work and empirical research (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Kraatz & Block, 2008; Oliver, 1991; Pache & Santos, 2010, 2013; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Empirical and theoretical work related to the nature of hybrid organizations has been conducted among colleges and universities (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Jaquette, 2013; Morphey, 2002, 2009; Morphey et al., 2018), social enterprise organizations (Battilana et al., 2015; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013), and religious organizations (Hinings & Raynard, 2014). As further explored in this chapter, theological schools combine both religious and educational purposes. As such, they can be considered hybrid organizations, and the literature describing religious organizations and colleges and universities as hybrid organizations is applicable.

In this dissertation, a hybrid organization is defined as an organization that “combines and makes sense of” (Battilana & Lee, 2014, p. 397) multiple identities, activities, forms,

processes, and meanings into its overall structure and functions, creating tensions that internal members must manage.

Religious Organizations as Hybrid Organizations

Organizational theorists apply organizational theory to the study of religious organizations in part to identify the key distinctives of religious organizations and how their management of them differs from other types of organizations (DiMaggio, 1998; Jeavons, 1992, 1998; Tracey et al., 2014). One outcome of this study was the recognition that religious organizations are one type of organization that combines multiple objectives: the religious identity and the functional mission (Henck, 2011; Hinings & Raynard, 2014; Scheitle, 2010). These organizations combine an identity marked by fundamental beliefs, goals, and activities centered on the sacred. Yet, they also carry an identity as organizations requiring typical activities such as financial solvency, human resources, and effectiveness within their particular field (Hinings & Raynard, 2014).

Studies revealed that although the relative strength of religious identity varies across the broad spectrum of religious organizations, an essential task in the management and operations of these organizations is navigating tensions arising from their hybrid identity (Benne, 2001; Chaves, 2002; Henck, 2011; Jeavons, 1992, 1998; Sider & Unruh, 2004). Each organization faces a conflict between the “normative and belief-centered nature of religious organizations . . . and the pressures they face from the institutional, economic, and social pressures from the societies in which they are located” (Hinings & Raynard, 2014, p. 168). This section discusses the impact of the supporting faith community on religious organizations, specifically religious higher educational institutions, to reveal how these organizations face pressures due to their religious nature as they fulfill their mission.

Authority of Faith Community

As explained later in this chapter, the religious organizations considered in this dissertation—theological schools—have remained connected to their churches and denominations in different ways, and the faith community maintains a level of authority over these organizations (Glanzer et al., 2013; Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). Religious organizations contain “dual parallel authority structures: a religious authority structure and an agency structure” (Chaves, 1998, p. 175). The religious authority structure reflects how control over the organization and access to resources and other goods is maintained using spiritual justification for authority. In contrast, the agency structure reflects how the organization interacts and engages within the functional field in which it operates (Chaves, 1998).

Religious authority historically took the form of denominational control over organizations, especially among higher education institutions; however, in the changing world of religion, religious organizations, now more commonly referred to as faith-based organizations, including higher education institutions, have often operated separately from formal denominational structures (Burtchaell, 1998; Cuninggim, 1994; Willmer et al., 1998). In this case, the agency structure of the organization has become dominant, changing the relationship with the faith community from direct control over the organization’s administration to one in which the faith community provides a base for financial and people resources (Chaves, 1998). This decline of authority within a faith-based organization, notably higher education institutions, has been considered a key marker in their secularization (Burtchaell, 1998; Chaves, 1994, 1998; Marsden, 2021). However, empirical study of faith-based organizations, including higher education institutions, has reflected that the faith community has remained an important

stakeholder in the administration of these organizations (Glanzer et al., 2013, 2019; Rine et al., 2013; Schneider, 2013; Wittberg, 2013).

Connection With Faith Community

The connection with a faith community can play a key role in sustaining the religious identity of the faith-based organization (Benne, 2001; Glanzer et al., 2019; Sinha, 2013; Smith & Sosin, 2001). Researchers have looked at the relationship between religious organizations and their sponsoring faith communities to explore the relational dynamics between the two (Glanzer et al., 2013, 2019; Rine et al., 2013; Schneider, 2013; Schneider & Morrison, 2010; Wittberg, 2013). A study conducted in 2008–2009, The Faith and Organizations Project funded by the Lilly Endowment, looked at how faith communities maintained connections to their nonprofit organizations using various qualitative research methods involving nearly 70 religious nonprofit organizations with differing faith traditions (Schneider & Morrison, 2010).

Although Schneider and Morrison's (2010) study found significant differences across faith communities in how they maintained connections with their nonprofit organizations, three broad systems emerged. "Institutionalized systems" (Schneider, 2013, p. 433) organize and centralize support and access to resources at the faith-community level. These systems are commonly found in Catholic and Jewish faith communities. "Congregational systems" (Schneider, 2013, p. 433) primarily conduct service work through local congregations. However, over time, successful community service work in a congregation will become institutionalized as a separate nonprofit organization sponsored explicitly by a group of congregations that provide the necessary resources of finances and people. These systems were primarily found among Mainline Protestant and Quaker faith communities. The final system discovered was a network system that transcends congregations but "draws on individuals who share common religious

beliefs to support organizations” (Schneider, 2013, p. 433) to do the work based on the social networks of the founders of the organization or the institutional or virtual networks of people holding a similar vision. These systems were most common among the evangelical faith community.

Network systems rely heavily on relational management systems that are unified by the organization’s core mission (Schneider & Morrison, 2010). Trust in the faith-based organization by the faith community is maintained as the organization remains faithful to its core identity, mission, theological principles, and values. Because the faith community views these organizations “as an arm of the church, entrusted with carrying out a vital aspect of the church’s mission” (Schneider & Morrison, 2010, p. 44), the actions taken by the organization reflect on the faith community and the broader Christian church. Maintaining this trust is vital to the success of these faith-based organizations and the continued support of their broad faith community (Schneider & Morrison, 2010).

Religious Higher Education Institutions

The tensions created by multiple identities are particularly acute for religiously affiliated higher education institutions, including theological schools, which seek to combine a religious organization’s identity with an educational institution’s identity (Henck, 2011). A Christian college or university has an identity marked by its Christian beliefs and the particularities of the church world to which it relates, and this constituency base carries specific standards of performance and expectations that define effectiveness and faithfulness (Henck, 2011). At the same time, these institutions are organized and structured as higher education institutions and carry an identity marked by the standards of performance and expectations set by accrediting agencies and the institutional field of higher education (Henck, 2011). Similar to the Faith and

Organizations Project, the CCCU Denominational Study, conducted in 2011, gathered data from 79 higher education institutions holding membership in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU; Glanzer et al., 2013). The CCCU Denominational Study sought to evaluate the role of denominational identity, influence, and authority among the institutions and key constituents such as faculty and students. The study consisted of a multiphase survey conducted among multiple constituencies, including institutional leaders, faculty, and students, that collected present and longitudinal data.

Results from the CCCU Denominational Study showed that current policies and practices existed within the institutions, particularly in governance, employment expectations, and financial support, to maintain a connection between the faith community and the institution (Glanzer et al., 2013). However, longitudinal data revealed a 20-year pattern of decline among critical areas of connection. Specifically, declines were seen in student enrollment, with fewer numbers of students claiming the same denominational identity as the institution, in the level of financial support an institution received from the sponsoring denomination both in terms of percentage of overall budget and actual dollar amounts given, and the use of denominational specifics in the curricular or cocurricular activities of the institution. Despite these patterns of decline in key areas, Glanzer et al. (2013) concluded, “Current policies and practices represent significant efforts made by ecclesiastical bodies and college officials to maintain the denominational identity of the institutions they serve” (p. 200).

Theological schools also exist in this tension, perhaps more clearly than another type of Christian college or university. As explained later in this chapter, a theological school is, on the one hand, the intellectual center of the church and, therefore, accountable to the standards of the church within the specific tradition it is based (Niebuhr, 1956), yet also an academic institution

accountable to the standards of accrediting agencies. By their very nature, theological schools are hybrid institutions, with one part of their identity as church and the other as higher education institutions. As such, they are subject to the pressures applicable to religious organizations and higher education institutions (Aleshire, 2008). Much like the CCCU institutions studied previously, theological schools are tethered to their religious communities or denominations in significant ways and primarily only exist because the growth of the specific religious community requires the creation and advancement of educational institutions to support it. In this way, theological schools “do not have a mission apart from the religious communities they serve . . . instead, they are inextricably bound to the fates of religious communities” (Aleshire, 2021, p. 71).

Consequently, regardless of the relationship structure between the faith-based organization and its faith community, its religious identity and image, as seen and understood by the broader faith community, is a critical organizational characteristic that organizational leaders must manage alongside the other functional aspects of the organization. The current research sought to uncover the role and processes undertaken by governing boards to attend to the organizational identity of the institution while recognizing the expectations of the faith community to which it belongs. Furthermore, the studies discussed previously also revealed that the faith community extends trust to its organizations to faithfully fulfill their mission consistent with their religious identity. Because identity informs organizational mission in significant ways, this research can broaden the organizational focus and consider organizational mission.

Organizational Mission

In conceptualizing organizational mission, it is helpful to see organizational mission as the bridge between an organization’s identity and its actions (Grimes et al., 2019). The bridge

works to specify the organization's purpose and define how it should act as it directs the attention and intention of organizational members so that actions proceed from the organization's identity (Crotts et al., 2005; Grimes et al., 2019). Mission publicly represents the organization's purpose (Jaquette, 2013). In this manner, organizational mission manifests the organization's identity by giving the organization a distinct purpose, goal, and justification for actions (Whetten, 2006). Furthermore, as an organization acts on and communicates its mission, external audiences connect patterns of action and communication to the organization's identity, which creates and later confirms the organization's image (Grimes et al., 2019).

In this dissertation, organizational mission is the fundamental purpose and reason for being of the organization, encompassing what it does. This section first broadly applies organizational mission to nonprofit organizations and then narrow the discussion to higher education institutions. This section then reviews current research related to organizational mission and higher education institutions before closing the discussion with a focus on faith-based higher education institutions specifically.

Organizational Mission and Nonprofit Organizations

The concept of organizational mission, often expressed in a mission statement, is used by for-profit and nonprofit organizations. The use of mission statements by for-profit corporations has become common after leading management theorists recommended their use in corporate planning, marketing, and communication (Drucker, 1973; Keller, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Some research has shown that the influence of organizational mission in for-profit organizations is malleable (Campbell, 1997; Grimes et al., 2019; Hanes, 1999), whereas for a nonprofit organization, mission serves as the critical factor in establishing, defining, and legitimizing its purpose (Berlan, 2018; McDonald, 2007; Oster, 1995).

Nonprofit organizations register for tax-exempt status with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service based upon the intended and defined organizational mission, and the accordance of tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code provides a significant source of public legitimacy to the organization because of its mission (Gooding, 2012). This public legitimacy was borne from the understanding that, by law, nonprofit organizations cannot redistribute or use profits to benefit their internal members (Gooding, 2012; Oster, 1995). Accordingly, there is a level of trust and expectation by the public that these organizations exist to benefit society in some manner through the mission they intend to accomplish (Oster, 1995). For nonprofit organizations, “consistency with the mission” (Oster, 1995, p. 23) becomes a guiding directive for management.

The mission serves as a boundary function by identifying the organization’s scope, bounds, and focus, allowing its various stakeholders—donors, staff, and benefactors—to coalesce around a centralizing mission (Oster, 1995). Nonprofit organizations use mission in the internal direction of activities and processes; the recruitment of financial resources, staff, volunteers, donors, and clientele; and to measure the organization’s performance (W. A. Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Campbell, 1997; Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Minkoff & Powell, 2006; Moore, 2000). Following a study of a broad range of nonprofit organizations and their mission statements, Koch et al. (2015) concluded, “Mission statements are accurate reflections of the actual services provided and thus appear to be directing decision-making and action within the organization” (p. 532). The mission enables the organization to act out its identity through specific actions and signals to internal and external members the values and purpose of the organization (Grimes et al., 2019). Therefore, organizational mission, as expressed through a mission statement, is fundamental in orienting and directing internal members so that actions are

consistent with the organization's identity (Crotts et al., 2005). Furthermore, organizational mission statements publicize the relationship between the organization's identity and actions and are key in solidifying an organization's image among external members (Grimes et al., 2019; Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

Organizational Mission for Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions, such as colleges, universities, or similar institutions, provide accredited postsecondary education to individuals. For these institutions, mission is the word most often used to describe the institution's primary purpose (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Scott, 2006). When higher education institutions seek accreditation, they must first establish and articulate a clear and guiding organizational mission and then show how it informs all other facets of the institution. For example, Criterion 1 of the Criteria of Accreditation for the Higher Learning Commission (n.d.-b) states: "The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations" (Section 6). Assessment of institutional effectiveness often begins with evaluating how a particular institution's mission, vision, and values inform various facets of the organization (de Noriega, 2006). Thus, institutional mission is "critical to the vision, identity, and success of the college or university" (Bidlack et al., 2014, p. 270). This section discusses research on institutional mission as examined through mission statements. The main points are that mission statements guide decision making, serve as legitimizing statements and identity narratives, and are used by faith-based higher education institutions with varying effects.

Mission Statements

Like other nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions typically codify their mission in a formal mission statement. However, the mission of an institution extends beyond the formal mission statement to embody the "life force of any enterprise [whether] stated or

assumed” (Scott, 2006, p. 1). Mission statements are used to communicate the core beliefs, values, and purposes of the institution to internal and external audiences, often serving as both “strategy statements” and “identity statements” (Cady et al., 2011, p. 65).

Much research related to the mission of higher education institutions has centered around the analysis of institutional mission statements because mission statements are “simply a declaration—usually public—of how the university perceives its role, which is often closely tied with how others perceive its role” (Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991, p. 600). Researchers have recognized that institutions use mission statements for a variety of purposes (Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Zenk & Louis, 2018). Mission statements can clarify goals for internal and external constituents, thereby guiding the institution’s strategic planning process (Keller, 1983; Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991). A study investigating whether mission statements influence student perceptions regarding an institution’s behavior revealed that mission influences the behavior of people connected to the institution, particularly among faith-based higher education institutions (Davis et al., 2007). Similarly, the mission can affect student engagement in the institution. A multiple case study of 30 higher education institutions, including 2-year colleges, private 4-year colleges and universities, and large public research universities, found the institution-specific mission of the institution held a more significant impact on the policy and practices of the institution related to student engagement than the “broad institutional mission related to institutional type” (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006, p. 169).

Legitimizing Statements

Other researchers have argued that mission statements may reflect aspirations to meet a normative ideal set for institutions of a specific type, such as research outcomes for public research universities or a focus on teaching for small, private liberal arts colleges (Lang &

Lopers-Sweetman, 1991). In this view, mission statements serve a legitimizing function as the institution seeks to both argue for its uniqueness and assure its constituencies of its conformity to specific normative standards for its institutional type and in accordance with constituents' expectations (Glynn & Abzug, 2002; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The comparison of the mission statement to the curriculum and programs of 327 liberal arts colleges revealed substantial inconsistencies between the espoused liberal arts mission and the actual shift to professional curriculum and programs designed to attract additional students, leading the researcher to conclude these institutions primarily used their mission statement to maintain legitimacy as a liberal arts institution among its constituencies (Delucchi, 1997).

Similarly, a study of colleges and universities across institutional types in the United Kingdom revealed mission statements often reflect the attempt by higher education institutions to adopt corporate managerial practices to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the government agencies that provide significant funding for the institution (Connell & Galasiński, 1998). In this view, mission statements helped institutions negotiate relationships between the institution and its external constituents and maintain identification as a particular institutional type in the eyes of funding agencies (Connell & Galasiński, 1998).

Another study of mission statements from 300 educational institutions across varying types confirmed the legitimizing function of the statements. However, in this case, Morpew and Hartley (2006) concluded, "Institutions include in their mission what their benefactors value [and] it is, then, these differences in values . . . that are the self-defining characteristics for postsecondary institutions" (p. 467). These institutions may use the statement to legitimate themselves, but through it, they communicate their values to multiple and often conflicting audiences.

Identity Narratives

More recent analyses of mission statements have investigated them as identity narratives providing a “symbolic representation that is to some extent shared by its constituents” (Seeber et al., 2019, p. 231). This perspective recognizes that higher education institutions often hold competing identities and conflicting audiences, requiring them to determine which expectations must be met (Kraatz & Block, 2008). In response, the institutions craft mission statements to serve as identity narratives that balance these expectations. A study of the content of mission statements of 123 universities in the United Kingdom revealed institutions develop statements that appeal to external constituents yet remain consistent with the values of internal constituents (Seeber et al., 2019).

Similarly, Zenk and Louis (2018) reviewed written mission statements. They conducted qualitative interviews with 36 university leaders from six regional master’s-degree granting institutions situated within larger public universities to evaluate how leaders used institutional mission within the context of their roles. They concluded that mission is socially constructed, often serving in a metaphorical way to guide the decisions and understandings of the leaders. Although the mission was commonly used to aid decision making, the leaders also used mission to “stimulate a broader and deeper sense of purpose that encourage the development of more coherent ‘stories’ about how hard decisions were consistent with historical identities and cultural preferences” (Zenk & Louis, 2018, p. 21). The most common metaphors found in the discussion of institution mission by leaders in the study were metamorphosis, cultural artifact, and symbolic unity.

As metamorphosis, mission involves transformation and can be used by internal members to stimulate necessary change. Simultaneously, mission as cultural artifact reflects the durability

and continuity of purpose found in the mission and its tendency to reflect the culture and values of the institution. As cultural artifact, the mission is understood as reflecting the institution's culture and may require reinterpretation when conflict over the values and priorities occurs. However, this metaphor is more often used to encourage continuity over time instead of supporting necessary change.

As a third common metaphor, the mission serves as symbolic unity, providing a “glue that holds members together under a unified belief” (Zenk & Louis, 2018, p. 15). As symbolic unity, the mission maintains an institutional memory over time, creating a sense of identification and importance among internal and external stakeholders. This institutional memory function of mission serves as a form of accountability for new members, encouraging them to act consistently with the standards set by prior leaders, and provides a tangible means of identifying the core distinctives of the institutions.

Faith-Based Institutions

Mission statement analyses have been conducted on faith-based higher education institutions as well. Arguing, “The mission statement reflects the heart and soul of a Christian college and its community” (Woodrow, 2006, p. 313), Woodrow compared the mission statements of 105 members of the CCCU to the nine essential components of an effective mission statement found in the literature on mission statements. Overall, the findings revealed that the institution's mission was valued, as seen by the inclusion of “some or all” (Woodrow, 2006, p. 325) of these nine essential components.

A similar analysis of the statements of 106 CCCU member institutions noted that, as expected, most mission statements included the concepts of education and Christian; however, other significant concepts such as truth, biblical, and integration were missing from most of the

statements (Firmin & Gilson, 2010). The results led Firmin and Gilson (2010) to question whether the values espoused in the mission statement reflect what happens on a day-to-day basis.

Another comparison of the language used in mission and vision statements across 210 secular private, secular public, Catholic, Christ-centered, and evangelical higher education institutions reflected considerable variety in statements reflecting a shared, clear, compelling, and complex vision (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009). Overall, the analysis of the content of these statements revealed that the Christians institutions did not use their mission and vision statements to clearly inform constituents how the institution will “transform an educational experience into general or specific actions that will generate concrete and tangible benefits” (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009, p. 105). Although the Christian schools offered a robust institutional vision, the communication of this vision lacked the practical goal-oriented application found in statements offered by secular institutions. The study focused on the communication of institutional vision and mission; yet, the results also raise the question of whether what is stated matches the actual practice of these institutions (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009).

In a broader study of the message communicated by mission statements, researchers evaluated whether the institutional mission statement at 87 faith-based institutions not limited to the CCCU indicated a concern for developing faith maturity among its student body. In this case, Weeks et al. (2016) assessed each institution’s mission statement using Benson’s Faith Maturity Scale. They found, in general, “the institutions’ mission statements did not embody the concept of mature faith or clearly advocate its development in students” (Weeks et al., 2016, p. 167), leading the researchers to question the effectiveness of the mission on student faith development.

Additional research related to institutional mission within faith-based higher education institutions has included efforts to assess the influence of mission on internal processes and practices leading to student outcomes (Karvinen et al., 2018; Schreiner, 2018). A qualitative case study of three European faith-based institutions examined whether the purpose and values stated in the mission statement were reflected in the curriculum (Karvinen et al., 2018). Although how each of the schools defined their degree programs, curriculum, courses, and learning outcomes varied, Karvinen et al. (2018) found each institution was intentional in embedding the institution's mission and values into the curriculum, which enabled the institution to maintain a distinct identity and prepare students to live out their religious identity in a secular and pluralistic world.

Finally, a recent study focused on the effect of mission on student outcomes (Schreiner, 2018). Using data obtained from national surveys, including the 2016 National Survey of Student Engagement, the 2011 and 2014 CARDUS Education Surveys, and the 2015 Satisfaction Inventory, Schreiner (2018) sought to determine whether the education at the faith-based institution influenced student engagement in individual good, common good, and Kingdom good. Results revealed the faith-based mission of the institution positively influenced student outcomes related to the individual good and Kingdom good; however, the influence of the faith-based mission on student outcomes associated with the common good was much weaker. Despite the varying outcomes and room for improvement, Schreiner concluded that the institutional faith-based mission did influence student outcomes.

In sum, studies of mission statements have revealed that these formal statements of purpose carry additional meaning to those operating within the context and values of the institution and are used in varying ways to influence both internal and external constituents.

Organizational mission can fulfill both an essentialist perspective on organizational identity by denoting what is central, enduring, and distinctive about an institution as well as a socioconstructivist understanding of identity emphasizing the symbolic nature and the intent to create legitimacy in response to demands on the institution (Seeber et al., 2019). Determining the institution's mission, transforming it into broad strategic goals, and using it to create specific objectives can aid decision making and "promote organizational improvement" (Scott, 2006, p. 2). It is recognized that espoused mission statements do not always match the actual processes, practices, or activities of the institution; however, when mission does consistently influence the internal workings, it contributes to the institution's success (Bidlack et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2007; Ferrari & Velcoff, 2006; Karvinen et al., 2018; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; McDonald, 2007; Meacham, 2008). This research sought to add to the literature exploring the influence of organizational identity and mission on a faith-based higher education institution's internal processes, practices, and activities by investigating how the governing board of select theological schools cultivates the institution's identity and mission.

Organizational Mission Drift

Another stream of research focusing on organizational mission centers on changes to the organization's mission in ways that may or may not indicate mission drift. Mission drift has been a topic of research on nonprofit organizations (Bennett & Savani, 2011; Gooding, 2012; Jones, 2007; Minkoff & Powell, 2006), hybrid organizations (Battilana et al., 2015; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Cornforth, 2014; Siebold et al., 2019; Staessens et al., 2019), higher education institutions (Galea, 2015; Henderson, 2009; Jaquette, 2013; Morpew, 2002; Morpew et al., 2018), faith-based organizations (AbouAssi, 2013; Chambré, 2001; Greer & Horst, 2014; Lin, 2019; Vanderwoerd, 2004), and faith-based colleges and universities (Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998;

Dovre, 2002; Glanzer et al., 2019; Marsden, 2021). This section acknowledges the conflation of identity drift and mission drift, defines the concept of mission drift, and then discusses research focused on evaluating the consistency of religious identity and mission among faith-based higher education institutions over time.

Identity Drift

Original conceptualizations of drift within organizations evaluated the occurrence of identity drift whereby the identity of an organization shifts at crucial transition points during the life cycle of an organization such that the founding ideals differ from the structure and practices of the organization as it matures (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Kimberly, 1980; Lodahl & Mitchell, 1980). In some cases, additional identities are added to the organization as its structure and processes become institutionalized; in others, the organization's identity changes enough to create a new identity and image (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Placing the concept of identity drift within the framework of the organizational life cycle results in drift being conceptualized as movement away from the founder's ideals and intentions as the organization matures, institutionalizes, and acts (Lodahl & Mitchell, 1980).

Unless organization identity is formalized into the organization's ideology, structures, and processes, and new members are purposefully recruited and successfully socialized into the ideology and values of the institution, theorists have argued that drift becomes more likely as the organization matures beyond the founder into subsequent generations of leadership. Drift fundamentally reflects the "difference between the ideals as enunciated in the ideology and the perceived operations of the organization in practice" (Lodahl & Mitchell, 1980, p. 188). Theorists have described organizational drift as a change in identity (Gioia et al., 2013);

however, it is more common to refer to organizational drift using the language of organizational mission (Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

Concept of Mission Drift

Because a nonprofit organization's mission serves as the bridge between its identity and its actions, actions taken by an organization that are inconsistent with its mission can affect the organization's identity and image (Jaquette, 2013; Minkoff & Powell, 2006). As these inconsistent actions continue over time, external audiences may perceive the difference between the organization's mission and its actions as mission drift (Grimes et al., 2019). Indeed, for nonprofit organizations, the legitimacy and integrity of the organization are often dependent upon the commitment of the organization to the founding mission despite changes in the external environment that pressure an organization to change its mission in some manner (Froelich, 1999; Jones, 2007; Moore, 2000).

The pressures of the external environment, particularly those impacting organizational survival, can lead to various changes in mission (Jones, 2007; Moore, 2000). These changes have been referred to as "mission drift," which is "the process through which the organization's goals can be deflected or sacrificed in the interests of organizational survival, or as the result of a loss of focus" (Minkoff & Powell, 2006, p. 592). Accordingly, for purposes of this dissertation, mission drift is conceptualized and defined as organizational movement away from the foundational identity and mission of the organization (Hersberger-Langloh et al., 2021; Jaquette, 2013; Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

Faith-Based Organizations

In the context of the relationship with a faith community, the threat of identity drift or mission drift becomes important. As described earlier, denominational control over faith-based

organizations has declined over time. Many of these organizations now exist within network systems where little denominational control exists over the organization, creating a religious authority structure that is diffuse and often inter- or non-denominational (Glanzer et al., 2013; Scheitle, 2010; Willmer et al., 1998). Faith-based organizations operate under the agency structure, whereby the organization itself provides the administration and management of its identity, mission, and activities (Chaves, 1998; Scheitle, 2010; Willmer et al., 1998).

Accordingly, it has been predicted that as the agency structure becomes further removed from religious authority structures, the organization will more closely resemble its secular counterparts in its functional field (Chaves, 1994, 1998). Indeed, in the last decade, there has been an increased call for faith-based organizations to ensure that they do not experience mission drift, as it is assumed that “mission drift is the natural course for organizations” (Greer & Horst, 2014, p. 20).

Written for practitioners as opposed to scholars, Greer and Horst’s (2014) argument captured the faith community’s understanding of the essence of mission drift for an organization existing in a networked system. They argued that Christian organizations experience mission drift when they begin offering their goods or services to the community without continuing to proclaim the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ to the individuals served. The authors evaluated the history of organizations such as the YMCA, ChildFund, and Harvard University. They presented mission drift as the process of sacrificing the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the organization as a response to pressures of the external environment. In their analysis, they argued organizations that fail to keep the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel as the central aspect of their identity, mission, and actions become like their secular counterparts (Greer & Horst, 2014). The result is a Christian educational institution, humanitarian organization, or

social service organization with a functional identity, organizational mission, and organizational actions that are no different than any organization that does not claim a religious identity (Greer & Horst, 2014).

As demonstrated in the empirical study of faith-based organizations in a network system, trust by the faith community in a faith-based organization relies on the perceived faithfulness of the organization to its fundamental mission, theological principles, and values (Glanzer et al., 2013; Schneider & Morrison, 2010). Thus, fulfilling an organization's mission and the perception that it remains faithful to its religious identity and values are vital in avoiding the perception of mission drift among the faith community.

Faith-Based Higher Education Institutions

Mission drift and identity drift have often been conflated and primarily conceptualized as the secularization of the institution, evidenced by the adoption of the progressive and changing values of the surrounding culture (Arthur, 2008; Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021). It has been assumed that faith-based organizations experiencing mission drift gradually adapt their functional identity and actions to resemble their secular counterparts more closely (Chaves, 1994). This discussion of maintaining religious identity amid pressures of secularization has been particularly dominant within the literature on Christian faith-based higher education institutions, which have also been referred to as church-related schools (Cuninggim, 1994) or religious schools (Dovre, 2002). Christian faith-based higher education institutions combine Christian religious beliefs with an educational mission in some manner. The main points of this section include the history of secularization among certain faith-based higher education institutions, the influence of denominational authority on secularization, and how certain faith-

based institutions have resisted secularization and instead strengthened and cultivated their religious identity and mission.

Secularization of Faith-Based Higher Education Institutions

A historical analysis of the leading Protestant schools in the United States presented the intricate story of the gradual drift away from religious identity and mission through leadership choices to increase each institution's relevance, prestige, and cultural standing (Marsden, 2021). The schools examined began as church-related colleges led by clergy with a primary mission of training young men for civil service in society and the church (Marsden, 2021). Initially, Christian theology and worldview pervaded the institutions, the curriculum, the faculty, and the training of the young men. However, as the institutions embraced the ideals of the enlightenment and modernity, such as pluralism, individualism, rationality, scientific analysis, and academic freedom, the distinctive Christian identity, Christian culture, and Christian mission were displaced. Out of a desire to be relevant to an increasingly broader constituency base of students, donors, and faculty, leadership of these institutions expressed an unwillingness to maintain sectarianism, particularly as the Protestant version of Christianity became its dominant expression in the culture.

Furthermore, as the institutions sought to compete with the land-grant colleges established under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which offered more professional and vocational education, the schools considered in Marsden's (2021) study deliberately adjusted their curriculum and program offerings to compete for students. In this adjustment, these institutions sidelined some academic departments, such as theology, humanities, and philosophy, to make room for professional or vocational programs. In most cases, these changes in educational programming led to the movement of theology and Bible departments, including

faculty and classes, into separate schools that were not affiliated with the primary university or simply replacing them with a more generic religious studies curriculum.

Finally, as the broad expression of Protestant Christianity within the culture embraced liberalism with an increased focus on moral behavior and service to the public rather than salvific matters, these colleges embraced a generic Christianity focused more on moral behavior and good citizenship. Instead of instituting policies, practices, and a culture that would protect the universities' distinctive Christian identity and mission, the universities chose to recast their mission in terms of a social mission of general moral education for the public. The universities responded to the pressures of their external environment and internal conflicts by gradually relinquishing their religious identity and mission (Marsden, 2021).

This long-term trend of secularization has been noted broadly across a wide swath of faith-based colleges and universities, whether Protestant or Catholic, leading some to argue:

The long-term trend appears to suggest an erosion of explicitly religious commitment [as] religious values become gradually subordinated to 'academic' values . . . which results in a muted and thinned-out language for mission and identity which is deliberately made acceptable to the secular public domain. (Arthur, 2008, p. 201)

Explaining the reasons behind this secularization process is difficult because of the complexity of the factors involved, the different levels of analysis required in an examination, and the differing interpretations of religious commitment across institutions (Arthur, 2008).

Loss of Denominational Authority

A contributing factor to this trend toward secularization within the leading Protestant institutions, as well as many other faith-based educational institutions throughout history, was the troubled relationship between the school and its sponsoring denomination (Benne, 2001;

Burtchaell, 1998; Cuninggim, 1994). For most faith-based schools, the relationship between the school and its sponsoring denomination has changed over time. Initially, the church strongly controlled and dominated the schools, providing support financially and through personnel. Administrators and governing boards were filled primarily by clergy members, and the church held much influence over the curriculum and social matters of the institution (Cuninggim, 1994).

However, over time, as the school grew as an institution and the faith community found it difficult to provide the necessary financial or personnel support, this relationship moved to one marked more by equality with the church and school seen as equal partners. These faith-based schools began to seek funding from other sources, including the government and other nonchurch benefactors. Increasingly, administrators, board members, faculty, and students came from sources other than the church, the school decided matters for itself, and faculty pursued academic associations more broadly within their specialties. Although the church remained influential in the life and administration of the school, this movement marked by “mutual withdrawal” led to “basic equilibrium in the relationship” (Cuninggim, 1994, p. 35). In the final stage of this relationship, however, the churches increasingly became unable or uninterested in supporting their schools, and the schools became the dominant partner in maintaining the institution. These faith-based schools have remained connected to their founding faith community but now serve as the “primary entity of academic decision-making for themselves” (Cuninggim, 1994, p. 39).

Specific case studies of denominational colleges and universities revealed the typical pattern that rather than serving as a mechanism to assist the institution in maintaining its religious identity, the support offered by the denomination was often weak (Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021). In some cases, the sponsoring denomination lost interest in

supporting their schools, whereas in others, the school disengaged from its sponsoring denomination (Benne, 2001). In either event, as the school severed ties with its sponsoring denomination, each school lost a governing authority that would have served to keep its religious identity intact (Burtchaell, 1998).

This lack of mutual accountability and support ultimately arose because “both parties, the school and the church, lost confidence in the Christian account of reality . . . Deep down, both church leaders and faculty members no longer believed the Christian faith to be comprehensive, unsurpassable, and central” (Benne, 2001, p. 47). Because of this lack of governing oversight, the leadership and faculty were free to decide for the institution directly. In many cases, the decisions made by leaders, faculty, and others ultimately led to a drift away from the institution’s founding religious identity and mission (Burtchaell, 1998). In some cases, the institutions may maintain the connection to the sponsoring denomination, but they “are merely reflecting the quality and depth of religion found in the sponsoring religious body” (Arthur, 2008, p. 201). For the institutions that left behind their religious identity and mission, history revealed that at crucial stages of an institution’s history, the people involved in the institution—church leaders, administrators, board members, faculty, and students—lacked the desire to retain the institution’s religious values and heritage as the key facet of the institution’s life (Burtchaell, 1998).

Strengthening Religious Identity and Mission

However, other scholars have noted that certain faith-based higher education institutions do maintain their religious identity and mission despite a desire to earn a solid academic reputation and balance a changing relationship with the sponsoring faith community (Benne, 2001; Daines et al., 2021; Dovre, 2002; Glanzer et al., 2011; Laats, 2018; Schuman, 2010). A widely referenced multiple case study investigated six leading faith-based schools to assess how

they maintained and strengthened their religious identity and mission (Benne, 2001). Particular facets of each school were evaluated, including the relevance of the Christian faith within the school, public communication used by the school, hiring requirements for faculty and administration, the importance of the theology or religious curriculum overall, chapel requirements, church support, and governance structure. Examination of the data revealed a spectrum of religiousness across the institutions. In general, the schools fit into four basic types: “orthodox,” “critical-mass,” “intentionally pluralist,” and “accidentally pluralist” (Benne, 2001, p. 49), with “orthodox” representing those schools with the most substantial religious identity and mission and “accidentally pluralist” representing those schools with the weakest religious identity and mission.

Orthodox schools have successfully kept the Christian identity publicly relevant in their institutions in three important ways. First, the institution must maintain the priority of all particulars of the Christian worldview in its intellectual tradition. Second, the Christian worldview must be embodied in the institution’s ethos or way of life, including worship, patterns of moral action, specific virtues, and rules for appropriate Christian behavior. Finally, the persons influential in the life of the school—governing board, administration, faculty, and students—must be committed to the Christian worldview and its way of life (Benne, 2001).

As the case studies of the schools in this study demonstrated, secularization is not inevitable for faith-based higher education institutions. Instead, with “careful attention given to persons, ethos, and vision [that flows] from the fundamental conviction that the Christian religious account is comprehensive, unsurpassable, and central” (Benne, 2001, p. 206), a faith-based school can advance its religious identity and mission, earn and grow a strong reputation in the academy, and navigate changes in the relationship with its sponsoring faith community.

Similarly, a multiple-case study of three Catholic institutions, two Baptist institutions, three denominational schools, and five nondenominational schools revealed that as a group, these schools strongly valued their religious identity and mission and felt a “strong need . . . to understand and articulate their nature and mission” (Schuman, 2010, p. 223). Each institution expressed its religious identity and mission in distinct ways and carefully negotiated the relationship with its faith community. These schools attracted academically strong students, promoted research and teaching excellence among their faculty, and intentionally created a rigorous thinking and scholarship culture. Once each institution and its internal and external constituencies understood, articulated, and organized all facets of the institution around the identity and mission, the ability to use their focused identity and mission to navigate “our complex and multifaceted contemporary culture” (Schuman, 2010, p. 229) became a vital strength of the school.

Navigating the tensions within the academy and the church was the key theme in another recent multiple case study (Laats, 2018). This study combined a deep analysis of six flagship interdenominational schools self-identifying as either fundamentalist, neo-evangelical, or evangelical with a review of broader public historical records of similar institutions, including three theological schools (Laats, 2018). These interdenominational institutions largely maintained their religious identity despite the pressures of their broader religious network, which continually redefined the meaning of fundamentalist or evangelical Christianity. Administrators of this group of faith-based institutions led these schools to become respected academic institutions within the broader field of U.S. higher education.

At the same time, administrators negotiated the school’s relationship to a religious network that was continually concerned with actual or perceived drift in their religious identity

or mission. No formal denomination existed for these schools to mandate adherence to doctrinal particularities or to provide defined parameters applicable to a group of individuals, churches, and organizations under a centralized authority. Instead, leaders of these schools experienced the influence of a diffuse religious authority found in the broad network of self-identifying fundamentalist or evangelical churches, institutions, and individuals. Because of the changing definition of fundamentalism and evangelicalism throughout the 20th century, this diffuse network of religious authority provided a more significant challenge to school leadership; yet, despite this challenge, these schools maintained and, in many cases, strengthened their religious identity and mission over time (Laats, 2018).

Finally, the findings of two recent quantitative studies conducted to compare denominational and nondenominational institutions provided additional evidence that denominational status is not a sufficient cause for changes in identity or mission (Glanzer et al., 2019; Kaul et al., 2017). Institutional and survey data collected from faith-based CCCU-member institutions about the identity, belief, behavior, and teaching practices of faculty members at nondenominational and denominational schools revealed no statistically significant difference between the theological beliefs and practices at denominational versus nondenominational schools (Glanzer et al., 2019). However, the results did indicate faculty at nondenominational schools practice more integration of faith and learning in their teaching than faculty at denominational schools (Kaul et al., 2017).

Cultivating Mission

Faith-based higher education institutions have remained a distinct part of and contributed to the diversity within the field of higher education, which has led to a focus on how these

institutions can cultivate and advance their mission (Glanzer et al., 2017b; O'Connell, 2002; Rine & Guthrie, 2016; Simon, 2003; VanZanten, 2011). For these institutions:

Identity must be coupled with a mission that reinforces the identity, or the identity falls flat. Mission must be derived and flow from a distinctive identity in visible, tangible ways. . . . These institutions must be distinct and translate that distinctiveness into a religious institutional academic mission. (O'Connell, 2002, p. 70)

Empirical analysis using institutional and demographic data from Christian higher education institutions has been conducted to help these institutions gain benchmarks by which to gauge effectiveness as a sector (Rine & Guthrie, 2016). Several case studies using primarily qualitative research methods have been conducted on specific faith-based institutions and the role of presidencies in understanding the process of changing, protecting, or strengthening institutional identity and mission (Ford, 2021; Haines, 2017; Head, 2009; Hughes, 2020; Lloyd, 2020; Pickering, 2017; Shore, 2021; Witek, 2009).

Furthermore, specific resources exist to assist faculty in understanding, engaging, and furthering the mission of the faith-based institutions in which they teach (Simon, 2003; VanZanten, 2011). In addition, additional focus has been given to how Christian institutions can move away from fragmentation in their structures, functions, practices, and values toward unity in identity and mission (Glanzer et al., 2017b).

Although the historical analysis and case studies described in the literature reviewed included a review of the governing board's actions, little empirical attention has specifically been given to the role played by the governing board in institutional identity and mission. A recent study used quantitative and qualitative data to consider the role of the governing board in the financial turnaround of several small Christian colleges (Twardowska-Case, 2021), and another

multiple case study using qualitative methods specifically examined the spiritual practice of discernment used by governing boards of eight Christian colleges (Barbee, 2018). As described in the last section of this chapter, the governing board is uniquely tasked with guarding the identity and mission of the institution. Yet, most literature related to governing boards is offered by consultants and based on experience rather than on empirical research using quantitative or qualitative methods (Cornforth, 2001).

The current study sought to further the discussion of how institutions cultivate their identity and mission and address the lack of empirical research on governing boards by using qualitative methods in a multiple case study to investigate the way a governing board cultivates the identity and mission within a particular subset of Christian higher education institutions, namely theological schools.

Theological Schools

The preceding review of the literature on identity and mission within higher education institutions, whether faith-based or not, revealed that colleges and universities have been a common research focus. However, one subset of Christian higher education institutions that has been largely ignored in the discussion of institutional identity and mission are theological schools, also called divinity schools or seminaries. Theological schools are institutions specifically developed to educate religious leaders and provide intellectual support to a Christian community (Aleshire, 2008). Although their identity and mission may seem easily defined, this group of higher education institutions has been under significant cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures recently, requiring them to give more intentional focus to their identity and mission to survive and thrive (Aleshire, 2008, 2021; González, 2015; Huffman, 2022b; Kuan, 2023; G. T. Miller, 2014; Newman, 2020). For this reason, the current study sought to extend the

discussion of identity and mission among faith-based higher education institutions to theological schools to guide these institutions as they wrestle through current challenges that may impact their identity and mission. This section discusses the origins and history of theological schools, describes their hybrid nature as one part church and one part education, discusses their historical institutional mission, and presents current challenges facing these schools.

Origins

Theological schools found their early origins in the monasteries and cathedral schools in medieval Europe, which served to preserve and disseminate theological and philosophical knowledge among some clergy and priests (González, 2015). Medieval European universities supplanted these schools and became the primary location for theological study of those with the means and opportunity for education. In the universities, theological study increasingly became more of an intellectual rather than a vocational pursuit, and many clergy and priests lacked access to these formal programs of study (González, 2015).

However, following the Protestant Reformation, the invention of the printing press, the growing availability of literary resources to previously excluded people, and the establishment of more educational institutions and programs, formal theological education became a common requirement for the ordination of religious leaders who serve the church (González, 2015). The reformers maintained the importance of intellectual theological study but also emphasized the need for such study to equip religious leaders who served congregations. Furthermore, through the influence of pietism and Methodism in Northern Europe, Great Britain, and North America, theological education came to be seen as important for all believers, whether laity or clergy, with particular emphasis on the training of ministers for the practical work of preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments in a local congregation (González, 2015).

Colonial Schools

In North America, the history of Protestant theological schools began with the founding of the first college, Harvard College, in 1636 to train young men. Harvard's founding was followed several decades later by the founding of the College of William and Mary by the Church of England, Yale by colonial clergymen, and the College of New Jersey by the Presbyterian denomination (Aleshire, 2021). These first colonial schools were modeled after colleges in England. They were designed to provide "clergy and laity . . . the same education, one that fitted them ideally for service in either of the two public realms, church or commonwealth" (G.T. Miller, 1990, p. 48).

These early colleges were founded by religious leaders who taught theology as part of a broad liberal arts education to prepare gentlemen to serve their community. Theological education was an essential part of the overall curriculum and formation of students, and the Christian worldview permeated all aspects of the institution and its curriculum; however, the identity and mission of these early schools became broader than the preparation of religious leaders or the furtherance of theology as an academic discipline (Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 1990). The colleges viewed their mission to be the preparation of gentlemen for civic service, and challenges to the particular religious doctrines and beliefs of the founding individuals or denominations were not withstood (Marsden, 2021).

When particularistic religious doctrines and beliefs no longer matched the doctrines and beliefs of the broader community, the institution's leaders chose to decrease the emphasis placed on theology and focus instead on faculty, curriculum, and institutional practices that supported the preparation of men for civic service (Marsden, 2021). As Harvard and other colonial schools left behind the particular doctrines, beliefs, and values of their founding churches and ministers

in favor of a more ecumenical and secular focus of education, a new model of U.S. theological education was established beginning with the founding of Andover Seminary in 1808 (G. T. Miller, 1990).

Independent Theological Schools

Andover Seminary was among the first independent theological schools focused exclusively on preparing religious leaders, including missionaries, and the scientific study of the biblical text and theology as a research discipline (G. T. Miller, 1990). The school had a professional faculty, emphasized education beyond the Bachelor of Arts, developed a library of theological resources, and welcomed a growing number of students. The program was modeled after theology programs found in German universities in which theology was a robust scientific discipline, and it “helped establish the standards by which later theological schools were to be judged” (G.T. Miller, 1990, p. 79).

Soon after Andover’s founding, Princeton Seminary was founded by the Presbyterian church as the first independent ecclesiastical seminary entirely under church control with the mission of both training the religious leaders of the denomination for service to the denomination’s churches and furthering academic theological study consistent with the church’s doctrines and beliefs. Where Andover defined the academic mission of a theological school, Princeton defined the church mission of a theological school. Both institutions set the standards for subsequent institutions designed to be recognized as institutions of academic study and research and institutions for preparing religious leaders and propagating confessional doctrines and beliefs within denominations (G. T. Miller, 1990).

Throughout the 1800s and the westward expansion within the newly formed United States, denominations and immigrant groups founded church-related colleges for a broad liberal

arts education taught within their Christian tradition. They also founded theological schools for the specific development of their ministers, missionaries, college presidents, and denominational leaders. These schools were small, financially dependent on the denomination and its churches, and continually operated from a place of financial weakness (G. T. Miller, 1990). Yet, the theological schools assumed a specific identity and mission: to house the systematic study of biblical texts and theology as the intellectual center for the particular confessional tradition of the denomination and to train men within these denominations for service to the church. The schools became “the theological representatives of the church charged with a truly ecclesiastical task” (G.T. Miller, 1990, p. 447).

Academic and Scientific Theological Education

Although independent confessional seminaries were being established, private universities also began to separate their religion and theology departments into university-related divinity schools (Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 1990). These divinity schools remained part of the university system but allowed for focused research and scholarship in biblical studies and theology. With the increased focus on the scientific, historical, and critical study of the biblical text, university-related schools and independent seminaries developed sophisticated academic programs that included specialization in various subdisciplines. A significant result of the increasingly scientific study of the biblical text was the use of biblical criticism, a method of studying the biblical text.

Biblical criticism led to a significant divide in U.S. Christianity among those Protestants who adopted a liberal theology that questioned biblical authority and those who continued to hold a conservative theology that maintained the authority of the biblical text (G. T. Miller, 2007). Furthermore, the various disciplines related to theology and biblical studies increased and

became fields of research and scholarship guided more by international networks and guilds of scholars rather than studies intended to further confessional doctrines and beliefs (G. T. Miller, 2007).

The response to biblical criticism caused divisions among scholars, ministers, churches, denominations, and schools. As many leading seminaries and divinity schools adopted more liberal theology, conservative theologians established new schools to provide biblical studies and theological education from a conservative perspective. As a result, several conservative evangelical schools were established as nondenominational institutions in the mid- to late-20th century (G. T. Miller, 2007). These nondenominational schools support a network of churches, undergraduate schools, and parachurch organizations rather than a specific denomination. The use of networks in supporting a school was an innovation among theological schools (Aleshire, 2021).

Practical Ministerial Education

Although these changes related to the scientific and critical study of the biblical text and theology significantly impacted the mission and identity of theological schools, the importance of practical and professional education increased following the Civil War (Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 2007). Education became available to more people, and new state universities were established through the Morrill Land grants focused on the practical and applied sciences. As a result, preparation for a practical profession and emphasis on the applied sciences dominated the education landscape in the United States by the mid-20th century (Marsden, 2021). Standards emerged for professional education such as medicine, law, engineering, counseling, and teaching. Furthermore, an increasingly educated public demanded a more educated clergy to lead their churches. Because of this, even denominations marked by resistance to advanced clergy

education responded to the call for a professional ministry by developing schools for their ministers (G. T. Miller, 2007).

In response to this call for practical training and in opposition to the liberal theology increasingly dominating the established seminaries and divinity schools, new Bible colleges and training institutes were established by groups adhering to conservative theology in the century following the Civil War (G. T. Miller, 2007). These college and institutes were designed to provide a shorter and more practical training program for men and women who desired to serve in churches, on the foreign mission field, in ministries focused on urban challenges, and in the increasing number of parachurch organizations with specialized purposes of ministry outside the local congregation. The Bible schools and institutes differed from seminaries because they offered a baccalaureate level of education focused on practical ministry.

These Bible schools and institutes competed with seminaries for students seeking practical ministerial education, and, along with the decrease in church-related colleges serving as feeder schools, seminaries experienced struggles with enrollment (G. T. Miller, 2007). Theological schools, whether independent or university-related, wrestled with the question of identity and purpose as they responded to a church and a culture that increasingly valued practical professional education for ministers and to an academy that treated biblical and theological studies as another scientific research discipline devoid of spiritual purpose or use (G. T. Miller, 2007). The post-World War II tension of scientific study, professional education, and practical training created an unprecedented opportunity for theological schools to determine what they had become and how they fit within the educational and religious landscape.

The Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting

Theological school leaders first collaborated on the state of theological schools through the Conference of Theological Seminaries, which held its first meeting in 1918 (Tanner, 2018). In response to two studies conducted on the state of theological education—one by Kelly in 1924 entitled *Theological Education: A Study of 161 Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*, and a second published by Brown and May in 1934 entitled *The Education of American Ministers*—the Conference decided to appoint a commission to determine standards by which theological school could be accredited. Subsequently, in 1936, the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS) was founded, which has continued under the name The Association of Theological Schools (ATS; G. T. Miller, 2007; Tanner, 2018). ATS serves as a membership organization that provides support and resources to member schools. In addition, it encompasses a separate corporation, The Commission on Accrediting, which is the accrediting body for theological schools (G. T. Miller, 2007). The AATS published the first set of standards for accreditation in 1936, and the official accreditation process was established by the ATS Commission on Accrediting in 1938 (Tanner, 2018).

Statement of the Purpose of Theological Schools

In 1952, the AATS commissioned a survey of theological education to review and update its standards (G. T. Miller, 2007). This study involved data collected from over 90 theological schools, from theologians and other religious leaders through various conferences, and from interviews with many theological students. Because theological schools prepared religious leaders for ministry, the study argued that determining the purpose of a theological school required that the purpose of the church and its ministry first be defined.

Following a review of the major activities and functions found across churches from varying Christian traditions and the teachings of Scripture, Niebuhr (1956) argued the primary goal of the church is “the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor” (p. 31). The church ultimately exists to reconcile people to God and increase in them a love for God, which in turn creates a love for others. This ultimate goal undergirds all other purposes for which the church acts within its particular time, place, and context (Niebuhr, 1956). With this understanding of the church and its purpose, the theological school is “the intellectual center of the Church’s life” (Niebuhr, 1956, p. 107). The purpose of the school is aligned with the purpose of the church. It is to be a place where the love of God is encouraged through the intellectual study of biblical texts and the various theological disciplines as one seeks to know God and know man in relation to God. In addition, it is to teach people desiring to serve as religious leaders the applied practical theology involved in communicating the knowledge and love of God to others, in ministering to the needs of people, and in equipping the church to love its neighbor both within and outside the church (Niebuhr, 1956).

As a unique institution reflecting the goals of the church and the academy, the theological school brings together the people and the materials necessary for deep consideration of all facets of the Christian faith, whether objective or subjective (G. T. Miller, 2007). Most importantly, the AATS study sought to remind those involved in theological education that “theologians professed to know and to teach about God, and they had to be accountable before God and humankind. The divine reality, as much as human circumstance, shaped existing theological institutions and claimed those institutions’ future” (G. T. Miller, 2007, p. 672). Theological schools exist to equip the mission of the church and, ultimately, the mission of God in this world

(Aleshire, 2021). Thus, a fundamental part of their identity and mission is defined by their unique role as the intellectual center for the church.

Broadly Accepted Standards

With this identity and purpose in mind, the ATS Commission on Accrediting has regularly evaluated, updated, and maintained a uniform set of standards by which theological schools can attain the official mark of legitimacy among institutions of higher education—accreditation—despite the diversity existing among them (G. T. Miller, 2007). By creating a set of standards and offering an accreditation equal to that of major institutional accreditors and federally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, ATS legitimized theological schools' mission as graduate professional education and provided a means to judge the institution's quality.

These schools are accountable to official accreditation standards and must also retain the levels of scholarship required by the academy for the disciplines taught in the school (G. T. Miller, 2007, 2014). Having secured federally recognized accreditation for all levels of education both through institutional accreditors and the specifically focused theological accreditor of ATS, theological schools locate a fundamental part of their identity and mission in being an institution of higher education, specifically one that provides a graduate professional education designed for people of a religious community (Aleshire, 2021).

Challenges Facing Theological Schools

The ideals outlined in the statement of purpose of theological schools have been significantly challenged over the last several decades, leading to calls for “no less than a radical transformation in theological education . . . grounded in a renewed vision” (González, 2015, p. 144). These challenges come from multiple sources, highlighting the hybrid nature of theological

schools. As discussed in the following section, some of these sources include cultural pressures related to changes in religious, moral, and ethnic demographics; educational pressures caused by changes in curricula, pedagogy, and delivery methods; financial pressures caused by enrollment challenges and decreased funding from denominations; and theological pressures caused by varying hermeneutical interpretations of Scripture and less allegiance by students to specific denominational particularities.

Cultural Pressures

A significant influencing pressure is changes in the broader culture. In recent decades, considerable changes have occurred in the religious landscape of the United States, including a decline among most Christian denominations (Nadeem, 2022). Data collected by the Pew Research Center (2021) reflected this decline, with 90% of the U.S. population identifying as Christian in 1972 but only 64% in 2020. Declines have specifically been seen within Protestantism, with 52% of the U.S. population identifying as Protestant in 2007 and only 40% identifying the same in 2021. Similar declines have been reported among those identifying as evangelical: 30% in 2007 but only 24% in 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2021).

The decline among Christian individuals, churches, and denominations has led to a decrease in the enrollments of many theological schools, with 55% of ATS member schools reporting a decrease in enrollment over the last decade (Meinzer, 2021). Christianity has no longer held the public cultural standing and privilege it held in earlier decades, denominations are weaker, and society has become increasingly disinterested in religion (G. T. Miller, 2014). In 1972, only 5% of the U.S. population identified as having no religious identity; in 2020, this figure had grown to 30% (Pew Research Center, 2021). Furthermore, in 2021, only 37% of Americans held high confidence in the church (Gallup, 2021).

The demographics of U.S. Christianity have also changed as society has become more diverse, the changes reflecting a decrease in white Christians. The 2016 *American Values Atlas* noted a decline in white Protestant Christians from 55% in 1976 to 30% in 2016, with a similar decline among white evangelical Christians from 23% to 17% over the same period (Cox & Jones, 2017). Following a similar pattern, 2011–2021 saw a 7% decrease among white pastors but an 11.6% increase among African American pastors, a 0.6% increase among Asian pastors, and a 17.8% increase among Hispanic pastors (Zippia, 2021). Theological schools historically have been institutions serving primarily white churches and denominations; however, in the last few decades, these schools have experienced enrollment growth primarily from nonwhite students, particularly among African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics (González, 2015). Data gathered annually by the ATS reflected a 34.9% decline among white student enrollment in Mainline Protestant schools from 2011–2021. During this same period, Evangelical Protestant schools experienced a 46.5% increase in enrollment by nonwhite students and a 4% increase among white students (Olsztyn, n.d.). Theological schools have experienced and responded to the increased focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity within society and higher education (E. S. Brown, 2018).

In addition, cultural changes in acceptable sexual and moral practices have required a response by theological schools (G. T. Miller, 2014). Historically, Christian teaching held to a traditional definition of marriage as between a man and woman; discouraged divorce, adultery, and sexual practice outside of marriage; and considered the practice of homosexuality as sinful (G. T. Miller, 2007). However, as changes in the larger culture have led to acceptance and legalization of divorce, cohabitation, homosexuality, LGBTQ+ rights, gay marriage, and transgenderism, the church and its schools have wrestled over their stance on these issues as

well, with certain denominations and schools accepting and embracing the change in sexual ethics and other groups and schools rejecting such changes (G. T. Miller, 2014).

Changes in the culture can necessitate institutional changes, as seen in the case of New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). NYTS made several significant institutional adjustments, including delivering classes in multiple languages, offering classes in the evening and on Saturdays, and creating partnerships with accredited undergraduate programs to enable ethnic minority students lacking undergraduate education to obtain the necessary academic credentials required for enrollment in the graduate-level seminary (González, 2015). Despite these changes, NYTS has planned to merge with another seminary after June 2024 (Walrond, 2023).

Educational Pressures

As higher education institutions, theological schools are accountable to standards that provide the basis for judgment of the quality of the school and its program (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b). These standards include, among others, the quality of faculty, the size and quality of library resources, endowments and financial resources, the quality of the physical campus, educational delivery methods, and the outcomes demonstrated in the employability and placement of graduates (Aleshire, 2021). To maintain accreditation and continue to attract students, schools must adequately meet the standards and expectations set by the higher education community. Although considerate of the broad type of educational institution, accreditation standards have a “homogenizing influence on institutional forms” (Aleshire, 2021, p. 60). Criteria for accreditation for higher education center on institutional mission, but changes within the field of higher education can challenge an institution’s identity and mission by requiring institutions to respond to changes in curriculum, enrollment, pedagogy, and outcomes (Aleshire, 2021; Huffman, 2022b).

The impact of these pressures has been seen in the creation of new degree programs, such as the Doctor of Ministry, and professional master's degree programs, such as counseling, which require institutional resources beyond the traditional Master of Divinity degree (G. T. Miller, 2014). Within Evangelical Protestant schools, enrollment in a professional Master of Arts degree program increased 38.8% over the 10 years 2011–2021, with a similar increase of 32.8% in Doctor of Ministry enrollments over the same period among the same group of schools (Olsztyn, n.d.).

A similar trend among theological schools was the decrease in requirements for the Master of Divinity degree, which may be a cause of the 34% decline in enrollments in the Master of Divinity degree among Mainline Protestant schools between 2011 and 2021, as well as the slight 5.7% increase in the same degree program over the same period within Evangelical Protestant schools (McKanna, 2022; Olsztyn, n.d.).

Furthermore, theological education has traditionally been delivered on residential campuses through in-person classes; however, a key trend in higher education has been the increased use of distance delivery and digital learning tools to engage students who need or prefer more flexible educational programs (S. L. Miller & Scharen, 2017; Tanner, 2017a, 2017b). The COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated the transition to digital learning for most schools, requiring decisions about the fulfillment of the goals of theological education using new methods (Aleshire, 2021; Saunders, 2022).

Financial Pressures

Historically, theological schools have faced significant financial pressures largely due to their dependence on supporting churches and denominations (G. T. Miller, 2014). As private, independent institutions of higher education, theological schools receive financial support from

private sources (e.g., the financial gifts of individuals, churches, and denominations) and from tuition paid by enrolled students either directly or subsidized by federal student loans. These schools must maintain similar faculties, facilities, resources, and programs to those of universities without the benefit of the significant resource base available to universities from endowments and state and federal funding (G. T. Miller, 2014). Denominational funding of schools has increasingly declined over the last few decades, and the schools have struggled with maintaining sufficient student enrollment to bring in adequate tuition (Aleshire, 2021).

Evangelical schools mainly rely on private donor contributions and tuition income because their endowments are much smaller than Mainline Protestant schools. Endowment per full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment among Mainline Protestant schools was \$705,682 in 2021, while endowment per FTE enrollment among Evangelical Protestant schools was only \$95,718 (Olsztyn, n.d.). Giving per FTE enrollment among Evangelical Protestant schools declined by 4.8% during 2011–2021. In contrast, revenue from net tuition per FTE enrollment increased by 6.7%, and revenue from scholarships per FTE enrollment increased by 46.5% over the same period (Olsztyn, n.d.). Financial challenges have caused many schools to consider their identity and mission and make changes necessary to meet financial problems, which can include decisions to close the school, sell a campus, merge with another institution, or open the school to faculty and students from other religions (Huffman, 2022a; MacKaye, 2009; Nelson, 2013; Ries, 2015; Tajanlangit, 2022). Since 2010, over 45 ATS member schools have closed, merged, or withdrawn (Gin, 2020).

Theological Challenges

The challenges to biblical authority that began with the introduction of the historical-critical scientific study of the biblical text in the late 1800s have continued to increase over the

last several decades (G. T. Miller, 2014). Along with the divide between liberal and conservative theological convictions over biblical inerrancy, further deconstruction of the biblical text and classical theology has occurred by scholars and theologians who have applied a liberationist, feminist, critical race, or queer hermeneutic to biblical and theological studies (G. T. Miller, 2014). The question of biblical inerrancy led to significant transformations in the governing board, administration, and faculty at several leading seminaries, including Fuller Seminary, Princeton Seminary, Concordia Seminary, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Highsmith, 1999; G. T. Miller, 2014).

Historically, theological schools were primarily established by a specific denomination or religious group to train their leaders consistent with the particularities of their confessional tradition (G. T. Miller, 1990). However, in the current environment, relationships with supporting denominations have weakened, confessional particularities have become less important, and students have often chosen to study in schools different from their denominational background (G. T. Miller, 2014). These changes were reflected in the 33.9% decline in student enrollment over 10 years in traditional Mainline Protestant schools versus the 22.1% increase in student enrollment over the same period among the Evangelical Protestant schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). The resulting impact of these diverse theological perspectives has challenged the mission and identity of theological schools as they have responded to new perspectives and welcomed students from different confessional traditions (G. T. Miller, 2014; M. Young, 2023).

Finally, the profession of pastoral ministry has seen significant challenges over recent years, particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic (McConnell, 2021). A recent study by the Barna Group revealed a 20% decrease in satisfaction levels among current pastors during 2015–2022 and an overall decline of 28% in confidence in their ministerial calling during

the same period (Barna Group, n.d.). However, this decline in satisfaction levels has not changed the average quitting rate among pastors, which was estimated to be approximately 1.5% annually (Green, 2015; McConnell, 2021).

In response to these theological, educational, financial, and cultural trends, “theological schools have needed to devote increasing attention to their institutional mission” (Aleshire, 2021, p. 61). The past and current experience of Protestant theological schools in the United States has revealed that attention to their identity and mission by institutional leaders is required for them to continue to meet the needs of their religious communities (G. T. Miller, 1990, 2007, 2014). Theological schools are hybrid institutions, with one part of their identity centered in higher education and the other part centered in the church, and their viability is closely connected to the viability of the religious communities they serve (Aleshire, 2008). The current study intended to assist these schools by investigating how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission in the face of various pressures because ultimately, as the intellectual center of the church, these institutions and the leaders thereof are accountable to God for their work in furthering his purposes for his church (G. T. Miller, 2007; Niebuhr, 1956).

Governance in Higher Education

When higher education institutions complete the accreditation process, they are asked to meet certain standards applicable to all such institutions. The first of these standards relates to the mission of the institution because the mission of the institution informs all other aspects of the school. Another standard sets criterion for governance because, without good governance, an institution cannot attain its mission (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b; Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-b; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, n.d.; New England

Commission on Higher Education, n.d.). Thus, governance and mission work together in higher education institutions.

Governance of higher education institutions has been recognized as particularly complex because the responsibility and authority have been distributed among many groups, and the processes for ordering and implementing this structure are difficult to manage, leaving decision-making processes unclear (Birnbaum, 1991; Lewis, 2009). However, despite the complexity of the structure and process, governance ultimately begins and ends with the board of trustees (Aleshire, 2008; Pierce, 2014).

Governance refers to “the way in which an organization is managed at the highest level, and the systems for doing this” (The Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). It involves authority, structure, and process (Aleshire, 2008; Pierce, 2014). Authority, or the right, responsibility, and power, is vested in varying groups and individuals throughout an organization yet begins and ends with the governing board, which holds the ultimate legal responsibility for the organization (Houle, 1989). Each organization must structure governance to define the responsibilities held by the internal groups and then define a process by which this structure and authority can be ordered and implemented (Aleshire, 2008).

Three common theories attempt to explain the nature of decision-making authority within higher education institutions. These include organized anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972), loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976), and professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1980). The main points of this section are that various theories and models have been developed to analyze and understand the complex governance structure of higher education institutions involving governing boards, administration, faculty, students, donors, alums, community members, and, in

some cases, local and state governing officials. For most higher education institutions, some form of shared governance has been adopted to manage the complexities of governance.

Organized Anarchy

Organizations marked by organized anarchy share the common characteristics of goal ambiguity, unclear decision-making processes, and fluid participation in such processes (Cohen et al., 1972). Organized anarchy recognizes the existence of multiple actors holding decision-making authority within the institution, each of whom has different preferences for the outcome. In these organizations, the technology, or how outcomes are produced and determined to be successful, is unclear and not fully understood by all the actors, making the decision-making structure and processes unclear. Further complicating the unclear decision-making process is the fact that participants involved in decision making change regularly, creating a fluid state of participation within the institution (Cohen et al., 1972). This model has been referred to as the “garbage can model [in which] a decision is an outcome or interpretation of several relatively independent streams within an organization” (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 2).

Higher education institutions have been referred to as organized anarchies with a garbage can model of decision-making because the “problems, solutions, and participants move from one choice opportunity to another in such a way that the nature of the choice, the time it takes, and the problems it solves all depend on a relatively complicated intermeshing of elements” (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 16). Unlike a corporation in which outcomes can be measured by profits, the goals and success markers of higher education institutions can be defined by various factors, including but not limited to enrollment, graduation rates, research publications, and financial solvency, thereby making them ambiguous (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Although all participants of an institution may understand its overall purpose and mission, each group holds varying

perspectives on its role in achieving that purpose and what defines success. Depending on the nature of the problem and the potential solutions, the decision-making process may involve differing groups for each decision, creating confusion in the decision-making process. Finally, participants engaged in the decision-making process also change frequently because of the fluidity of the problems and solutions (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Thus, decision making appears to occur in a manner described as organized anarchy, and governance of the institution is needed to bring order, structure, and definition to the anarchy.

Loosely Coupled Systems

Coupling refers to the alignment between distinct parts of a system, and loose coupling reflects a weak or infrequent connection between the different parts (Weick, 1976). Each part of the system is responsive to the other; yet, it retains its own identity and separateness. The connection between the parts is fluid: in some instances, certain parts work closely together, but in others, they do not interact. The strength of the connection depends on the activity drawing the parts together, and these points of connection can build upon one another, thereby strengthening the connection (Weick, 1976). A benefit of loose coupling is that disturbances in one part of the system may not significantly affect the other parts, allowing the work to continue. However, aligning goals, decisions, and actions across loosely coupled systems can be challenging, impeding the entire system's overall success (Weick, 1976).

The theory of loosely coupled systems may apply to academic institutions because these institutions have distinct parts that interact with one another in varying frequency levels (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Certain departments may be closely tied while others infrequently interact with one another, and each distinct part has its role, responsibility, goals, and definition of success. When the goals differ across departments, the participants in the institution may work

against one another rather than work aligned toward the same purpose, enhancing the tension and confusion already apparent in the decision-making structures and processes (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Governance in loosely coupled institutions necessitates a communal effort focused on clarifying and implementing the institution's mission while providing structures and processes for various groups to advocate their goals (Lewis, 2009).

Professional Bureaucracy/Adhocracy

Each organization contains different components, broadly divided between the technical core and the periphery (Thompson, 2003). The operating or technical core of the organization is that which provides the primary services, and this is overseen by the strategic apex, which comprises the individuals holding authority over and carrying overall responsibility for the organization (Mintzberg, 1980). Within the organization exists the middle line of workers who connect the strategic apex with the operating core and a technostructure that determines and defines operating procedures and standardization within the organization. All of this is supported by staff, who coordinate and enable the separate components of the organization to work together (Mintzberg, 1980). These components are coordinated within organizations in different configurations based on contingency factors, including age, size, technical system, environment, and power, creating differing organizational structures (Mintzberg, 1980).

Higher education institutions have often been considered professional bureaucracies where the faculty, as the highly trained specialists, serves as the dominant operating core with considerable autonomy for producing the services generated by the institution, such as teaching and research (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Although not the dominant legal authority, the institution's operating core holds considerable power and responsibility and actively participates in decision making. Although these institutions also contain a large support staff structure, this

component of the organization lacks authority, and its participation in decision-making is weaker, even though the overall operation of the institution depends upon the contribution of the support staff (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Professional bureaucracies function well in complex and stable environments. However, as environments become more unstable, professional bureaucracies may become more like adhocracies where the professional staff dominate. Still, the organizational structure becomes more fluid, allowing multiple departments to interact to solve pressing environmental problems (Mintzberg, 1980).

Models of Governance

Governance of these institutions includes multiple stakeholders. The governing board, administration, and faculty assume the most significant roles in overall governance; however, other stakeholders, such as students, alumni, donors, community members, and in the case of public institutions, state and local governing officials, impact governance as well (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Manning, 2018). Organizational theories, such as the ones described previously, have been used to develop various models to explain the complex governance processes found in higher education institutions (Manning, 2018; Tierney, 2008). These models work by emphasizing different aspects of the complex governance processes in these institutions, and the most commonly applied models are anarchical, bureaucratic, collegial, and political (Birnbaum, 1991; Manning, 2018; Tierney, 2008).

Applying a collegial model to an institution focuses on the faculty's relationships. In contrast, a political model focuses on the existence and use of power by differing groups in the governance processes (Manning, 2018). A bureaucratic model analyzes the impact of the organizational structure on decision-making processes, while the anarchical model demonstrates the complexity of governance and the multiplicity of decisionmakers (Manning, 2018). A more

recent model, the cultural model, has also been applied to higher education institutions in an attempt to broaden the analysis of decision making to include intangible factors such as organizational culture, identity, and values in the governance processes (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Tierney, 2008).

Although each model provides a focused lens through which to analyze an institution, “some elements of each of the models reflect institutional functioning in some ways, at some times, and in some parts of all [higher education institutions]” (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 175). Every institution contains all elements in each model, and in this way, every institution reflects each model in certain ways (Birnbaum, 1991). Every institution has a governance process involving the governing board, administration, faculty, students, and other internal and external constituencies. Furthermore, the environment in which all higher education institutions operate has grown increasingly complex, requiring governance processes to become more sophisticated in addressing these institutions’ problems today (Aleshire, 2008; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Pierce, 2014).

Governance of these institutions primarily developed to function well in a stable environment. Still, the pressures facing higher education institutions, including theological schools, require institutions to innovate, adapt, and become more agile, which has implications for governance processes (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Pierce, 2014; Tierney, 2008). Amid this challenging environment, governance requires a “clear sense of organizational identity [and] if governance is to improve . . . then an organization’s participants ought to have a sense about the core values of the institution” (Tierney, 2008, p. 167).

Shared Governance

Whether described as organized anarchies, loosely coupled systems, or professional bureaucracies, higher education institutions have been characterized by “high levels of goal ambiguity, client-focused missions, highly professionalized staff, unclear decision-making processes, and environmental vulnerability” (Hendrickson, 2013, p. 31). Effective governance of institutions requires a structure that allows for differentiation among organizational members and the coordination and integration of members with one another to enable the institution to achieve its strategic goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In recognition of these challenges, many institutions have adopted a shared governance model to define the authority, structure, and process for governance and decision making within the institution and allow for differentiation and coordination among members. In shared governance, the governing board, the administration, the faculty, and, to a lesser extent, other internal and external constituencies each play a role in the decision-making processes of the educational institution (Basinger, 2009; Pierce, 2014).

Shared governance principles were clearly outlined in the 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” issued by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (American Association of University Professors, 2006). The statement offered guidelines that the leadership of higher education institutions can apply in ways appropriate to their context. Shared governance intends to develop “a college or university in which all the components are aware of their interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among themselves, and of the force of joint action [to] enjoy increased capacity to solve educational problems” (American Association of University Professors, 2006, para. 1). Shared governance seeks to align the faculty, administration, and governing board, all of whom

hold authority and responsibility for the institution's work, to allow the institution to fulfill its mission effectively.

Faculty

In shared governance, faculty hold primary responsibility for academic matters, including curriculum, teaching methods, faculty status, research, and student affairs related to educational purposes (American Association of University Professors, 2006). The faculty constitutes the highly professionalized operating core of the institution engaged in the substantive work of teaching and research, the primary products of the institution, and this group delivers these services to the beneficiaries, namely the students. An academic administrator often coordinates this group of participants, leads the institution's educational programs, and represents the faculty to the administration and governing board (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The governance structure and processes of the faculty and academic programs of the institution differ across institutions. Their context determines them, but in all institutions, this group holds considerable power and authority over institutional matters (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

Administration

The administration, led by a president, provides institutional leadership and holds primary managerial responsibility for nonacademic activities, including securing and sustaining financial resources, communicating with the public on behalf of the institution, and engaging in institution-wide planning and operations (American Association of University Professors, 2006).

In a shared governance model, the president develops collegial partnerships with other constituencies internal and external to the institution and is expected to operate democratically with them within the specific context of the institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Because the president is the institution's public face, the chief executive officer of a complex organization,

and often a faculty member, the administration may dominate the governance process of the university. Studies on the academic presidency have revealed that although robust and influential leadership by presidents during times of crisis is beneficial to a struggling institution, in general, academic presidents are more effective when they encourage democratic processes, open communication, and balance among the various groups within the institution (Birnbaum, 1999; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

The most important relationship within the shared governance model is the relationship between the governing board and the president because the president is to work with “responsible partnership” (Houle, 1989, p. 87) and complement the work of the governing board of the institution. Research has revealed that the performance of the president is strongly affected by the conduct of the board, and the performance of the board is strongly affected by the conduct of the president (Kerr & Gade, 1989).

Governing Board

The governing board of a higher education institution operates as the final and ultimate institutional authority (American Association of University Professors, 2006). The board of trustees provides the legal authority for the institution vis-à-vis the state and federal governments. As such, the group holds ultimate responsibility for the institution’s assets, mission, and operations (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Furthermore, the governing board is the source of public trust and is accountable to the broader public for the institution’s performance (Houle, 1989). As the complexity and significance of the governing processes for these institutions continue to grow, the importance of an effective governing board overseeing all aspects of the institution grows as well (Aleshire, 2008).

In sum, shared governance is a “communal effort in which various power structures interact, trust, and work together to achieve the institutions’ mission while encouraging and allowing individuals in the organization to share and advocate their own goals for the organization” (Lewis, 2009, p. 23). Although various models exist to explain shared governance, most of the writing about governance remains theoretical and is “based in neither qualitative or quantitative methodologies. . . . [Indeed], only a handful of studies have utilized explicit theoretical tools to diagnose a particular area of inquiry such as the role of the faculty senate” (Tierney, 2008, pp. 150–151). This research added empirical study by employing qualitative research methods in case studies to evaluate a particular area of inquiry within the governance of higher education institutions. Because the ultimate authority and responsibility for the institution and the fulfillment of its mission rests with the governing board, the board’s role was the primary focus of this research.

The Governing Board and Its Work

A governing board is “an organized group of people with the authority collectively to control and foster an institution that is usually administered by a qualified executive and staff” (Houle, 1989, p. 6). This authority was granted to governing boards of private independent nonprofit institutions in 1819 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819). The *Dartmouth* case distinguished nonprofit private institutions from public sector institutions and solidified the common practice of volunteer lay governance of higher education institutions (Hendrickson et al., 2013). These nonprofit private institutions “are organized under the laws of trust and charity” (G. T. Miller, 1990, p. 31), allowing funds to be given to an institution in trust to be administered by a board of trustees in a manner consistent with a defined purpose.

In this manner, trustees are not responsible to the government but are expected to serve as fiduciaries of the institution, ensuring its financial viability and fulfillment of its defined purpose and mission (Gooding, 2012; G. T. Miller, 1990). Since the *Dartmouth* case, private nonprofit higher education institutions have been governed by a volunteer board of trustees comprised of lay, nonacademic individuals charged collectively with balancing the needs of internal and external constituencies and protecting the autonomy of the institution (Kerr & Gade, 1989). The governing board provides fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance for the institution (Chait et al., 2005).

Purpose and Role

The board of trustees of an educational institution serves as its legal and ultimate authority. Its fundamental role is fiduciary (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2015). It holds the ultimate responsibility for the institution's administration, ethos, mission, identity, and resources (Houle, 1989). The governing board's work is to exercise leadership by guiding the institution through "informed decision making and by critical and creative thought" (Aleshire, 2008, p. 98). This work begins by discerning, defining, and articulating an institutional mission consistent with its identity, values, and history and then continues through the implementation of the mission (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

Implementing the mission involves setting the strategic direction through attainable goals and empowering the administration and faculty to take action to fulfill the mission by achieving the goals (Aleshire, 2008). Board work then ends with ensuring that this mission is maintained over time through proper oversight and evaluation of the president (Hendrickson et al., 2013). In the process of its work, the board appoints, supports, monitors, and evaluates the president, ensures the financial solvency of the institution, serves as the connection between the institution

and its community, and assesses its performance (Nason, 1982). Conceptually and practically, boards of trustees serve as the guardians of the institution's identity, mission, values, resources, and reputation (Chait et al., 2005; Kerr & Gade, 1989). Boards are often overlooked members of the shared governance process; yet, they serve influential roles in the institution's overall success through their fiduciary, strategic, and generative work (Aleshire, 2008; Chait et al., 2005; Novak & Johnson, 2005).

Fiduciary Governance

The duties of care, loyalty, and obedience mark fiduciary governance, and the board is responsible for making "careful, good-faith decisions in the best interest of the institution consistent with its public or charitable mission" (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2015, p. 2). The board is to faithfully manage the institution's assets, including tangible assets, such as financial and property assets, and intangible assets, such as its values and reputation. Fiduciary governance focuses on mission fidelity, and this mode of governance is concerned primarily with internal organizational interests and activities and monitoring the use of resources with the standards of fiscal and procedural integrity (Aleshire, 2008; Chait et al., 2005).

Strategic Governance

Boards are also involved in strategic work because fulfilling the institution's mission requires an institution to be strategic in how it responds to environmental forces (Chait et al., 2005). Accordingly, when boards work strategically, they work with the administration to "align internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats, all in pursuit of organizational impact" (Chait et al., 2005, p. 52). This work is creative and requires the board to use insight, intuition, and visioning to think through how the institution might respond to the

challenges it faces and what changes to structures and processes are needed to continue to fulfill the institution's mission in a changing context (Chait et al., 2005). Boards are involved with strategic planning appropriate for the institution's context. This involvement can be limited to approval of a strategic plan primarily developed by the administration and faculty or broadened to include an active role in gathering information necessary to assess the problem and define a solution, asking pertinent questions, and providing insight gathered from the external constituencies to which the board is connected (Chait et al., 1993, 2005).

Generative Governance

Generative work is a less commonly practiced mode of governance for boards of higher education institutions (Aleshire, 2008). In this mode of governance, boards provide essential leadership for the organization by framing problems and potential solutions and making sense of the challenges faced by the institution in light of its history, values, and mission (Chait et al., 2005). This form of governance seeks to make sense of the relevant data in a new way that guides the institution toward alternative solutions to pressing problems (Chait et al., 2005).

Models for Governance

Literature on nonprofit boards contains two primary models of governance: policy governance (Carver, 2006) and governance as leadership (Chait et al., 2005). Both models address the fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governing but differ in their recommendations for the relationship between the board and the other participants in shared governance, including the administration, faculty, and staff. The main point of this section is to show policy governance and governance as leadership are models used by higher education institutions.

Policy Governance

Policy governance distinguishes between the ends of the institution, which encompass the vision, mission, purpose, and strategic goals, and the means, which comprise the manner through which the ends are realized (Carver, 2006). In this model, governing boards act strategically to determine the overall vision, mission, and strategic goals of the institution and then set boundaries by way of broad policies that define how the president and staff of the institution work to fulfill the mission and achieve the goals. Once the ends are established, the board allows the president, faculty, and staff to engage in the necessary work to fulfill the mission and meet the strategic goals without considerable board involvement. The board monitors the president's performance and fulfills its fiduciary role through the assessment process. Thus, the roles of the board, administration, faculty, and staff are demarcated, allowing each to function most efficiently for the good of those the institution serves (Carver, 2006).

Policy governance has been criticized as a governance model for higher education institutions because it conflicts with the concept of shared governance (Basinger, 2009; Chait et al., 2005; Walford, 2000; Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). Shared governance reflects the commitment that decision-making authority, including the authority to help determine the mission and strategic goals, should be delegated to those "most affected and with the most specialized expertise" (Bejou & Bejou, 2016, p. 56). Because lay volunteers govern higher education institutions, the board, the administration, and the faculty recognize that expertise is held by each decision-making component of the institution, making the involvement of each component vital to the institution's overall success (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). Under shared governance, responsibility for developing and implementing the institution's vision, mission, and

strategic goals is carried out by each governing component in proportion to their responsibility for the issue at hand (Basinger, 2009).

Governance as Leadership

A different governance model attempts to address the lack of purpose felt by individuals serving as trustees who function primarily as fiduciaries (Chait et al., 2005). Approaching governance from the leadership perspective invites the participants involved in the institution's decision-making to view and treat the board as a key leadership team member. In this model, the board engages in generative work alongside the other decision-makers within the institution, particularly the president and executive team. Generative work encompasses the processes before setting a vision, mission, and strategic goals. It involves framing problems rather than solving problems, seeking environmental cues to help identify threats and opportunities, reflecting on the institution's history and the outcomes of prior decisions, and making sense of these factors to create the institution's vision, mission, and strategic goals. It seeks active board involvement in issues marked by ambiguity, high stakes, the potential for conflict among groups related to the institution, and irreversibility. In these situations, the board provides leadership by questioning assumptions, examining the feasibility of options, and identifying potential obstacles and opportunities. Then, together in partnership with the president and other decisionmakers, the board determines the vision and mission and sets the strategic goals necessary for the institution to move forward (Chait et al., 2005).

Governance as leadership fits within a model of shared governance that gives each decision-making group within the institution a responsibility for the decisions of the institution. It strengthens the board's role by adding the generative mode of governance and inviting the board to participate in the problem-defining phase, thereby creating a stronger partnership

between the board and the president (Basinger, 2009). Indeed, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges has increasingly called for more robust board support for and participation in the decision-making processes of the executive team of institutions in response to the challenging and complex environment of many higher education institutions (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2010). Similarly, the ATS Standard on Shared Governance has invited the governing board to exercise leadership by collaboratively engaging the broader school community to promote educational quality and financial sustainability (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020a).

However, this model has also been criticized as adding even more time and complexity to an already inefficient decision-making process, particularly in times of crisis (Bejou & Bejou, 2016). In addition, institutions with strong presidents and faculty may be reluctant to expand the governance process out of a preference for board approval rather than board dialog, and board members who are aware of their nonprofessional status as laypersons may be reluctant to accept the greater involvement required in generative governance (Basinger, 2009; Pierce, 2014).

In sum, both the policy governance model and governance as leadership recognize the board's ultimate responsibility for the institution's vision, mission, and strategic goals and provide tools for distinguishing the duties of the differing governing authorities within institutions. Ultimately, it is the board's responsibility to define the institution's identity and mission and ensure the institution fulfills its mission. This responsibility requires the board to continually assess the mission, its continual appropriateness, and its influence on the institution's operations (Novak & Johnson, 2005).

Board Effectiveness

Although the board and the president are to work in partnership (Houle, 1989) and within the shared governance model, the board, faculty, and administration together make decisions on behalf of the institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013), the balance of partnership can often be tipped to one side or the other. A loss of balance is seen in boards that do not follow institutional policy and act on their own initiative, in boards that do not pay sufficient attention to critical internal or external problems or issues, and in boards that overstep their role and insert themselves in the management of the institution (Aleshire, 2008; Houle, 1989). Each of these patterns reflects the failure of board governance and contributes to the view that boards are ineffective, unable to function, and filled with “high-powered, well-intentioned people engaged in low-level activities” (Chait et al., 1996, p. 1). The main points of this section show board effectiveness requires attention to structure and process, and more effective boards reflect competencies in six key areas: contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political, and strategic.

Obstacles to Effectiveness

Survey research of board members revealed several common obstacles to board effectiveness among higher education institutions (Chait et al., 1996). These include the tension between being neutral, objective analysts of the institution’s work versus being an effective champion for the institution; lacking expertise in the governance and work of the institution yet expected to serve in those processes actively; learning to work together as a group but serving as volunteers who meet infrequently; and understanding and valuing the importance of the board’s role in the institution’s success (Chait et al., 1996). These obstacles can prevent a board from effectively fulfilling its role and being a valuable member of the governing process.

Despite these obstacles, Kerr and Gade (1989), in their study of boards of higher education institutions, found a spectrum of board involvement ranging from boards that served only perfunctory roles while the faculty and administration controlled the decisions of the institution to boards that directly managed all administrative details, acting as the primary decision maker for all institutional decisions. The study compared the nature of board involvement with the opinion of board effectiveness among board members and presidents of the institutions and found institutions led by a board evenly balanced between both extremes were rated as the most effective (Kerr & Gade, 1989).

Chait et al. (1993) also studied board members across 22 private higher education institutions. They found board effectiveness is possible, and a direct positive association exists between the board's strength as measured across six distinct competencies and the institution's overall performance based on conventional financial indicators (Chait et al., 1993). The six specific competencies found in effective boards include contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political, and strategic.

Contextual

Effective boards are aware of, use, and promote the distinctive culture, identity, values, mission, history, and tradition of the institution they serve (Chait et al., 1993). These boards use these intangible aspects of the institution as a guide to make decisions; use decisions to solidify the identity, beliefs, values, and mission of the institution; and make sense of environmental factors through the lens of the institution's identity and mission. Furthermore, these boards reflected behavior that symbolically represented "the core values and concepts that furnish a source of direction and purpose for distinctive colleges" (Chait et al., 1993, p. 19). These boards

embodied and promoted the organizational saga that defines the institution's distinctiveness (Clark, 1972).

Educational

Boards who diligently and purposefully educated new trustees, evaluated their performance, and reflected on their mistakes were deemed effective (Chait et al., 1993). These boards continuously educated themselves about matters concerning the institution, its history, its environment, and the needs of its constituencies so that they could make informed decisions that would serve the best interests of the institution and those impacted by it.

Interpersonal

Governing boards are comprised of individuals who frequently hold leadership positions and positions of considerable authority, autonomy, and influence in their professional environments. However, on governing boards, these individuals serve as peers and must operate by consensus to further the purposes of the institution for which they are accountable (Chait et al., 1993; Kerr & Gade, 1989). In addition, new individual trustees lack an understanding of the purpose of board service, the history, tradition, and values of the institution, and the complexities of the institution's environment. Furthermore, although specific studies revealed that boards of private independent institutions are networked (Lindsay, 2008; Pusser et al., 2006), board members are often strangers connected because of their shared service on the board (Chait et al., 1993). Thus, boards that seek to develop board cohesiveness, a sense of collective purpose, provide orientation and training to their members, and learn to act as a group to further the mission of the institution are more effective (Chait et al., 1993; Dika & Janosik, 2003).

Analytical

As previously acknowledged, higher education institutions have been marked by complexity, ambiguity, competing goals, and distributed authority, and this nature requires a board that can tolerate ambiguity, recognize complexity, and approach issues from multiple perspectives (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Thus, the more effective board gathers information from various sources, analyses problems and information from different perspectives, and understands that perfect solutions are rarely found (Chait et al., 1993).

Political

Boards serve a boundary-spanning role between the institution and its external constituencies, representing the institution to the broader community and the broader community to the institution (Kerr & Gade, 1989). The board is the guardian of the public trust, entrusted to ensure the institution serves its stated purpose by fulfilling its mission and serving the public good (Novak & Johnson, 2005). The board also recognizes although it retains ultimate responsibility for and authority over the institution, it operates within a shared governance framework that includes a variety of other important decision-making groups. In that role, an effective board adheres to a governance process that includes other groups and works to develop and maintain positive relationships with the community and other constituencies (Chait et al., 1993).

Strategic

Effective boards operate well in the strategic mode of governance as they help “envision and shape institutional direction” (Chait et al., 1993. p. 2). These boards focus on critical priorities, anticipate potential problems and act promptly, and assume appropriate risk and responsibility in decision making. They seek to strengthen accountability by developing clear,

attainable, and measurable goals for themselves and the administration while encouraging flexibility in structure and processes to allow the board to address the institution's strategic priorities (Holland, 2000).

Board Structure and Processes

In response to the prescriptive literature providing governing boards with recommendations regarding structure and processes, survey research from 727 charities in the United Kingdom assessed whether structure or processes impacted a board's performance (Cornforth, 2001). Structure variables included board size, use of committees, frequency of meetings, use of job descriptions for board members, and availability of training. The process variables measured shared vision, clear roles and responsibilities, communication, review of board work, conflict management, and meeting practices. The logistic regression analysis used to test the relationship between the structure, process, and board effectiveness variables did not indicate a relationship between board structure and board effectiveness. Instead, four processes greatly impacted the variance in board effectiveness ratings. These processes included a clear understanding by the board of its role and responsibilities; attention to selecting board members with the right skills, experience, and time to serve well; a shared vision among board and management as to how the organization should achieve its goals; and a regular review by both board and management on the working relationship of the two groups (Cornforth, 2001). From this study, board processes appear more important than structure in board effectiveness.

A study of public universities focused on the selection and training process of board members and its impact on board effectiveness (Dika & Janosik, 2003). Governing boards of public universities are selected by state officials such as the governor or other state higher education officials; thus, survey data were collected from this group of individuals in all 50

states. Collected data related to both the selection process and the training and orientation processes for trustees of public universities and were compared to the ratings of board effectiveness. Descriptive data findings revealed that board effectiveness was related to the quality of the trustees selected and the use of training and orientation programs for new trustees, leading the researchers to conclude that board quality is related to “the selection and training of institutional governors” (Dika & Janosik, 2003, p. 285).

In another study on public boards, a critical process related to board effectiveness was the exercise of leadership through agenda setting and board culture management (Kezar, 2006). This study obtained interview data from 132 individuals experienced in board service in private and public higher education institutions. The data revealed that above all other structure, process, and competencies factors, the exercise of leadership by the board in setting the agenda of strategic priorities and cultivating the board’s culture were the most influential processes in overall board effectiveness. In this way, governing boards can exercise essential leadership functions within the overall governance structure of the institution and become “an asset to build the organization” (Kezar, 2006, p. 999).

Thus, it is possible to have a well-functioning board actively participating in the shared governance process for the institution’s good. Furthermore, processes matter more than structure in the overall effectiveness of the governing board. This research considered how the structure and processes of the board and understanding of the board members contribute to the cultivation of institutional identity and mission.

Distinctives of Governing Boards of Theological Institutions

The governance literature has noted that although good practices exist across sectors, the context in which a board governs influences its performance (Carver, 2006; Kezar, 2006).

Because of this, it is important to consider board performance “relative to the specific mission and processes” (Kezar, 2006, p. 976) of the board and its sector. Governance in theological higher education institutions includes more than the practices of good governance offered by the governance literature available to nonprofit institutions. This section’s main points show theological school governance requires an understanding of calling and mission, and specific practices related to discernment, stewardship, and faithfulness should mark effective governing boards.

Governance as Calling and Practice

Governance in theological schools finds its foundation in the unique calling and mission given to it by God, and it is conducted as a communal effort to serve God through fulfilling the mission and calling of the institution (Aleshire, 2008; Hester, 2000). In a religious context, governance is best understood as a practice marked by its own internal and external goods within the specific tradition of the institution (MacIntyre, 2007). Governance as a practice seeks to ensure the institution faithfully produces internal goods, which are reflected in the fulfillment of the institution’s God-given vision and mission while simultaneously achieving external goods of financial viability, credible reputation in the marketplace, and continual production of research and trained graduates (Hester, 2000).

Internal goods reflect excellence of the practice as measured by faithfulness to the mission and calling of the institution as defined by the community and tradition. In contrast, external goods reflect effectiveness in the institution’s outcomes (MacIntyre, 2007). Pursuing external goods of effectiveness without adequate attention to internal goods of excellence can lead institutions away from God’s calling to further his work in the world. Pursuing an outcome of financial viability, reputation, or increased enrollment and graduation rates may result in

drifting away from the foundational purposes of the organization if careful attention to the mission and purpose is not maintained (Hester, 2000). Trustees who practice governance live out their faith in God, help the institution fulfill God's purposes, and remember that the institutions and the persons involved are ultimately accountable to God (Hester, 2000; G. T. Miller, 2007; Niebuhr, 1956). Indeed:

To accept specific responsibilities as a trustee of a particular community or institution, in [a] Scriptural sense, will be seen as a matter of *religious vocation*. It is to accept God's call to *ministry*: to serve, to care for, to administer some particular and valued part of what God has given. (Greenfield, 1983. p. 13)

Thus, the practice of governance in religious organizations seeks to balance the generation of internal goods reflected in consistency to the calling and mission given by God and external goods of effectiveness reflected in traditional success markers for academic institutions. In this way, governance in religious organizations includes additional characteristics.

Discernment

Decision making among those sharing governance in theological institutions is ultimately aimed at discerning God's purposes for the institution within its specific tradition and context (Walford, 2000). Trustees are entrusted with the task of discerning God's vision and mission for the institution and how to fulfill this mission within the complexities of the institution's culture and context (Aleshire, 2009). Discernment is a spiritual practice that involves identifying the "God-endowed and life-giving vocation of the institution" (Delbecq et al., 2003, p. 147) and then using this purpose to guide further decisions as those involved in governing the institution work through the issues and challenges faced by the institution. Recognizing that rational decision-making practices are insufficient in effectively governing religious organizations given their

spiritual callings, using a practice of discernment allows for the influence of spirituality in governing institutions (Delbecq et al., 2003).

Governance as leadership through the model of generative governance includes this practice of discernment as trustees engage in the institution's sense making, analysis, and problem-defining processes (Chait et al., 2005). Generative governance with discernment is particularly appropriate for ambiguous, complex, and consequential matters as trustees seek to identify the proper direction for the institution in light of its identity and mission, determine the best strategies to implement the mission, obtain and use the resources necessary to fulfill the mission, and monitor the management of the institution as they work to meet the determined goals (Aleshire, 2009). Discernment provides a tool to help trustees find and maintain the appropriate balance between internal goods of excellence and external goods of effectiveness (MacIntyre, 2007).

Stewardship

The image of the role of a leader, including the trustee, within a religious organization is one of a steward taking care of an institution that ultimately belongs to God (Greenfield, 1983; Walford, 2000). A steward understands that they are managing tangible and intangible resources that originate with God, are owned by God, and are entrusted to human managers to fulfill God's intended purpose. Trustees are accountable to internal and external constituencies of the institution and the broader public community and to God for the institution's management (Greenfield, 1983; G. T. Miller, 2007; Walford, 2000). This notion of stewardship strengthens the fiduciary responsibility of the board because if the "institutions lose sight of their essential vocation as communities ultimately accountable to the gospel, then they have lost their reason for existence" (Walford, 2000, p. 5).

In addition, stewardship helps to align all decision-making groups within a shared governance model because it reminds each group of their commitment to work together and to use their respective power and authority to fulfill the God-given calling and purpose of the institution (Lewis, 2009). Stewardship allows flexibility in structure and processes as the institution responds to changes in its environment; however, such changes are to be consistent with God's unchanging purpose in the world (Greenfield, 1983). Fulfilling this calling requires the board, faculty, administration, students, donors, and the religious community to work together in alignment to steward the institution (Aleshire, 2009).

Faithfulness

If stewardship is the dominant image for leadership of a religious organization, then the best metric for success is faithfulness (Walford, 2000). Faithfulness is part of the legal fiduciary duties of loyalty and care, which are prescribed by the state statutory and common laws governing directors of for-profit and nonprofit corporations as well as trustees of a trust (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2015; Johnson, 2011). A breach of these fiduciary duties can bring legal consequences (Johnson, 2011). For religious organizations, trustees are entrusted with keeping the institution faithful through legal fiduciary responsibilities and the standards set by its religious community (Schneider & Morrison, 2010). Furthermore, biblical teaching provides standards for faithfulness for trustees and institutions abiding by the Christian tradition (Bainbridge, 2016).

In this way, for religious organizations, legal fiduciary duties, religious community standards, and biblical teaching become determinants of whether the board is effectively fulfilling its role (Greenfield, 1983; Walford, 2000). Faithfulness applies the analytical and strategic competencies of board governance by requiring “interpreting situations that call for

corporate response in light of the institution's mission or purpose and values in order to act in 'good faith,' in continuity with the institution's tradition, yet extending the tradition to meet present circumstances" (Hester, 2000, p. 69). The faithful board functions as a learning community that knows its purpose and mission, desires to see reality clearly to understand its situation and context, and together discerns the decisions and actions necessary to balance excellence as defined by the mission and effectiveness defined by external standards (Lewis, 2009).

Governance in Theological Schools

Theological schools are private independent institutions, and their boards are not appointed by governmental officials or elected by the public (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). Instead, three primary structures of board oversight exist within theological schools, and a fourth applies to Canadian schools (Aleshire, 2008). One structure is a governing board of a free-standing school that holds full authority and power to make decisions for the school. In these schools, boards are self-perpetuating, and the institution or its sponsoring denomination selects its members (Aleshire, 2008). Over the last several decades, however, denominational influence over theological institutions has waned, leaving many institutions responsible for selecting their members without involvement by the denomination (G. T. Miller, 2007; Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015).

Certain theological schools, mainly Roman Catholic institutions, are owned by a religious order or bishop, who appoints an advisory board and delegates limited authority and power for decision-making to the board (Aleshire, 2008). A third structure, the embedded theological school, is similar in its limited board authority. These schools are embedded in a larger academic institution and are subject to the university's governing board. In these schools, the theological

school's board often operates in an advisory capacity and lacks decision-making authority (Aleshire, 2008). Finally, Canadian theological schools often have a bicameral system of governance. In this system, one body oversees the financial and administrative matters of the institution, while a second body oversees the academic matters (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020b).

Despite the variation in board structure and selection of board members, survey research collected from theological schools revealed their governing boards often adopted the good governance practices and techniques offered by the nonprofit board literature, desired to improve their effectiveness, and in many cases reported functional improvement over time (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). Subsequent case studies of six theological institutions revealed that boards could be effective governing bodies working in partnership with the administration, whether that partnership reflected executive-centered governance led by a strong president who effectively negotiated and invited participation with other groups in a shared governance model or engaged-governor governance led by a highly effective and engaged board which modeled a deep focus on the mission of the institution (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015).

Despite the bright spots in current governance processes, significant challenges have existed for governing boards arising from the increasingly complex environment in which theological schools find themselves (Aleshire, 2008). As described earlier, theological schools have two fundamental identities—one in the church and the other in higher education (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Aleshire, 2008). Because of this dual identity, the schools have faced the pressures experienced by the church and higher education. They must respond to the challenges of the changing nature and relevance of the Christian church in society and the challenges found in higher education (Aleshire, 2008).

By nature, theological schools are hybrid organizations, and research on hybrid organizations has shown that these organizations “make sense of and combine” (Battilana & Lee, 2014, p. 397) multiple objectives, activities, structures, forms, processes, and meaning. These multiple objectives create a complexity of values that must be coordinated and balanced in a rapidly changing environment to ensure the organization remains on mission (Grimes et al., 2019). Theological schools are mission-driven religious institutions seeking to fulfill a God-given calling; yet, financial, cultural, educational, and social pressures have proven in the past to be strong enough to divert religious higher education institutions far from their mission and calling (Arthur, 2008; Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021). As the corporate body vested with the ultimate power, authority, and responsibility for the identity, mission and viability of the institution, the governing board’s role is increasing in its significance to these schools as they navigate a complex and challenging environment. As Aleshire (2008) concluded in his essay on the future of theological schools:

Theological schools need governing boards that understand how integral these schools are to the vitality of communities of faith and how critical communities of faith are to a society that needs moral understanding translated into social witness, religious commitment translated into a winsome religious voice, and mercy translated into acts of service. (p. 166)

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed has revealed that institutional identity and mission can be decision-making and sense-making tools. However, multiple identities and missions have existed in hybrid organizations, creating tensions. The history of faith-based higher education institutions has reflected a mixed record of maintaining and cultivating the religious identity and

mission while strengthening the academic mission. Governance in higher education institutions is particularly complex, involving multiple decision-making groups. Nonetheless, the governing board is ultimately responsible for the institution and its mission.

For religious organizations, board effectiveness requires fulfilling legal fiduciary duties, meeting the standards defined by the faith community, and being biblically faithful as stewards of the organization. Current theological schools require effective governing boards that can cultivate institutional identity and mission despite significant challenges. Little empirical research has been done on governing boards of theological schools, and most of the literature related to governing boards and governance is prescriptive. The purpose of this research was to extend the analysis of mission currently existing in the literature on higher education institutions, including faith-based institutions, and to address this lack of empirical research on governing boards by investigating how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school.

Chapter 2 reviewed key literature used to develop the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 1 and demonstrated the gaps the study intended to address. Chapter 3 reviews the methodological literature to justify the specific research design. It also provides an overview of the research design, specific data collection methods, procedures for data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 describes the sample, data collection methods used, and data sources obtained for each school. It then presents the research findings using seven separate case narratives to describe the results for each school. Following the individual case narratives, Chapter 4 concludes with a thematic cross-case analysis of six themes found across the seven cases.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the findings and shows how the evidence from the case studies answers the guiding research questions. It then offers suggestions for further research and implications for practice before providing a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This research focused on the reality that governing boards of theological schools must cultivate the school's identity and mission despite cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures that impact identity and mission. This key role of the governing board is often fulfilled within a shared governance structure, which affects its effectiveness. The purpose of this multiple embedded instrumental case study was to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. This chapter sets forth the methodology adopted to address the following research questions.

Primary Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution's governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board's role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

Research Paradigm

Social science research is divided into three primary paradigms—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research is deductive, seeks to determine cause and

effect, broadly generalizes, and collects numeric data for statistical analysis. In contrast, qualitative research is often inductive and descriptive and relies on textual and visual data for interpretive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Mixed methods research paradigms generally use a combination of methods and often combine quantitative and qualitative in the research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The current study used a qualitative research paradigm to address the research questions.

Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when a researcher wants to understand the context in which the participants act and how this context influences their actions, uncover the participant's perspectives on the phenomenon in focus, collect data from multiple sources, use both inductive and deductive reasoning in the analysis process, and present results in a literary, flexible format (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). A particular strength of this paradigm is in "getting at the processes that led to the outcomes" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30) and creating a holistic account of the complexity of the processes and events under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative research is also helpful in improving "existing practices, programs, or policies" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 32).

Researchers have used the quantitative analysis of survey data to investigate whether an institution's various stakeholders understand the mission, vision, and values (Ferrari & Velcoff, 2006), how denominational status influences institutional policy and faculty practices (Glanzer et al., 2019; Kaul et al., 2017), whether academic reputation decreases religious identity (Mixon et al., 2004), to collect benchmarking data on faith-based higher education institutions as a field (Rine & Guthrie, 2016), and the effects of institutional mission on student outcomes (Schreiner, 2018). However, researchers have used qualitative methods to provide a more detailed and in-depth analysis of the relationship between a higher education institution and its identity and

mission (Benne, 2001; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Schuman, 2010; Zenk & Louis, 2018). In addition, many analyses of mission statements used by these institutions adopt a content or discourse analysis (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009; Delucchi, 1997; Morpew & Hartley, 2006; Zenk & Louis, 2018). Recent doctoral studies have used qualitative methods to examine institutional identity and mission from various perspectives (Barbee, 2018; Haines, 2017; Head, 2009; Hughes, 2020; Pickering, 2017; Witek, 2009).

This research explored how a theological school's governing board cultivates the institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure. This purpose reflected a desire to recognize and account for the institution's complexity, understand the perspectives of varying institutional leaders, uncover the actions taken and processes involved, and consider whether improvement of governance practices and policies is warranted. For these reasons and to follow the pattern of previous qualitative studies, this research adopted the qualitative research paradigm for its design.

Positionality Statement

With qualitative research, the individual researcher is the primary instrument through which data are collected and interpreted; therefore, the role of the researcher and how she may impact the data collection and interpretation must be considered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although various methods for accounting for this exist, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) recommended using a positionality statement to "help readers to see how the researchers have located themselves . . . [and] to communicat[e] the level to which the research was undertaken honestly, plausibly and effectively" (p. 73). This positionality statement also sets forth the potential bias the researcher may bring to the research process and how this bias will be addressed using specific practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I have a vested interest in the research I undertook. I graduated with my undergraduate degree from a well-known, nondenominational, evangelical Christian college. I received my master's degree from a large public research university and continued on to pursue my PhD studies through another evangelical Christian university. At the time of this study, I was currently employed by an evangelical Christian organization that began as a church planting and benevolence missionary organization in the 1950s but gradually adjusted its institutional identity and mission to become what now is an accredited graduate school offering theological and leadership training through a certificate, Master of Arts, and Master of Divinity degree program primarily to Christian leaders in countries outside of the United States.

I believe the Christian worldview, as defined through the Bible and church tradition, is the ultimate reality through which all of life can be understood. I further believe that an objective reality exists independent of our construction. However, I recognize that each individual's perspective of that objective reality differs, leading to multiple perspectives and viewpoints of a similar phenomenon. These differing perspectives create complexity in fully understanding any phenomenon. It is my earnest desire that Christian institutions continue to be faithful to the Christian worldview and remain a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ as they conduct their functional work in this world. Thus, I acknowledged this background, context, and perspective create a bias that may have influenced the data collection and analysis. However, these same positions gave me a passion for this research problem and questions, motivating me to uncover what could be helpful to my employer institution and other Christian institutions that currently wrestle with these issues.

To reduce the influence of bias in this research project, I made notes throughout the research process to reflect on how my background, context, and perspective may have influenced

my interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, I had no personal experience with any of the institutions selected as cases for the study. Finally, I practiced methodological triangulation, member checking, and data confidentiality to reduce my bias's influence in this research. More details about these measures follow later in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Method

Five standard qualitative methods exist: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both narrative research and phenomenology have individuals as the primary unit of analysis. Narrative seeks to explain phenomena occurring in an individual's life, and phenomenology focuses on understanding the "essence of experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 104). Ethnography centers on culture, particularly understanding the culture of a group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory is used to inductively build a theory about a particular process, action, or interaction involving many individuals. Case study enables a researcher to develop a holistic and detailed description and analysis of an event, program, activity, or individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because the purpose of this research was to explore how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission within a shared governance framework, grounded theory or case study are the most appropriate research methods. This section justifies case study using subject-specific literature and methodological literature.

Case Study in Subject-Specific Literature

A portion of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 resulted from case study analysis using qualitative and, to a lesser extent, quantitative methods. Case study allows the researcher to incorporate various research methods to collect data necessary to develop a detailed analysis of

the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Historical case study analyses of institutions provided a holistic account of the struggle with institutional identity and mission experienced by faith-based higher education institutions (Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Cuninggim, 1994; Daines et al., 2021; Laats, 2018; Marsden, 2021; Schuman, 2010). These analyses demonstrated the complexity of institutional governance and the many tensions that institutional leaders must balance.

Current research has also adopted a case study approach using qualitative methods to analyze the particular steps and actions of specific institutions and their leaders to cultivate their faith-based identity and mission despite the pressures they face (Hughes, 2020; Swezey & Ross, 2012; Witek, 2009). Tierney (2008) noted higher education governance literature included “only a handful of studies have utilized explicit theoretical tools to diagnose a particular area of inquiry such as the role of the faculty senate” (pp. 150–151).

Recent doctoral studies have used case studies with qualitative methods to study presidential leadership of faith-based institutions (Haines, 2017; Head, 2009; Pickering, 2017), the role of discernment in governing board decision-making practices (Barbee, 2018), and the role of the governing board in institutional change (Highsmith, 1999; Twardowska-Case, 2021). Mission statement studies have often used content and discourse analysis to analyze the text (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Seeber et al., 2019; Woodrow, 2006), and researchers have combined the content analysis with survey data or in-depth interviews within a case study approach (Weeks et al., 2016; Zenk & Louis, 2018). Zenk and Louis (2018) followed their content analysis of mission statements with in-depth interviews with 36 institutional leaders from six institutions to investigate how they used them in their day-to-day activities. The current study research followed a similar pattern to these studies by using a

multiple case study analysis using two qualitative methods to explore the governing board's role in cultivating institutional identity and mission.

Case Study

Case study is an empirical method that allows a researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). This holistic method allows the researcher to describe and analyze the many influences on a particular phenomenon, and it is also particularistic because it focuses on the specific aspects influencing a single occurrence of the phenomenon (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). Case study research enables the researcher to “focus in-depth on a ‘case’ and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective—such as in studying . . . organizational and managerial processes” (Yin, 2018, p. 5). This research method is particularly well-suited for research that asks “how” or “why” questions but in which the researcher cannot manipulate the participants' behaviors because the phenomenon is occurring or has occurred in a real-life context (Yin, 2018). In case study, the context is relevant to the phenomenon and must be considered in the description and analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012).

A case study is a specific bounded system defined by parameters such as time, place, or occurrence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These studies can either be intrinsic, in which the researcher desires to learn about the particularities of a specific case, or instrumental, in which the researcher uses a particular case to learn something about another broader concept (Stake, 1995). Although case studies always consider the context in which the specific case is located, they may be holistic and focus on a single unit of analysis, such as one organization, or use an embedded design, whereby the researcher focuses on more than one unit of analysis, such as both the organization and a particular subset of the organization (Yin, 2018). Studies that hold a broad unit of analysis risk becoming too abstract or shifting in focus during the data collection

phases. In contrast, an embedded design must ensure that both the smaller and broad units of analysis are analyzed adequately so that the larger case does not simply act as the context for the embedded units (Yin, 2018).

If more than one case is involved in the study, the method is considered a collective or multiple case study (Stake, 1995). Stake (2006) used the term “quintain” to refer to the “object or phenomenon or condition to be studied” (p. 6) using several instrumental case studies, which are both analyzed as individual cases and through which cross-case analysis is conducted to address the quintain. Multiple case study designs often provide more compelling evidence and are “therefore regarded as being more robust” (Yin, 2018, p. 54). Each case is selected in these designs following either a literal replication or theoretical replication logic (Yin, 2018). Literal replication cases are expected to provide similar results, whereas theoretical replication expects differing results (Yin, 2018). The replication logic is guided by the overall purpose of the research and the research questions, which must ask “what is most important for understanding the quintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 9). The researcher begins with the quintain and then selects cases to study individually to understand the issues present in each situation. Following this individual analysis, the researcher recognizes and draws attention to patterns within each case and develops cross-case findings that address the quintain (Stake, 2006).

Specific Study Design

To answer the primary research question of this study—how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure—the current research followed a multiple embedded instrumental case study design. As noted previously, case study applies to research questions asking “how” and that seek to uncover organizational processes (Yin, 2018). The primary research question asked how organizational

processes are applied in a specific context to cultivate institutional identity and mission integrity. Using Stake's (2006) language, the current study's quintain was the phenomenon of the governing board's role and processes used in cultivating institutional identity and mission integrity. Each case was about the theological school and its specific identity and mission; however, focused attention was given to the governing board and its activity within its governance structure, using the governing board as the embedded unit of analysis. I evaluated the governing board within the specific parameters of the school and its identity and mission to identify the key issues arising from the particular school case. I identified key themes and conducted cross-case analysis to determine what can be learned about the quintain from these individual case studies.

Time Period

This study considered the school's interaction with its identity and mission over a 10-year period (2012–2022). It focused specifically on the governing board's engagement with issues of identity and mission during these 10 years. The range of 10 years was selected because it is a standard length of time evaluated by an accreditor during the re-affirmation of accreditation (ATS Commission on Accrediting, 2020a; Higher Learning Commission, n.d.-a). I acknowledged that the last 3 years in this range coincided with the COVID-19 global pandemic, which significantly disrupted normal operations for all higher education institutions globally. Accordingly, data specific to 2020–2022 may not have represented normal organizational operations.

Research focused on leadership and decision making in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 global pandemic has been emerging (de Yarza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Although this

emerging research has recognized the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, it has acknowledged that the pandemic, in many ways, exacerbated the already-present struggles and pressures on higher education institutions (Bebbington, 2021; Ramlo, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Indeed, emerging research has noted the need for these institutions to review, reevaluate, and potentially adjust their missions and their operations to better prepare for the postpandemic environment and future crises (Bebbington, 2021; Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022).

Furthermore, emerging research has noted the importance of institutional identity, mission, and values in decision making during the COVID-19 global pandemic (de Yarza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022). One particular study specifically looked at how 55 institutional leaders across 30 higher education institutions attended to the crisis from the perspective of their institutional identity, mission, and values (Liu et al., 2022). Liu et al. (2022) found, “leaders aligned their decision-making with their institutions’ missions and values, and closely tied their institutions’ identities to their missions and values” (p. 363). Similarly, a case study of leadership decisions made by a faith-based university concluded that the institution “demonstrated an ability to remain faithful to the values proclaimed in its vision and mission statements” (de Yarza et al., 2023, p. 103). Because crises test commitment to identity, mission, and values, 2020–2022 were included even though they do not reflect normal operations.

Population and Sample

This study focused on a subset of Christian higher education institutions: Evangelical Protestant theological schools accredited by The Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). As discussed in Chapter 2, theological schools are “the products of religion building” (Aleshire, 2008, p. 12) and exist specifically to educate Christian leaders

through specialized graduate-level education that builds on a more general undergraduate education to equip them to serve their broader religious community in a variety of ways. Theological schools can be considered hybrid institutions, with one part of their identity as the church and another as an educational institution.

Because of this dual identity, theological schools face “a double portion of the pressures that higher education and religion encounter” (Aleshire, 2008, p. 5). Theological schools are accountable to a religious community that expects the school to fulfill its God-given calling as a part of the church within the current cultural environment, and they are accountable to accrediting agencies who expect the institution to demonstrate that it meets the applicable and changing educational standards for higher education (Aleshire, 2008). For this reason, theological schools provide a robust context to investigate how governing boards cultivate institution identity and mission within a shared governance framework. This section describes the identified population as accredited evangelical Protestant schools, and purposeful sampling used to select participating institutions from the population.

As described in Chapter 2, ATS is a membership organization created by theological schools to provide a network for improvement and growth within the United States and Canada. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS is separate from ATS and is the body that accredits ATS member schools. ATS has more than 270 member schools across three ecclesial families: Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic/Orthodox (Olsztyn, n.d.). As of 2021, 45% of the ATS member schools were Evangelical Protestant, 33% were Mainline Protestant, 22% were Roman Catholic or Orthodox, and 0.37% were Jewish. In addition, 55% of member schools were denominational, representing over 70 denominations; 23% were independent, and 22% were Roman Catholic or Orthodox.

In 2022, Evangelical Protestant schools enrolled 71% of students in ATS member schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). Furthermore, over the last 10 years, Evangelical Protestant schools experienced a 22.1% increase in student enrollment, whereas Mainline Protestant schools experienced a 33.9% decrease in student enrollment schools (Olsztyn, n.d.). These data showed theological students have been more interested in studying in institutions identifying as Evangelical Protestant than in any other type of school. For this reason, the specific population for this research was ATS member schools accredited by the Commission for Accrediting and identified as Evangelical Protestant.

Sample

Instrumental case study research focuses on the particularistic aspects of a case for two reasons: to understand the case and to learn about the broader phenomenon of interest through the experience of the case (Stake, 1995). In this type of research, the generalization sought is analytic generalization rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). The goal of analytic generalization is to provide evidence related to theoretical concepts or principles, thereby allowing the particularistic nature of a case study to empirically inform a more general understanding of a phenomenon occurring across situations (Yin, 2018). In this way, case study research uses the particular to inform a broader generalization of theoretical concepts or principles (Yin, 2018). Because of the goal of analytic generalization, case study research requires a purposeful sampling procedure rather than the random sampling procedure used in many quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling of study cases is done to “maximize what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4), requiring the researcher to ask which cases can provide the greatest understanding of the phenomenon being considered.

The current study explored how governing boards of theological schools cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure. The schools selected were affiliated with different denominations, located in various regions, and of different sizes to allow for theoretical replication (Yin, 2018). Another influential factor is whether the theological school is free standing or embedded in a larger institution, as its structure significantly affects the governing board's role (Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015). The sample contained one embedded institution and six free-standing schools. As noted previously, multiple case studies are considered more robust (Yin, 2018).

There were 121 ATS member schools in the Evangelical Protestant ecclesial family at the time of this study, which was too large of a sample for this multiple case study (Olsztyn, n.d.). To identify potential schools to study from among this large group of schools, I asked a group of individuals currently or formerly affiliated with ATS to recommend a pool of Evangelical Protestant schools that represented a broad cross-section of its member school population, had stable and healthy governance, and would be open to participating in research of this nature. The former Director of Accreditation at the Commission on Accrediting of ATS sent a personal email on behalf of the researcher to the president of each school in the pool to introduce the research project and ask for participation in the research. I emailed a formal introductory letter to the president and board chair asking for the president and the current board chair to participate in this study on behalf of each school. The letter described the research project and data collection methods. This letter and research summary are included as Appendices A and B.

In this email, I also provided the organizational cooperation agreement, included as Appendix C, and the informed consent, included as Appendix D. I asked the president of each school to sign an official organizational cooperation agreement issued on school letterhead and

to email the signed agreement to me. I asked each participant interviewed to read and sign the informed consent form and return the signed consent form by email to me. I collected all consents from a school and the individuals affiliated with the school before beginning the data collection from that school. No conflicts of interest occurred in the sample selection as I had no current relationships with any schools in the population.

Data Collection

After obtaining the organizational cooperation agreements and informed consents from seven schools, data collection occurred using two methods, an advantage of the case study research method (Yin, 2018). These methods included document analysis and in-depth interviews. The same procedures were followed, and I used memos to record notes and reflections during all aspects of the data collection process to allow for consistency in data collection across multiple cases.

Document Collection and Analysis

Document analysis involves the review of written documents pertinent to the research question. These include organizational documents, public records, personal communication, and a research journal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research gathered and used documents for two distinct purposes: contextual information and triangulation.

Contextual Information

I reviewed the institution's website, the data published in the ATS annual data tables for 2012–2022 related to the institution, and the ATS directory information regarding the institution's accreditation history and current accreditation cycle status. The institution's website provided public source data about the school, specifically its denominational affiliation, history, identity, mission, values, leadership, faculty, and academic programs. The ATS data provided

historical data related to enrollment, faculty headcount, expenditures, long-term investments, tuition and fees, and accreditation. These data were used to prepare an institutional profile for each school to create context and allow for thick description of each case.

Institutional Documents

I requested the following documents for each school: (a) current bylaws plus any previous versions used during 2012–2022, (b) current board handbook and any prior versions used during 2012–2022, (c) board member demographic data, (d) most recent accreditation reports (e.g., self-study sections) responding to criteria related to mission and to governance, and (e) any other relevant documents related to institutional mission and governance provided by the institution. Subquestions 1, 2, and 3 asked about the governing board’s activities, role, and structure. These organizational documents contained written information addressing these aspects of the governing board. The documents provided by the school were reviewed using the document review guide included in Appendix E. Reviewing these institutional documents helps to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2018, p. 115), namely the in-depth interviews discussed in the following section.

Interviews

In-depth interviews are one of the primary data collection methods used in qualitative research, including case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method is used to gather as much data about a phenomenon from the perspective of the expert interviewee as possible in a short time frame (Morris, 2015). For 5 of the 7 schools, I interviewed the current board chair, the president, and any additional individual recommended by the president or board chair of each school. The current board chair could not participate in the interview for two schools. In these cases, I interviewed a former board chair who served during 2012–2022 instead of the current

board chair. I interviewed the current board chair, a former board chair, and the president for one school. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain information about the school's identity and mission, the governing board processes and practices used to cultivate identity and mission, the board's role in the institution's overall governance structure, and the pressures faced by the school.

Board Chair

The board chair is authorized to speak for the governing board and often represents the board publicly. In addition, the board chair oversees the governing board processes, practices, and agenda and knows the role played by the board in the overall governance structure of the institution (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 1993; Houle, 1989). Accordingly, the board chair was an appropriate person from whom to obtain data intended to answer the primary research question and all subquestions.

President

In addition, I interviewed the institution's president to gather data related explicitly to Subquestions 2, 3, and 4. The president understood the overall governance structure of the institution and could provide data associated with the specific role played by the board within this structure to address Subquestions 2 and 3. Furthermore, the president was attuned to the institution's particular pressures and could provide relevant data for Subquestion 4. Finally, the president, being part of the institution's administration and the direct employee of the governing board, also allowed for data triangulation by providing a knowledgeable, yet different, perspective on the governing board's activities and effectiveness in cultivating institutional identity and mission.

Additional Individuals as Needed

It is possible that the current board chair did not serve in the role or even on the governing board during the entire period (2012–2022) under study. In several cases, the board chair or the president suggested I talk with someone knowledgeable to help answer the research questions. For this reason, I remained flexible in interviewing additional individuals whom the board chair or president recommended to gather further data pertaining to the research questions. For three schools, I interviewed a former board chair as part of the data collection process.

Interview Procedures

I conducted semistructured open-ended interviews, allowing similar questions across all cases while providing flexibility to probe further to clarify responses (Morris, 2015). I contacted the participants via email using my Johnson University email and the email they provided to me to schedule a 60–90-minute interview at a time convenient for the interviewee. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, which uses end-to-end 256-bit encryption of video, audio, and chat data (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2021). An audio/video interview recording was saved to Zoom’s cloud storage. Each participant was sent a unique meeting ID and password for their interview. I used the virtual waiting room feature to control access to the meeting. Included in the appointment invitation were instructions to choose a private location where they could speak freely without fear of being seen or overheard. I also chose an area suited to privacy and confidentiality for the conversation.

Interviews were conducted using the interview guide found in Appendix F. This interview guide was pilot tested with two individuals. The first individual was a former president of a theological school, and the second individual had served as board chair or board member of three different theological schools. Accordingly, both were familiar with board governance and

higher education administration. The pilot tests allowed me to clarify the wording of the interview questions, identify potential questions that required follow-up questions, and gauge the interview length. As a result of the pilot tests, I asked the interviewees for a longer duration for the interview (60–90 minutes), although most interviews were completed within 75 minutes.

Following the interview, I used Zoom to transcribe the interview and reviewed the Zoom-generated transcript to edit for accuracy. To ensure the confidentiality of the schools and the participants, and reduce the risk of personal bias when interpreting the data, each school was given a code name and each participant an alias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All organizationally and personally identifiable information was redacted from the transcript, and the transcript was saved to my Johnson University OneDrive account. The interview transcript was emailed from my Johnson University Outlook email as a OneDrive file link to the interviewee for clarification of comments, as needed, and accuracy verification. Once the transcript was complete and verified by the interviewee, the audio/video recording was deleted from Zoom's cloud storage. The transcript was stored on my Johnson University OneDrive account. It also was uploaded to NVivo 14 software for analysis, which is protected by Lumivero's data protection policies (Lumivero, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Data analyzed by the NVivo 14 software are not owned or used by Lumivero in any manner (Lumivero, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). A debrief letter thanking the participant and reminding them of their rights, included as Appendix G, was sent to the interviewee.

Trustworthiness of Data

The concepts of validity and reliability emerged from quantitative research and serve as measures by which the quality of the research can be assessed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although these terms have been used in qualitative research to measure the quality of a study, their direct application to a qualitative research paradigm is difficult due to the descriptive and

interpretive approach often taken by researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As alternative terminology, qualitative researchers consider the trustworthiness of the research using the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Terrell, 2016). This section describes how each of these concepts was addressed in this study.

Credibility

Credibility is a parallel term for internal validity that measures how well the study reflects the phenomenon under investigation (Terrell, 2016). In this case study design, credibility was addressed in two ways. First, case study design allows for data triangulation because it uses multiple data sources to determine findings, allowing data to “develop *converging lines of inquiry*” (Yin, 2018, p. 127). This research collected data from document analysis and two in-depth interviews in each case to generate findings relevant to that case. This approach allowed different data sources to converge into findings specific to the case. In addition, these same data collection procedures were used in each case, revealing how the particular data from each case converged into findings related to the quintain. Triangulation of methods is the most common protocol followed within the case study method to strengthen the credibility of the research. In addition, convergence found out of several lines of inquiry strengthens assertions made regarding the reality of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Second, member checking is a practice by which a researcher shares the drafts of the report with the individuals from whom data were collected to request their feedback on the credibility and accuracy of what is reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This practice allows the individual participant to “provide critical observations and interpretations, sometimes making suggestions as to sources of data” (Stake, 1995, p. 115), thereby strengthening the credibility of the research study. The transcript was provided to the interviewees for review, and all their

corrections and redactions were applied to the final transcript. A summary of the final research report will be provided to each institution's president and board chair, along with an offer to present the findings to the institution's governing board.

Transferability

Transferability parallels external validity and addresses whether the research findings can be applied to other contexts (Terrell, 2016). As discussed, this case study was designed to allow for analytic generalizations across cases. Analytic generalizations allow the particularistic aspects of an individual case to be applied to different contexts through the way they inform the broader theoretical concepts and principles (Yin, 2018). This study was designed to create theoretical replication across cases to create opportunities for analytic generalizations. Although each participant case was uniquely informed by its context, it provided input on broader theoretical concepts and principles, which can be applied to other specific cases in their contexts. The detailed thick description used in the case study report was designed to allow the reader to determine whether the findings "can be transferable to other participants or situations" (Terrell, 2016, p. 174).

Dependability

Dependability is similar to reliability and refers to whether the research process is robust and leads to accurate results (Terrell, 2016). In case study research, the use of a case study database "markedly increases the *reliability* of the . . . entire case study" (Yin, 2018, p. 131). Accordingly, I used the Johnson University Microsoft OneDrive account to create and maintain a case study database. In addition, I used NVivo software to assist in the coding and analysis process. By creating and using a database to store all of the data, a third party would be able to verify the final case study report against the data stored in the database, providing the necessary

evidence for an external audit of the study, if that is needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, a chain of evidence was created and maintained to help a reviewer follow the progress of the study from the initial research questions through the data collection protocol to the data located in the database and finally to the case study findings as detailed in the report (Yin, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the researcher's influence on the research process (Terrell, 2016). As noted earlier in the positionality statement, I recognized that I played the primary role in the data collection and analysis and used my interpretations of the data to generate the findings of this study. I created memos during my data collection and analysis to know how I influenced the research process (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, the use of methodological triangulation, member checking, a case study database, and a chain of evidence together increased the confirmability of this study (Terrell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an iterative process depicted as a spiral where the researcher moves forward and backward through several steps when analyzing the data and drawing conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study's data analysis processes are outlined in the following section. The main points to be discussed include the organization and management of data; methods for capturing emerging ideas; how data were described, classified, and interpreted; and the production of the final case report.

Organizing and Managing the Data

The first necessary step was to organize and manage the data. As part of the data collection process, written transcripts of interviews were created, and copies of the written documents were collected. A data file for each participating school was kept using the Microsoft

OneDrive account provided by Johnson University, which provides a 256-bit encryption and allows for limited access to the data. In addition, I stored an electronic copy of the data on a USB drive, which was stored in a locked home office. As mentioned previously, all transcripts were deidentified and organized according to code names and aliases.

Reading and Memoing Emerging Ideas

Key theoretical concepts identified in Chapter 2 and applied in the guiding research questions presented earlier provided a starting point to capture emerging patterns and themes. These themes include identity, mission, institutional pressures, governance structure, and governing board processes and practices. All data related to each participating school were read with notes and memos to capture emerging patterns and themes (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2018). The theoretical concepts noted previously provided an initial coding strategy for analyzing the data, and the data review generated additional codes and patterns. This way, the initial data analysis used deductive and inductive reasoning (Yin, 2018). The data from each participating school were thoroughly analyzed to synthesize the data in each case (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). These memos and syntheses served as tools for building the chain of evidence necessary to enhance the trustworthiness of the research (Terrell, 2016).

Describing, Classifying, and Interpreting the Data

Data analysis occurred through the deductive use of theoretical concepts from the research questions and the inductive review of each case's synthesized data. This case study used an instrumental case study method to understand the quintain; therefore, categorizing data into themes related to the larger research question was necessary (Stake, 1995). Accordingly, I used two spreadsheets to manually categorize data according to the interview and research questions.

In addition, interview transcripts were coded using NVivo software to assist in cross-case comparison.

I first used a within-case strategy to analyze each case to develop a thorough understanding of how each case addressed the research questions using categorical aggregation of data. I then wrote a descriptive thematic narrative of each case (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In this manner, the integrity of each case was maintained even as cross-case analyses were sought (Yin, 2018).

Following the individual review of the cases, I completed a cross-case analysis organized by the themes identified in the analysis of the particular cases (Yin, 2018). In this process, I focused on “reading the case reports and applying their [f]indings of situated experience to the research questions of the [q]uintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 47). In this cross-case analysis, the worksheets provided by Stake (2006) were a helpful tool to organize the themes and findings across the cases to support the assertions made for analytic generalization.

Case Report

Finally, a case report was prepared that first includes the descriptive thematic narratives of each case and then presents the cross-case findings and assertions organized by themes (Stake, 2006). As appropriate, visual representations of data were used to provide a concise overview of the findings and how these findings support the assertions made.

Ethical Considerations

Approval by Johnson University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before data collection started and is attached as Appendix H. The purpose of the IRB is to advance the goal of conducting research with diligence and integrity and to protect the rights and welfare of the human participants who participate in the research conducted or that involve students and

faculty of Johnson University. I was trained and certified in protecting human participants by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, and my certificate is attached as Appendix I. Per IRB policy, this study included the following practices to address common ethical concerns in social science research (Babbie, 2016).

Voluntary Participation and No Harm

All research has the potential for some risk to human participants. In this study, the participants were those with high-level responsibility for institutional governance. They were asked to divulge information about governance processes and outcomes that are typically kept confidential. Accordingly, participants may have experienced emotional and psychological discomfort at revealing aspects of operational governance that generally would be private, confidential communication. Although the research questions guiding this study did not address personally sensitive topics, and the interviews sought information about organizational processes and perceptions of these processes from adults who voluntarily serve as officials at their respective institutions, a negative impact on participants due to divulging confidential information may have occurred. As described previously, official institutional consent from the school and all institutional leaders who participated in this research was obtained before data collection. No deception or psychological interventions were used in this study. Consequently, this research design involved minimal risk of harm to the participants.

Notwithstanding the minimal risk and institutional approval, an informed consent document was used to address the ethical concern for voluntary participation and ensure that no harm was done to the participants (Babbie, 2016). After receiving a summary of the research project, the president of each school was asked to sign an organizational consent agreement, included in Appendix C. In addition, each participant received a summary of the research project

and their role and was asked to give their consent via completion of the form, included in Appendix D. A thank you letter was sent to each individual for their participation after the interviews were conducted and the interviewee had an opportunity to review the transcript. This letter was a debrief form, attached as Appendix G (Babbie, 2016).

Confidentiality

The information sought in this research study involved organizational processes that are primarily kept confidential, and I gathered data from individuals who participate in these confidential organizational processes. Accordingly, it was imperative to ensure the confidentiality of the participating schools and the individual participants who participated in the interviews (Babbie, 2016). The following steps were taken to address confidentiality issues.

First, each school was given a code name used throughout the data collection, analysis, and storage process. All data about each school were filed under the code name. The key for code names was stored in a password-protected document on a USB drive. The USB drive was stored in my locked home office.

Second, each participant interviewed was given an alias used throughout the data analysis, management, and reporting process. As described previously, each interview was recorded, and a written transcript was created. Once the verified transcript was developed and provided to the interviewee for accuracy, the audio and video file was deleted from Zoom. The transcripts were deidentified by removing the name of the school and the interviewee from the transcript. The key for aliases was stored in a password-protected document on a USB drive. The USB drive was stored in my locked home office.

Finally, the case report did not include a list of the participating schools or the individuals interviewed. Instead, all descriptions used the school's code names, and references to interview

responses used the participant's alias. The report was written to preserve the confidentiality of the participating schools and individuals.

Data Security and Storage

All electronic data, such as interview transcripts, were stored in a secure Johnson University-provided Microsoft OneDrive account. The service offers 256-bit encryption, securing data at rest and in transit. The service is password protected, with additional two-factor authentication (Microsoft Trust Center, n.d.). Access to the data were limited. All email communications with participants were conducted using Johnson University's email service, provided by Microsoft. The service offers 256-bit encryption, securing data at rest and in transit. The service is password protected, with additional two-factor authentication (Microsoft Trust Center, n.d.).

Per Johnson University IRB policy, digital video and audio files were retained until transcription was completed. Then, these files were deleted from the cloud storage of the third-party services identified previously. Other digital files will be retained for the required 5 years and then deleted. Per Johnson University policy, paper documents such as notes will be retained for 5 years in my locked home office. After 5 years, the documents will be shredded using a secure service such as that currently offered through UPS stores nationwide.

Analysis and Reporting

Researchers must also be ethical in their analysis and reporting, which includes appropriately citing other scholars' work, reporting accurate findings, and presenting the research findings with appropriate diligence and care (Babbie, 2016). Every effort was made to abide by these ethical principles.

Furthermore, this research study benefitted both the participating schools and individuals and the broader network of Christian higher education institutions, particularly theological schools. Evaluating the governing board's role and actions within shared governance and through the lens of institutional identity and mission will assist these selected institutions and their governing boards in understanding how they function and where they can improve. Although using a case study methodology is limited in the generalizability of findings, the analytic insights learned from the research will be valuable to other Christian higher education institutions and governing boards wrestling with similar issues (Yin, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter set forth the methodology intended to be followed to address the research question of how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure. The study used a multiple embedded instrumental case study approach focused on seven theological schools and involved document analysis and interviews. Ethical issues were addressed through informed consent, confidentiality, and best practices in analysis and reporting. Although a case study approach is limited in its broader generalizability, the analytic insights learned will benefit other faith-based institutions wrestling with similar issues.

Chapter 4 describes the sample, the data collection methods used, and the data sources obtained for each school. It then presents the research findings using seven separate case narratives to describe the results for each school. Following the individual case narratives, Chapter 4 concludes with a thematic cross-case analysis of six themes found across the seven cases.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the findings and shows how the evidence from the case studies answered the guiding research questions. It then offers suggestions for further research and implications for practice before providing a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The findings presented in Chapter 4 resulted from research into governing boards' role in cultivating institutional identity and mission in theological schools. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, governing boards of theological schools fulfill an essential role in cultivating a school's identity and mission despite the various pressures faced by the school. The purpose of this multiple embedded instrumental case study was to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

Primary Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution's governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board's role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

This chapter first describes the sample and the data collection methods used. It then presents the findings of each school as a separate case study. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of common themes drawn through cross-case analysis.

Sample

I emailed participation requests to the presidents of a purposeful sample of 13 theological schools accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and identified as Evangelical Protestant. Seven schools from this group formed the final sample used in this study. As reflected in Table 1, the schools differed in location, size, and denomination, providing a balanced sample. For each school, the unit of analysis was the governing board.

Table 1

Theological Schools Included in Sample

School	Location	Size*	Denominational
1	Midwestern USA	Medium	Yes
2	Western USA	Large	Yes
3	Southern USA	Small	No
4	Midwestern USA	Small	Yes
5	Canada	Small	Yes
6	Western USA	Medium	No
7	Southern USA	Large	No

Note. Small = < 400 students; Medium = 400–999 students; Large = > 1,000 students.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from August through December 2023. The data collection methods used were consistent with those outlined in Chapter 3. I requested and received organizational documents from each of the seven schools. The production of organizational documents by each school varied; however, each school produced its current bylaws, the current board handbook/policy manual (if it existed), and, with one exception, their most recent self-study report submitted to ATS. In some instances, if the school did not also produce the current

articles of incorporation, I obtained the most recent articles of incorporation documents from the governmental agency charged with oversight of nonprofit corporations organized in the state where the school is incorporated. I also reviewed the website for each school to gather public information regarding its history, identity, mission, vision, and values.

In addition, I interviewed two people from each school: the president and either the current board chair or a former board chair. In one case, I interviewed the current board chair and a former board chair. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and the procedures described in Chapter 3 were followed for every interview.

Finally, I reviewed data published by ATS in its annual data tables for each school from 2012–2022. These data contained information on denomination, ecclesiastical family, enrollment by degree type, number of faculty, and financial data. Furthermore, I checked the current accreditation status of the school with ATS and, if applicable, its additional institutional accreditor. Table 2 lists the sources of data collected and analyzed for each school.

Table 2

Sources of Data by School

Data item	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
ATS annual data tables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ATS accreditation history	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current articles of incorporation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current bylaws	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current board handbook/policy manual	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Most recent self-study report (ATS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ^a
Board chair interview	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
President interview	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Former board chair interview	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

Note. ^a The relevant sections of the most recent self-study submitted to the institutional accreditor were produced instead of the ATS self-study report.

Using multiple data sources from each school allowed for data triangulation into converged findings. In this way, the credibility of the research was strengthened. Similarly, using common types of data across the schools, which were analyzed using the same procedures, enhances the dependability of the research. I acknowledge that I was the sole individual analyzing the data and further recognized my influence on the findings presented in this chapter. Accordingly, I was careful to follow the same steps in analyzing the data from each school and memoing my reflections during the process. Nonetheless, the findings reflected my influence in the narratives presented and the following thematic cross-case analysis.

Case Studies

This section presents the research findings for each school as seven separate case studies. To maintain confidentiality, neither the school's name nor any individual interviewee's name were used in the following case studies. Code names using the Greek alphabet were used instead. The source of the direct quote from a document or interviewee was noted in parentheses directly following the quote.

School 1

School 1 was an independent medium-sized educational system based in the midwest region of the United States. The school was founded over 150 years ago, but the founding institution merged with several other seminaries in the last decade and became a more diverse and distributed educational system. School 1 maintained its historic affiliation with its founding denomination while welcoming board members, faculty, students, staff, and institutional partners from other theological traditions. School 1 offered a variety of customizable degree programs and educational opportunities to help individuals achieve their goals for theological education. Along with theological education, School 1 also provided many educational opportunities in

counseling. Thus, its mission was not focused solely on preparing individuals to serve the church but rather on helping individuals flourish in their vocations, whether inside or outside the church. Indeed, to some degree, the mission included developing individuals who do not ascribe to Christianity through the programs offered by the school. It was accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS and an institutional accreditor.

Over the last decade, School 1 made significant changes to its governance, administrative, and educational structures to move from near closure to a vibrant institution that has merged other struggling seminaries into its fold. The rate of growth it was experiencing through relationships with other schools, organizations, and individuals globally placed pressures on the institution in terms of scalability, personnel needs, the pacing of growth and the increased workload, and the generation of a shared culture and ethos across a wide range of individuals who have joined the institution at various parts of its history. A key challenge for the school was how to guard against growth for reasons other than pursuing the school's mission and how to build sustainable processes for all constituencies amid growth.

Denominational Influence

The school had a formal connection with its founding denomination, expressed in its governing documents through a defined ratio of board members who must be from churches affiliated with the denomination and through a common statement of faith. The denomination must approve board members; however, the denomination does not appoint them. In the last decade, the denomination gave the school "a fair amount of grace and leeway," according to Beta, in not meeting the required ratios prescribed by the governing documents. It approved new board members as they were added to the board by the school.

Apart from these two connections, the denomination did not play a significant role in the school's identity, operations, or governance. Indeed, the school was recognized more by its openness to others from differing theological backgrounds and perspectives, even those who "do not claim to be part of the Christian faith," as Alpha said. The priority of caring for and including all of those connected to the school while staying true to the fundamental identity of the school was a source of tension to be managed. For this reason, the connection with the denomination remained important to the school's leadership, and the president and the board tried to maintain and strengthen this relationship.

Governing Board Structure

The board had 20 members, 10 of whom were added in the last few years through the merger of several other seminaries into School 1. The board had no committees, although it may occasionally use a small group task force for a specific defined project. The entire board was engaged with all areas of the school to ensure that everyone "know[s] everything that's going on and see[s] across the whole spectrum as opposed to being specialized," as Beta said. The board and administration developed a rhythm of reporting pertinent information to the board biweekly and monthly, which increased the transparency of operations to the board and eliminated the need for time-consuming reports by various parties during board meetings.

Meetings occurred 5–6 times yearly, and discussion was focused on strategic matters. At the meetings, the board engaged in the reading and study of Scripture, reflective silence, focused prayer, and discussion on crucial issues in small groups and as an entire board. The board did not vote during meetings; however, once a consensus on a matter was reached, the board would note key actions or decisions in the minutes as needed.

Governing Board Role

The school's governance was marked by collaboration among parties connected through relationships and trust rather than position and role. Over the previous decade, intentional effort was made to equalize the voices across the institution "to bring all the voices to the table," according to Beta, to discern God's leading in the institution's mission. The board functioned as one voice among many in the school's affairs. The governing documents described a board that works with other institutional parties to define mission, strategy, core values, and practices. In this collaborative governance environment, "the board's job . . . is to make sure [strategy] is happening more than it is to drive the bus, if you will. So once [they] get into the conversation, the board is one voice in the wider conversation about strategy," as Alpha said. This collaborative posture meant no specific action was taken or a decision was made until consensus among the parties was reached. The board would continue conversations and delay actions or decisions until all parties reached a consensus.

Every 3 years, the entire institutional community underwent a focused discernment process as it reviews the school's mission statement and strategic direction. This year-long process was marked by iterative conversations among the board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and partners to "try to discern where the Spirit is leading," as Beta said. The emphasis for governance and strategy was on "how do [they] follow and listen to the Spirit," according to Alpha, rather than other factors such as mission, vision, or competitive advantage. Thus, Alpha said, "Continuous improvement or continuous adjustment is kind of built into who we are." The board usually began this review during one of its meetings and then participated as one voice among many throughout the process. Board meetings were open to anyone, and the board

received feedback from all parties. Similarly, board members could participate in faculty and operational meetings throughout this discernment cycle.

Over the last decade, this discernment process led to a rewording of the institution's mission statement multiple times as the school sought to capture the mission of the institution more accurately. Each re-iteration of the mission statement occurred because the discernment process regarding mission and strategy revealed that there had been institutional changes made that adapted the mission. For example, an early iteration recognized that the school's mission was not just to develop leaders but rather to help individuals in different vocations, particularly those pursuing counseling, flourish. As a result, the mission statement was changed to remove references to leaders.

Another change to the wording occurred because the student base was growing more dispersed throughout different local, national, and global contexts, and the educational process was structured less formally than before. In this case, the mission statement was changed to reflect a mission of stewardship of Christian individuals. At the time of the interviews, discussion was being held on whether further changes should be made to the mission statement because the school's programs and activities, particularly in counseling, include individuals who may or may not claim to follow Jesus. In this way, changes to the mission statement reflected changes in the mission of the school as its community discerns the leading of the Holy Spirit and stays "open to where [our direction] might change over time," as Beta said.

In this discussion of mission and strategic direction, a key distinction made by the school community, including the board, is a distinction between activity and outcomes. Pursuing faithful activity and understanding that "God ultimately controls the outcome," according to Beta, is the priority. Accordingly, the strategic direction that resulted from the discernment

process and was recognized by the board as the guide for a defined 3-year period would include statements of strategic direction followed by specific areas in which institutional activity will be focused to support the direction. The final piece included prayer goals, which Beta stated, “Represent the outcomes.” This framing was purposeful because it helped all parties to distinguish between what faculty, administration, staff, and board can control—activity—and what only God can control—outcomes.

As the school grew, more voices were added to the collaborative governance. At the time of this study, more faculty, institutional partners, and board members could speak to the school’s mission and strategic direction. Before the merger of additional seminaries into School 1, the board, along with the administration and faculty of the school, discussed whether to amend the governing documents and handbooks to set limits on the collaborative model of governance and whether to allow board members from the other institutions to join the school’s governing board. In essence, the board needed to determine whether to be open and welcome collaboration with those who had not been involved in developing the school’s mission and way of governance and who came from institutions reflecting very different missions, governance structures, and models. Through open discussion among the board, faculty, and administration, a consensus was reached that no changes should be made, and new board members and faculty coming in from other institutions “came in with the same power and authority and voice,” as Alpha said, as those who had been involved for the last decade. This influx of new members strengthened the need for building relationships and trust across a larger and more distributed community of people who lack a prior relational connection with one another.

Governing Board Culture

To continue to grow the trust-based collaborative, relational culture of the board and the school community, the board developed an orientation process designed to teach and mentor new board members into the unique educational process and goals of the school, the distributed nature of the organizational structure, the collaborative nature of institution-wide governance, and the specific discernment and consensus-building activities of the board. In addition, the board increased the number of times it meets per year and added an annual in-person retreat meeting to help the board members build relational connections and maintain more regular communication among members. At its meetings, board members used frequent discussion in small groups to allow all voices to be heard. The board also intentionally reviewed with the board the history of the founding school's near closure and subsequent reimagining of its mission, operations, educational model, and governance every 18 months to help the members maintain institutional knowledge and stay connected to the culture, values, and practices that were foundational for the school. In addition, the practices of Scripture, silence, prayer, and discussion continued to define the board meetings.

The opportunities for expanded partnerships and opportunities were creating a need to develop more robust processes for evaluating and embracing an opportunity for expansion. In response, the board was beginning to use more task force groups to provide focused attention on specific matters. Similarly, the board reviewed prior institutional actions, such as the merger with another school, to create checklists of necessary steps to guide the review of subsequent opportunities. Tools like these smaller groups or checklists were used to augment and guide rather than replace the open collaboration and discernment practices that define the school's governance. Furthermore, the board was anticipating areas that would require specific attention

because of the potential effect on the mission and identity of the school. One of these areas was the extent of theological openness embraced by the school and the implications of such openness on institutional identity and discernment practices within the collaborative community.

Theological openness is a key value of the school, as is a “posture of humility and listening and really trying to discern where God is leading, not where [they] are leading,” as Participant Beta said. However, it was recognized that the school’s mission involved following Jesus, governance involved listening to the Holy Spirit, and the denomination provided a guiding statement of faith. Thus, the board anticipated the probable need to set some parameters around the value of theological openness. Overall, however, the governing board, as one voice in the school community, participated in the discussion of, as Alpha said, “What does it mean to be faithful to who God is calling us to be . . . We’re always thinking about that.”

In sum, School 1 had a loose governance structure in which board members, administration, faculty, and staff participated as equal voices. The ties to the denomination were weak; however, the relationship remained important to the school’s leadership. The governing board served as one participant among many in the collaborative, relational governance structure in which little separation existed between governance parties. The board was highly engaged with other stakeholders as they cultivated the school’s mission, strategic direction, and performance. Accordingly, the board regularly engaged in discernment processes regarding the mission and strategic direction of the school. It prioritized discerning and following the leading of the Holy Spirit over other traditional metrics of mission, vision, or competitive advantage. Over the last decade, the school regularly reenvisioned its mission, educational programming, and governance processes and experienced considerable growth through partnerships and

mergers with other institutions. Aligning new individuals and partners with the governance processes and values of the school has remained a key challenge.

School 2

School 2 was a large denominational seminary located in the western region of the United States and existed for more than 70 years. It had locations throughout the western United States and a strong international presence, particularly in Asian countries. Accordingly, its mission was global in scope. It was a comprehensive seminary offering multiple degrees and programs to meet the diverse needs of students seeking theological education. The seminary boasted a broadly diverse student enrollment, which remained steady over the previous decade despite the disruptions in higher education and the declining pool of students seeking theological education. The school enjoyed financial stability due to solid enrollment, a significant endowment, denominational support, and a generous and committed donor base. It had a long accreditation history with the Commission on Accrediting of ATS and was accredited by another institutional accreditor.

Despite its current financial health, the economic pressures caused by the seminary's location were significant, and the need to make wise financial decisions regarding the use of property and develop a robust financial model for sustainability was important. The school recognized the implications of a smaller pool of individuals seeking theological education on its future financial health, requiring creative solutions for the recruitment and retention of students. Its location's economic and political challenges created difficulties in recruiting and maintaining the necessary faculty and personnel to fulfill the school's mission, as did the limitation that faculty and personnel be from within the denomination. Because it was one of several schools within its denomination, an expectation existed that the school would align itself with the other

schools in academic focus, theological distinctives, and church policy decisions. Similarly, the size and location of the seminary also led to expectations that it would become involved in political matters, cultural debates, or even internal priorities of the denomination. The school was working to fulfill its mission in a diverse and challenging environment and was focused on preparing leaders who can serve in vastly different contexts. This challenge required flexibility and creativity that was unique among its denominational peers.

Denominational Influence

As a denominational school, School 2's governance was subordinated to the denominational authority that appointed the trustees, regularly monitored the school's performance, provided funding, and held reserve powers over the substantial use of the institution's assets. Although Delta said, "There are some review elements but . . . no instructive directives given" by the denomination, its influence over the school was felt primarily through the appointment of each trustee to a 5-year term on a rotating basis. The school's governing documents reflected a specific composition of the board to allow for representation from across the United States, and the denomination determined the particular balance of church leaders and lay people on the board. These appointments primarily happened without input from the school. There was no succession of terms for board members, resulting in frequent changes to the board's composition.

In addition, the denomination provided funding for the school based on student enrollment only at its main campus. Although insufficient to fully fund the school's expenses, this denominational funding reflected a significant portion of the budget. Although the board discussed asking the denomination to fund all students enrolled in the seminary regardless of

location, it adopted an alternative funding model, which included tuition, endowment, and gifts and donations to supplement the shortfall in denominational support.

The denomination also set the doctrinal requirements for the school to which board members, administrators, faculty, and staff must adhere. In addition, the denomination periodically established church policy on many matters. For example, a recent denominational policy change regarding the role of women in church leadership had implications for the school as a significant number of female students were enrolled in its degree programs. The board anticipated a future need to grapple with how this church policy affects its mission of training leaders to serve the church globally.

Finally, the board regularly sought input from the state denominational groups the school serves. This practice ensured that the school remained responsive to the needs of the denomination and its affiliated churches in its leadership and programming. For example, Epsilon noted that during a future presidential transition, the board-appointed search committee would conduct a “listening session to hear their concept about what they would like to see in the new president of the seminary.” In turn, the state denominational groups supported the school in practical ways, such as leasing office space for classes, recruiting students, and placing graduates within denominational churches or ministries.

Governing Board Structure

Despite denominational oversight, the school’s governing board was the legal body entrusted to “make all bylaws and policies necessary and proper to accomplish the mission of the seminary,” according to School 2’s bylaws. The governing board consisted of approximately 40 members, who were all members of the denomination and located throughout the United States. Because the denomination appointed the trustees and may or may not be familiar with the

seminary, the governing board adopted a robust board orientation process designed to help the new trustee become a knowledgeable and productive board member. This orientation process focused on the school's mission and the board's role in governance and aimed to connect the new trustee to the school leaders and an existing board member who helps mentor the new trustee. In general, Delta said, "Board members get up to speed within [the] first year pretty well." In addition, the board regularly provided board improvement training at every fall meeting to enhance the board's performance.

The board was organized into five permanent committees and four permanent subcommittees, and board members were assigned to the committees based on need, interest, and expertise. The committees paralleled the organizational units of the school, and each had a vice president assigned to the committee, which allowed for frequent communication and information sharing between the governing board and the administration. The governing documents outlined very specific duties for each committee, and much of the board work was accomplished through the committee structure. Regarding the use of committees, Delta stated:

It's just difficult to get 40 people together sometimes, and it's easier to get a handful. The other thing is the committees are very important because there's too much information for the entire board to deal with all the detail of the various parts of the seminary.

The committees focused on one area of the seminary operations in conjunction with the administrative leadership of such area. However, the information did not stay in the committee, nor did the committee act apart from the entire board. At the semiannual board meetings, every board member reviewed the complete reports about the school's mission progress, asked questions related to the work of any committee, and gathered additional information as needed to be fully informed about any matter presented to the board. For example, the finance committee

of the governing board worked closely with the school's business services division to develop, approve, and monitor the annual budget according to the set financial policies. In a recent matter regarding the financial challenges related to a particular campus location, the finance committee gathered data and information from the staff and administration, reviewed it over several years, considered various options presented by the administration, and then made a recommendation to the entire board to sell the real estate. The full board took up the recommendation, discussed it, and voted to approve the recommended sale. Gamma said, "[It is common practice for the board to] listen to [the administration] on recommendations on all these things, [and] to ultimately give [the administration] their solutions or their conclusions."

Governing Board Role

The board operated at the policy level, generally following a policy governance model. Gamma said, "[The board] set[s] policy and practice[s] accountability." The school's governance was clearly under the direction of the board, but the execution of policy was the purview of the president and administration, with necessary input from the faculty. The board appointed the president, other executive officers, and permanent faculty of the school. In this way, the board can maintain consistency of identity among personnel and appoint operational and academic leadership appropriate to the identity and mission of the school. Anticipating a transition of presidential leadership in the future, the board adopted a policy several years ago that details the process and timeline for presidential transition. Gamma said:

The board has been very engaged in this. They have 100% of the decision about who's going to be president. And so they control the process and how it's going to be conducted. Now they'll get faculty input, staff input, constituent input. I mean, they'll have a process, but they get to make the final decision.

All interviewees noted that the board was very mission driven. The board was aware of the mission. Epsilon said, “It’s primary in everything that [the board] does and all the decisions that are made.” The board was instrumental in developing the school’s current mission statement. Defining the mission and purpose into one clear, definitive mission statement took considerable effort. Still, the board worked with the president to receive input and buy-in from all school constituencies. It waited until the school community united around one statement and then approved that statement, creating a sense of permanence of the mission. Only the board was authorized to change the statement, and no school constituency could adapt or modify it. The board-led process created a seminary community that embraces the idea that “the mission matters most,” as Gamma said.

Coalescing around the mission enabled the board and executive leadership to enact a significant major change. What could have been a painful, divisive, and destructive change became an opportunity to set a vision for the expanded fulfillment of the school’s mission. This vision united the school community as it experienced the disruption resulting from the change. The board engaged deeply in the change process by repeatedly asking, “What’s our mission [and] how do we do that today,” according to Delta. The board considered various data and stakeholder feedback, recognized the changing landscape of theological education, and spent considerable time in prayer seeking the Lord’s direction. Ultimately, the board voted unanimously in favor of the change. Delta shared, “It was the board’s decision, not the president’s decision,” and mission fulfillment was the driving factor behind the approval and implementation of the major change.

The board effectively guided the major change process because it had been involved in the school’s strategic planning process. Over the last 20 years, the board shifted from one that

Delta said, “Seemed satisfied with the status quo . . . [without] serious discussions about vision or the future [to one that] is invited to have serious discussions about the future of the seminary and real input into those long-term plans.” The board worked with the president to initiate, develop, craft, and approve the last two strategic plans. The board has since had a systematic annual process that it followed to review progress toward mission fulfillment based on the goals established in the strategic plan. The board reviewed progress and provided input. Gamma said, “[The input was] both congratulating and directing, both encouraging and holding [the administration] accountable.” The role of the board was clear to all parties. It set policy and paid attention to results. Furthermore, the administration invited the board to play a generative and strategic role in the governance of the seminary, which allowed it to influence the cultivation of its identity and mission.

Working through the major change and being part of the school’s strategic planning created awareness among the board of its role. Most board work was routine; however, Gamma said, “[When faced with] the decision [to enact major change], the gravity of that settled on the board in a pretty profound way and . . . help[ed] them understand how serious this work is of being a trustee.” The change resulted in considerable benefits for the school and proved to be the right decision when evaluated by any marker. The process and outcome created confidence by the board in its processes as it recognized that the processes work and can be trusted.

Governing Board Culture

This robust role of the governing board within the school’s governance structure was due to the regular practice of transparency, honesty, and submission. The board demanded and expected transparency and honesty from the administration, allowing it to provide robust accountability, support, and real help in the school’s governance. The president and

administration provided regular and detailed information to the board regarding all school matters to keep the board well informed. The practice of transparency was reflected in the information provided to the board by the administration, but also in the willingness of the president to come to the board with problems and ask for appropriate guidance and help. As a result, the board can be more engaged generatively and strategically with the school's mission.

This culture was possible because of humility and a willingness to submit to one another and to the school's mission. The interviewees noted the lack of ego with the president, administration, and board members. Within the board deliberations, Delta said, "Everyone is given an opportunity to speak. Everybody's heard. . . . Everyone is valued and has an equal opportunity to speak and participate, and I think that goes a long way to keeping the board united." Furthermore, relying on prayer and seeking the Lord's guidance on matters facing the school was part of the board's practices. This culture of humility and submission to one another and to the Lord enables the board to be "a group of people committed to the mission humbly trying to work together to get that mission done," as Delta shared.

School 2 reflected a solid governing board concerned not only with fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities but also deeply involved with strategy as it guided the school through policy and accountability. The governance structure and responsibilities of the parties were clearly defined, giving the board a clear understanding of the school's mission and its role in governance. The denomination exerted considerable influence over the school; however, the board recognized itself as its legal authority and operated accordingly. The last decade was marked by a coalescing of the school community around the mission, which allowed the mission to unify the school community through a major change. Through the change process, the board grew in confidence.

It developed a culture of trust and transparency that allowed it to provide robust accountability and genuine assistance to the administration in fulfilling the school's mission.

School 3

School 3 was a small, independent, nondenominational school located in the southern United States. It was a young school, having existed for less than 30 years, and was created to fill a void of focused graduate-level theological training for a specific type of Christian leader. Like other theological schools, it existed to provide theological education and training to those serving God and his church. However, rather than developing a comprehensive seminary with multiple programs and degrees, School 3's founder and subsequent leadership kept the school's mission focused on its specific niche. Thus, it held a narrow mission and identity. The school's uniqueness attracted a particular niche of students, and nearly half of its student base was international. The school did not own property but used facilities provided to it through a partnership with a church. In addition, it purposely kept its administrative staff to a minimum to maximize funds for its educational and formational activities. The school recently became accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS but held institutional accreditation through the Association of Biblical Higher Education for many years.

The school struggled financially in recent years due to insufficient enrollment and a small endowment; however, intentional effort toward increasing enrollment was expected to help mitigate the financial challenges. In addition, a good portion of the faculty were at or past retirement age, and there was a need to expand its administrative staff to provide more support for the school's work. Recruitment of new faculty and staff was a challenge, particularly given the unique niche of the school.

Denominational Influence

School 3 was not affiliated with any specific denomination, and its leadership, governing board, faculty, and students represent all Christian traditions—Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. This ecumenism was a crucial aspect of its identity, as was its commitment to maintaining a gospel-centered, deeply theological focus in its mission. Because the school was nondenominational, no overarching denominational authority exercised legal authority over the school. In addition, it was a free-standing school and not embedded in any manner with any other institution. The organizational documents of the school described the governing board as having the ultimate powers of the corporation and holding the legal responsibility for the institution.

Governing Board Structure

The governing board of School 3 consisted of 12 members, several of whom were graduates of the school and several of whom were unconnected to the school before joining the board. The level of prior connection of board members to the school resulted in a different understanding of the mission and identity of the school among the board members. The board itself elected board members to 3-year terms without a limit on succession of terms. The bylaws set forth guidelines for board orientation and development of new members. Still, the interviewees noted that the actual practice of orientation and development of board members was not sufficiently implemented. In response, the board developed a new committee to focus on recruiting, nominating, approving, and orienting board members.

Board work was done through a committee structure of five standing committees, allowing for focused attention by specific board members on various aspects of the school. Although the board used committees to organize its work, it could only act as an entire group.

There were no guidelines for who could serve on which committee, and several board members, including the board chair, served on several committees simultaneously. This committee structure allowed the board to receive feedback from various institutional stakeholders. The academic committee worked with the faculty and educational leadership of the institution to oversee all academic matters.

Similarly, the finance and audit committees oversaw the school's financial aspects with the finance and operations staff. Although the board handbook clearly described each committee's functions and responsibilities, the reality of committee work was less straightforward. The several years of enrollment insufficient to cover the financial costs of the school resulted in financial difficulties and hard decisions that affected all aspects of the institution. The interviewees described the difficulty the finance committee experienced in recent years in approving a balanced budget for the institution. These financial challenges led the finance committee to ask the academic committee to review academic strategies to determine where changes can be made to decrease costs. This action created tensions regarding the proper role and oversight of the committees in the board's role in the overall strategy for the school.

Governing Board Role

The organizational documents stated the governing board assumed authority for the mission, vision, and core values. It also approved policies and held fiduciary responsibility over the school's financial affairs. Although the board acknowledged that its responsibility for the school's mission, the board members who were graduates of the school held more missional awareness and had a better understanding of the school's identity, ethos, and mission than other board members. For this reason, the board and administrative leadership were "careful to keep the mission before the board, so they are aware of what [their] constraints are, what they can't

do,” as Rho said. However, the deeper understanding of the mission and identity of the school by board members who were graduates allowed them to be more engaged missionally than the other members. The interviewees noted that a marked difference existed between the board members who were graduates of the school versus those who were not. For example, Sigma said:

We have a few board members who are graduates of the seminary, and they seem to have a real good grasp of the mission. We have other board members who are really not very familiar. . . . They don’t really understand the ethos. They don’t necessarily understand the mission.

This different missional awareness manifested in board decisions. A proposal by the president to add a degree program led the governing board to establish a task force committee comprised of faculty, staff, and a few board members. The task force committee reviewed the proposal and recommended against adding the degree program because it was inconsistent with the school’s mission. The board did not discuss the missional alignment of the proposal but approved the task force committee’s recommendation. In this case, Sigma stated:

The . . . board really didn’t have a lot of insights. I think the committee that the board set up really drove that process and said this is not a good idea. . . . And then the board received that generally, as you know, an appropriate recommendation.

However, the board engaged directly with the school’s mission and its implications on academic strategy. A full review of the school’s mission statement occurred in the few years prior to the study, which led to a minor change in the statement’s wording. The need to change the mission statement arose from a question of assessment of outcomes required by ATS. The president noted a need to assess outcomes related to the formation of students, but the wording of the mission statement was insufficient to support this assessment. To remedy this, the president

proposed a wording change to the board, which used a committee to review the proposal. The committee recommended the entire board approve the change, which it did.

Furthermore, over the few years prior to this study, as part of the stakeholder feedback process, the board became aware of certain academic aspects of the school that required attention to increase the school's attractiveness and enrollment, which led to better financial stability. In this case, the finance committee recommended the board require the academic committee to review the results of the feedback process and address those elements that needed attention. In this way, the various board committees worked together to oversee the school's mission and strategy.

The board experienced frequent personnel turnover in the previous decade, which led to difficulty in developing institutional knowledge to help the board understand and act missionally. In addition, the lack of limits for term succession led to the collection of personal power in those board members who serve for a long time. The interviewees stated the long-tenured board members seem to hold more control over the board than was appropriate. This dynamic affected the functioning of the board as it fulfilled its duties. Both interviewees described mission-related questions primarily discussed and determined between the long-time board member(s) and the president, who then presented them to the board for approval. The board asked questions regarding cost and mission alignment in these scenarios, but Sigma said, "The board was never very likely to push back on those kinds of decisions."

The governing board was committed to shared governance with administration and faculty and was designed to function as a policy governance board using a traditional policy governance model. Under School 3's policy governance model, the governing board elected the school's president, assessed the president's performance, and defined and establishes policies.

The governing board followed a regular annual process to evaluate the president's performance and its own performance. There was regular communication between the president and the board chair, and the president provided regular feedback to the entire board regarding progress toward the strategic goals and fulfillment of the mission. An annual strategic plan survey involved all school stakeholders, and the results were shared with the governing board. In addition, board members could talk with and ask questions of various school constituencies, including faculty, students, and staff, at each meeting. Thus, regular information-sharing and communication enabled the board to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.

Governing Board Culture

An essential identity marker for the school was its broad ecumenism regarding Christian traditions. Board members, faculty, staff, and students came from differing denominations within the Protestant mainline and evangelical traditions, as well as from Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox traditions. The school used the Apostles' Creed as its primary faith statement and relied on the historical consensus of the whole church to speak into common Christian practices and ways of living. Rho stated, "We don't have [an] explicit catechism or explicit legal authority." Hence, the school and its governing board lived in the tension of "how to define [that authority] when the boundaries get stretched, and they do," as Rho said. With this lack of outside authority, Rho said, "[The school and its governing board] look for a consensus within our community."

Rho described how certain divisive aspects of the culture, particularly discussions about sexuality and race, pressed upon the school and those affiliated with it. Describing a situation where the impact of choices regarding individual sexual preferences led to the abandonment of other historically accepted Christian relational practices such as marital and parental faithfulness,

the lack of an outside authoritative stance required the administration and faculty to seek “how the church has historically defined those activities, those actions, and . . . try to find that consensus that is talked about [in their values],” as Rho said. The governing board was beginning to engage more with these divisive cultural issues and their impact on the school’s mission or identity. For example, the board established a diversity, equity, and inclusion policy and a standing committee of students, faculty, staff, and trustees to consider these matters related to the school’s operations and mission. Thus far, the primary focus of the diversity efforts related to pedagogy and the impact of culture on teaching, primarily as it related to the large proportion of international students involved in the school’s programs.

In general, Sigma noted the board can be “fairly disengaged.” The nature of the school’s policy governance model created a strong potential for disconnect between the board and the school. To address this, both interviewees noted the intentionality that was required between the board and the administration to invite board members to be “involved as much as they can, so they fall in love with the mission . . . and stay connected with the mission,” as Rho shared. Developing a board that understood, was fully engaged with, and embraced the mission and ethos of the school was a current priority for the school.

In sum, School 3 reflected an independent board and school without denominational influence. The school had a defined governance structure, but the implementation of governance over the last decade was marked by inconsistency and weakness on the part of the board. The board was involved with the school’s mission and recognized its fiduciary responsibilities. However, the adopted policy governance model resulted in disconnections between the board and the other governance parties. The board was making improvements to increase its effectiveness in its governance role, particularly as the school addressed the enrollment and

financial challenges it faced. The school's narrow and focused mission and broad ecumenical identity have remained steady throughout its history and provide it with a unique niche among its peers.

School 4

School 4 was a small denominational school located in the midwest region of the United States. The current school resulted from a 40-year cooperation effort between two seminaries that formally merged several decades ago to form School 4. Its denominational counterparts in North America and Canada owned it, and the school served a significant portion of the global denominational community. After several years of financial challenges, it was experiencing financial health and enjoyed a growing number of on-campus and distance delivery students. The institution's identity was closely tied to its name, with each element reflecting a key identity marker.

The school's mission was to serve the church by preparing leaders who will serve both within and outside the church structures. Although its past reputation within the denomination hinted at a deeper focus on scholarship within its tradition rather than service to the church, the board was clear that the school's mission was to serve the church and prepare leaders who can serve in the current context. Furthermore, its mission included intentional focus and effort to promote justice and peace through intercultural competency, undoing racism, and bringing witness to God's reconciling mission in the world. School 4 held accreditation with the Commission on Accrediting of ATS for the length of its cooperation between the two seminaries and remained in good standing.

School 4 experienced significant financial difficulties in the last decade. However, the school was in a more solid financial position in recent years due to program innovation and

involvement with the global denominational community. Nonetheless, the lack of interest among people affiliated with the denomination in North America for theological education will create ongoing enrollment challenges and affect the school's financial position. The school and its denomination have faced cultural challenges related to racism and the LGBTQ+ movement. Responding to these cultural challenges was one of the reasons for its mission focus on intercultural competency, undoing racism, and peace and reconciliation work within communities worldwide.

Denominational Influence

School 4 was owned by its denominational counterparts in the United States and Canada. Nearly half of the school's governing board members were appointed by the denomination, which maintains a connection between the school and the denomination. However, Theta said, "While [the school] is owned by the denomination, the denomination has not exercised its governance role over the seminary at all." The denomination within North America was marked by decline and disintegration due to the separation of many churches and conferences from the official denomination in response to changing positions on current cultural and social issues.

This changing nature of the denomination was "potentially going to be a challenge and a risk," as Iota said, to the school because it saw itself as serving individuals and churches remaining with the denomination and those who were now independent. The board and the president continued prioritizing the connection with the denomination and working diligently to pursue denominational involvement with the school. The school actively sought input from denominational leaders regarding the needs of the North American churches and feedback on how the school was preparing students to meet those needs. Denominational leaders were invited

to and included in board meetings, and the administration provided regular updates from the school to the denomination.

Although the denomination in North America was declining and disintegrating, the global denominational community was experiencing robust growth. Over the last 10 years, the global denominational community increasingly asked the school to provide educational opportunities to leaders in various countries. Following a worldwide denominational meeting in 2014, the North American denominations actively offered School 4 as a resource for the growing church worldwide. This involvement prompted the school to expand its mission to include degree programs and other educational offerings accessible to different cultures and countries through distance education. The board was very engaged in considering this mission expansion. Iota stated, “The board just heard that we were being invited. We weren’t asking to do this. We just felt like hey, this is God’s calling. We have to look at this and see how we can make it work.” The board responded slowly by authorizing a few changes to develop international engagement in the school’s programs as finances permitted. Since those initial decisions, this international opportunity steadily grew, and the board “continue[d] to ask questions,” as Iota shared, as it received updates from the administration regarding the demand by the global community.

Governing Board Structure

The governing board consisted of 15 members, seven of whom were appointed by the denomination and eight of whom were appointed directly by the board. In addition, there were student and faculty representatives on the board in nonvoting roles to provide feedback from these important constituencies. Furthermore, the governing documents described a board that must work in consultation with the ministerial leadership of the denomination, especially in matters of vision, mission, purpose, strategic planning, and program changes. Board members

can serve three 4-year terms or a maximum of 15 years. The board used five standing committees to focus the board's work on specific operational areas of the school; however, the committees did not act apart from full board approval.

The expansion of the mission into international contexts was a source of transformative change at the school, with implications felt from pedagogy to programs to governance structure as the school responded to the global need. A current discussion held by the board and administration was whether to change the governing board structure to include official representation by members of global denominational partners on the board. Following the input received from the North American denominational groups, the board resisted a formal change to the governing board structure but instead required participation in the board meetings by representatives of the global community. This participation ensured the governing board actively engaged firsthand with the global denomination's needs and interests.

Governing Board Role

The governing board operated at a policy level and avoided inappropriate management. However, it did not follow a traditional policy governance model. The board policy manual for School 4 stated:

Members of the board . . . serve as stewards of the mission and resources. . . . In doing so, board members accept responsibility as trustees of the mission and finances, and [they] covenant to do [their] work as leaders of [the school].

Each year, the board's executive committee and the school's administrative cabinet met to identify the opportunities and challenges requiring attention for the year. The executive committee returned the discussion to the entire board. Iota said:

[The board then] weighs in on . . . is this part of our mission? Does this make sense? Is this something we want to continue to do? Is this an experiment? Then . . . [the board] comes together on a decision whether to take [an opportunity] on or not.

Through this process, the board provided a handful of specific recommendations to the administration, which went into the strategic plan. The board then monitored the progress of those recommendations. In this way, the board regularly engaged in strategic and generative discussions regarding the mission and vision of the school while allowing the administration to work out the operation and management of the strategic plan. Theta said, “[The board is] free to dive in to help us imagine our God’s preferred future for our seminary on whatever topic we’re talking about.”

The North American denomination’s decline and disintegration and the global denomination’s growth were a source of tension that needed to be managed by the governing board. For example, the traditional market for seminary students in North America was shrinking as fewer people chose to pursue a career in the church or seminary education. Meanwhile, the demand for global distance education increased. The board wrestled with the impact these changes had on the school’s mission and continued to keep the school engaged in both markets. To do this, it specifically directed the president to focus on increasing the number of on-campus students and on outreach to wider communities within the North American market. For example, it approved newly developed programs designed to reach high school and college students in North America to instill a desire to serve the church, and it regularly reviewed data from surveys from North American congregations regarding whether the seminary programs meet the churches’ needs.

The board encouraged involvement with Latinx and Black, Indigenous, and people of color denominational communities as potential opportunities for growth. In response, the board specifically sought to grow its diversity “relative to geographic location, ethnicity, and even sexual orientation,” as Iota shared, by engaging with these associate groups within the denomination to ensure people serve on the board who experienced the church denominational community from different perspectives. At the same time, the board has continued to review and authorize the increasing involvement internationally through expanded degree programs and educational offerings that the global community can access.

Governing Board Culture

The board and the school had a culture of learning and growth, evidenced by the board setting aside intentional time in each board meeting to hold generative discussions regarding the school’s mission, vision, and challenges. Iota described the board and school culture as “learning and growing and aspirational rather than thinking we have all the answers at this point.” Using information about the environment in which the seminary operated, data from North American congregations regarding the leadership need expressed by the church, the financial realities of the school, and opportunities for global involvement, the governing board engaged with mission and vision strategically and generatively.

Transparency was another key aspect of board culture and practice. The board had regular input from students and faculty because the board representatives from each group participated in the board meetings. In addition, the board members were regularly invited to share meals with students and faculty to hear from them regarding their experiences at the school. In various ways, the president and the administration practiced transparency with the board and invited the board’s input on the school’s mission, vision, and operations. These

opportunities to engage with various school constituencies were essential because “the board expects transparency from the CEO,” as Theta shared.

Furthermore, the governance practice has a robust relational element with little “formal distance between the board and administration,” according to Theta. This relational connection and the transparency practiced by the board and the administration resulted in a more involved board than a policy governance model might stipulate. Still, it led to healthy governance for the school, especially during times of challenge. This relational connection assisted the seminary as it sought to improve its financial situation. The board was very clear with the president that financial sustainability was a crucial goal for the school, and it committed regular attention to the school’s financial situation. Becoming more “thoughtful about longer-term financial sustainability,” as Iota said, led the board to take a much more active role in a substantial fundraising initiative. At the same time, it pushed the board to be more involved in discussing innovations and changes brought to it by the administration and providing direction through recommended strategic goals. Theta stated:

The quality of our relationships has helped the seminary navigate times when there have been too weak processes and policies. And I think our learning would be that the best policies and practices won’t save you if the relational part isn’t there.

This practice of transparency and relational connection was borne out of a crisis of governance that occurred within the last decade. A combination of factors during a leadership transition led to a crisis of authority in the institution. During this crisis, the roles; responsibilities; power; and authority of faculty, board committees, and the entire board were uncertain and conflicting. Lack of communication between governance parties precipitated the crisis, and this gap led to conflicting groups asserting authority during the crisis. As a result of

these experiences, the administration and governing board worked diligently over several years to develop robust governance policies for routine governance matters. In addition, it developed robust guidance and clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of various parties for future leadership transitions. Crisis management became a skill the governing board and administration use to ensure the institution did not lose its focus on its mission when challenges come. Out of crisis management, the governing board and administration worked on increasing communication and transparency between each other and among the entire campus community. Theta said, “[This] transparency has fostered a huge amount of trust.” Through the experience, Iota said, “[The board became] more focused on . . . bigger picture policy and support and care of the president and cabinet rather than operationally focused.”

In sum, the financial and leadership crises and the growth opportunities offered by involvement with the global denominational community led the governing board to clarify and strengthen its structure, role, and responsibilities. The board and administration developed a close working relationship built on trust, relationships, and transparency. These changes resulted in a board that was active in mission strategic ways as it fulfilled its legal and fiduciary responsibilities in a loose policy governance model. The school felt the effect of the denomination’s struggles, which were a significant concern; however, the school’s leadership was committed to working diligently to maintain a healthy connection with the declining North American denomination, the now independent churches and communities, and the thriving and growing global denominational community. The school’s mission broadened to embrace the global community and directly responded to some of North America’s significant cultural and social challenges.

School 5

School 5 was a small denominational school in Canada that existed in various forms for nearly 200 years. The current institutional form was established by the denomination almost 60 years ago. This school was long connected to a university. These dual connections allowed the school to serve as the denomination's seminary and the university's faculty of theology.

Although small, the school was experiencing steady enrollment and financial health. The decline of the church and the secularization of society were very pronounced in Canada, so the school recognized a need to adaptively prepare leaders for God's mission in ways that past practices did not. Thus, the school's leadership focused on visioning and creating leaders who can be transformative and adaptive to fulfill God's work in contexts not limited to the church as it functioned in the past. In addition, the school was heeding the call of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to improve and grow reconciling relationships with the indigenous peoples who had historically been badly mistreated. It was accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS.

The rapid decline of the church and the struggling denomination provided significant challenges to the school. Although people were still called to serve the church and seek theological education, maintaining sufficient enrollment was challenging. In addition, determining how to prepare leaders to address the rapidly changing needs of churches and other ministry contexts was a continual concern for the school. Furthermore, cultural issues such as the LGBTQ+ movement were increasingly creating divisions within the denomination. In addition, because the school was connected to and received governmental funding along with its related secular university, cultural values like these could pressure the historical doctrinal positions of the school and its supporting denomination.

Denominational Influence

The denomination owned the seminary and exercised its governance over the school by appointing board members and a common statement of faith. In addition, the top leader of the denomination served as an ex officio board member with the right to vote. The school had regular reporting requirements to the denomination, and the governing documents stated that it primarily served church-related constituencies even as it welcomed students from other denominations.

The denomination was becoming weaker and less influential; however, the school maintained strong connections to the churches within the denomination. In recent years, the denomination did not fulfill its responsibility to identify, recruit, and nominate members. It either did not recommend anyone as a trustee or nominated people with no knowledge or interest in the school and its work. The board was not self-perpetuating and did not recruit or appoint board members. This failure by the denomination caused the school's president to identify, recruit, and nominate board candidates to the denomination for appointment as trustees. As a result, the president was able to increase the board's diversity in ethnicity, gender, skill set, viewpoint, and age. However, Kappa said, "The downside is that somebody else who wasn't committed to things like diversity or different viewpoints and so on could really pad the board." Recently, a new governance committee was formed by the board to attend to the orientation of members and evaluation of board performance. It was anticipated that this governance committee would develop the ability to identify and recruit potential candidates to recommend to the denomination for appointment.

Governing Board Structure

The school's governance structure reflected the bicameral models of higher education institutions in Canada. There was a governing board of trustees, which was "the highest organizational and governing authority and is responsible for the [school's] well-being . . . and is legally responsible for all institutional operations," according to the School 5 governance manual. In addition, there was a separate senate, which, in conjunction with the faculty, was charged with overseeing the school's academic affairs. The senate was comprised of two faculty representatives, two student representatives, two members appointed by alumni, two governing board members, and the seminary president. The connection to the university was through the authorization of programs, granting degrees, and general oversight of the school's academic affairs. However, specific curricular matters and other matters related to seminary-only policies were governed by the faculty and overseen by the senate. There was representation by the board of trustees on the senate to allow for communication, but the board had "strong respect for the work of the senate," as Lambda shared, and did not engage with the academic matters of the school. This governance structure created a firm separation between the academic governance of the school and governance over all other institutional issues.

The board of trustees was comprised of 18 members, 12 of whom were appointed by the denomination and three of whom were denomination-appointed trustees to the university's board of governors. The remaining members included the seminary president, the university president, and the denomination's senior leader.

The board revised its committee structure in the few years prior to this study to eliminate certain committees whose work infringed on management and those that did not function. As a result, the board developed four committees with well-defined purposes specifically related to

governance and financial oversight of the school. The board used these four standing committees to organize and focus its work. The committees oversaw specific governance and financial oversight activities and reported all recommendations to the board for review and approval.

Governing Board Role

In the last decade, a few incidents of overreach by board members caused the board to give specific attention to its structure and model. Out of these incidents, Kappa said, “The board became very focused on understanding itself as a policy governance board . . . with a fresh commitment to good governance.” The governance documents of the institution, including the bylaws and the governance manual, were revised several times over the last decade to provide increasing clarity on the board’s role and involvement in governance. As a result, the board knew very well that their role was to “own the mission,” as Kappa shared, and they were very focused on “making sure [the school] is pursuing the mission.” The board took this role very seriously and was directed in the governance manual as follows:

Trustees need to understand [the school’s] mission in light of changing demographics of the institution’s prospective community and ensure that the changes that do take place continue to represent the values of [the school’s] church-related constituencies and continue to fulfill the mission of [the school]. (p. 11)

Preparation for an accreditation review prompted a thorough review and slight modification to the school’s mission statement. The school’s mission was codified in the legal incorporating document forming the school. Still, the administration and board felt that preparing a slightly revised statement would bring clarity and vibrancy to the school’s mission in its current context and allow the board to determine tangible ways to monitor progress on mission fulfillment. The president formulated a revised statement, presented it to the executive

committee, who discussed and reviewed it, and brought it before the entire board for review and discussion.

Before adopting the new statement, the whole board discussed and deliberated the mission statement and its related strategic implications. The latest statement broadened the scope of the mission to include preparing people to serve God in various contexts, including the church. In addition, the president and the board used the new mission statement to remind the school's constituencies that the school served God's mission, an all-encompassing and transforming mission to the world. This broadening of the mission statement led the school to embrace opportunities to be an agent of transformative change in the church, the world, and relationships with indigenous peoples.

The president used this mission to develop the strategic vision and goals to be met over time. The board preferred to engage with a formal proposal on strategic mission priorities rather than serve as a sounding board or a cocreator of the goals. In this sense, the board did not regularly engage in creative or generative discussion regarding how the school would implement its mission but, rather, left the outworking of the mission to the president. Lambda said:

If the board [in a delegation] circumstance attempted to decide for the president, it would be relieving the president of all responsibility for it. The board needs to take the position of "here's what we can contribute for you to think about. We'll basically back you on any decision you make."

When the president presented a recommendation regarding the strategic vision and goals to the board, Kappa said, "[It is] very engaged in understanding what [it] is, so that when [the board approves] it, [the board] believes it is doable." The board then monitored progress on the approved strategic goals through regular reports given by the president and regularly sought

explanations and clarifications on this progress in its meetings. Board members participated in the fulfillment of the goals in practical ways, such as sitting in on interviews for faculty and offering feedback, contributing financial or in-kind gifts to the school, getting to know internal and external constituents of the school, and engaging in discussions regarding the future of the church to help inform the training of leaders.

Although the board did not want to encourage direct interaction between itself and other school stakeholders, board meetings were attended by a faculty observer, a student observer, and an alumni observer. In addition, several of the president's staff members attended the board meetings regularly. Although the president was the direct employee of the board, participation by these other groups helped to "demystify board meetings," as Lambda said, and, as Kappa shared, "[Ensure] policy governance doesn't go so far in the, you know, one employee-only attitude that it could become a power silo."

Membership on the board by the university president and by the senior director of the denomination also provided for open and regular communication between the school and these key stakeholder groups. To ensure adequate opportunity for sensitive conversations, the board included an in-camera session at every meeting and provided regular updates to the president of any board-only discussions. Communication between the president and the board chair was regular, although it took intentionality on both sides to maintain this communication. The board engaged in regular performance evaluations of the president and held the president accountable for fulfilling the goals set under the strategic vision.

Governing Board Culture

The school developed an orientation process designed to help the board members understand the school's governance structure, its connection to the university, and the specific

role of the board of trustees and the senate in governance. The orientation also focused on orienting the members to the board's model of policy governance. Because the overarching model was policy governance, Kappa said, "[The board] leans heavily on [the president] to make sure that if there are things [the board] need[s] to be looking at, that [the board does]." There was a desire for the board to become more forward looking in its role and to help dream and envision what would be needed to prepare leaders for a world marked by the decline of the church but to do this in a manner marked by good policy governance.

The board was to "act as counsellor and adviser to the president, supporting him/her and working with him/her to achieve their common goals," according to the School 5 governance manual. Accordingly, the board provided encouragement, support, and genuine care for the president, which improved the working relationship between the two parties. The board learned from previous missteps and overreaches and was careful to be appropriately involved with the president and administration. Its movement into new leadership and visioning was consistent with policy governance, which provides strong board governance for the school. Kappa said, "[There is great value in] good governance and the difference it makes in an institution. If we had everything else in place, and our governance was screwed up, we would be screwed up."

In sum, the governing board of School 5 functions using a traditional policy governance model that maintained clear boundaries between the board and the other governance parties of the school. Due to the governance structure of Canadian higher education systems, the board did not interact much with the academic matters of the school. Instead, it focused its fiduciary work on the financial and operational aspects of the school. The board participated in the mission and strategic direction of the school primarily as an approver and monitored and rarely engaged strategically or generatively in these matters. However, the board sought to support the president,

understand the mission and its fulfillment, and be willing to engage appropriately. The school's mission maintained the same focus for its history. However, recent attention to the mission resulted in a broadened statement enabling the school to be more adaptive and responsive to challenges resulting from a declining church and denomination as well as cultural and social issues.

School 6

School 6 was a free-standing, medium-sized, inter-denominational school located in the western region of the United States that has existed for over 70 years. It offered a full range of degree programs, both in-person and online. It experienced relatively consistent enrollment and financial health over the last decade and grew in its presence as a broadly evangelical seminary. Like most other seminaries, it felt the pressure of the tuition-based financial model. It took specific action to counteract the adverse effects of the financial model through the sale of property, the building of its endowment, and the movement into new markets for students locally, nationally, and globally. As its on-campus student base declined, the school increased its global and nontraditional student base, including intentionally developing programming focused on lay ministry in urban and ethnically diverse contexts. The school's mission was to engage with the world's needs from the perspective of Scripture and the gospel. As a practical outworking of this mission, it proactively initiated opportunities to engage in conversation about current divisive cultural issues by bringing together people representing different viewpoints to create a forum for listening to counter viewpoints and responding with an evangelical Christian perspective. The school was accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS and by another institutional accreditor.

The school continued to wrestle with the implications of a shifting enrollment. Fewer in-person students were enrolling. However, more students were enrolling in distance delivery options, including students from global markets. As the number of students from global markets increased, the need to provide course content in multiple languages grew. Accordingly, there were challenges related to developing and maintaining the technology required to offer programs online. Recruiting and providing competitive pay for the necessary technical personnel was challenging for the school. Similarly, the probability of declining enrollment but increasing operational expenses put pressure on financial sustainability. In addition, cultural pressures such as the increase of the LGBTQ+ movement required attention to the policies and practices of the school.

Denominational Influence

School 6 began as a denominational school, and for more than half of its history, its governance was structured as a school under the denomination's control through appointments of board members, faculty, and administration. As the denomination weakened and eventually disappeared, the school divested itself of many of its denominational ties, including the requirement that board members, faculty, and administration be members of the denomination. However, intentional elements of the denomination remained through the core commitments of the school; specific board responsibilities in terms of faculty appointments and other academic matters; affirmation of a statement of faith by trustees, administration, faculty, and staff; and the ethos and values passed down from the denomination through the leadership of the school throughout its history.

The board's decision to move away from the denomination and change the school's name "communicated a more open and welcoming name for people who were interested in continuing

the study of Scripture and seminary education,” as Tau said. Furthermore, this board decision led to increasing enrollment, a more viable financial model, and continuing operations for the school despite the disappearance of the denomination and its related churches from the area of the seminary’s reach. The current governing bylaw documents clearly stated, “It is the determined policy of the board of trustees that the corporation shall not come under the control of any inter-church organization either by relationship or by financial support.”

Governing Board Structure

The board was comprised of 23 members reflecting different ethnicities, ages, sexes, geographical regions, and professional experience who all annually affirmed their adherence to the school’s statement of faith and its mission statement. It was a self-perpetuating board with a governance committee that focused on the identification, recruitment, approval, and orientation of new board members. As the board separated from the denomination, it also instituted term limits for board members. A board member may serve up to four 3-year terms or a maximum of 12 years. Adopting term limits created a natural process of transformation of the board from its former model of denominational control reflected by a board of white male pastors to the diverse mix of people serving at the time of this study. Through intentional effort by the board to change its composition, Tau said the board has:

Become more a reflection of the students that are coming in, more a reflection of wanting to be inclusive of different groups and genders . . . and a younger generation who is familiar with technology . . . online learning . . . [and] social media.”

The board was interested and engaged in seminary as a vibrant, active experience, whether in-person or online, for various people across sex, ethnicity, and age.

The board had six standing committees and two standing subcommittees. Each board committee was assigned a vice president responsible for the activities under the committee's purview. This structure allowed relationships to develop between the board and the administration. Committees oversaw a particular aspect of the seminary's work and reported the work and any recommendations to the entire board for deliberation and action. According to the Board Policy Manual, in its work in committees and as a whole board, the:

Board will approach its tasks with a style that emphasizes outward vision rather than an internal preoccupation, encouragement of diversity in viewpoints, strategic leadership more than administrative details, clear distinction of board and staff roles, and proactivity rather than reactivity. (p. 4)

This approach was evidenced in the seminary's development of policies in response to the LGBTQ+ issues that increasingly emerged over the last decade. Recognizing that the seminary lacked a defined policy related to these issues, the board led an effort to develop policies and align its response with its statement of faith, addressing the seminary's stance on these issues and how they might affect the seminary community. Tau said, "[The process] wasn't something the board just dictated." However, it involved 18 months of research, review, and "extended discussion before [they] came up with a policy that [they] felt was in line with the statement of faith and yet was palatable to the board, to the administration, to the faculty, to the donor base," according to Tau.

Governing Board Role

Over the previous decade, the board was very intentional in updating and amending its policy manual to clarify and define policies and procedures to help create effective governance and to "be an initiator of policy, not merely a reactor to staff initiatives" (Board Policy Manual,

p. 4). The board understood its role in operating at a strategic level focused on the mission, core commitments, vision, strategic goals, and financial sustainability by prescribing policies and guidelines for the other parties to work within. As Mu stated, “The board by far has the most power and authority of the governing entities of the seminary . . . They are the final voice in matters related to the broader strategic concerns of the seminary.” Yet, the board exercised this authority in policy and strategy-focused ways and appropriately engaged the other governance parties. For example, with the increased demand for online degree options, the board led a process to develop degree programs that could be completed entirely online. It did this by convening a faculty committee to develop the program, defining specific parameters, and setting a time limit for the work. In this year-long process, Mu said, the “board having that authority, both by statute and by culture, to initiate the process and then to be the final approval of the process but not be involved in the details of the actual outcome” led to a transformative academic change that furthered the mission of the school.

The board appointed the president, executive-level officers, and permanent faculty members of the school, thereby allowing the board to ensure that these key personnel were aligned with the school’s mission, vision, values, and statement of faith. Mu said, “[The president had the responsibility] to mediate the authority of the board through the organization and to mediate the strategic direction and challenges at a strategic level from the administration.” Accordingly, the strength of the relationship between the president and the board was a priority for the board. The board primarily received feedback from stakeholders through information delivered by the president and does not regularly engage with other school constituencies.

Throughout the school’s history, the mission statement changed with every new president as each president defined the mission with respect to a particular aspect of seminary education.

Mu said the most recent change was to “define a mission statement that would encompass all of the departments and programs that the seminary already had in existence” and that “all of them were embraced by” to give a unified focus to the seminary. To do this, the board took the recommendation of the current president, considered the limitations of the previous statements, discussed the rationale behind the proposed statement, and recognized the importance of a unifying statement. It approved the new statement, and at every subsequent meeting since then, the board rehearsed the mission statement to “pull everybody back to the right focus as [the board] begins [its] deliberations,” as Tau shared.

The board evaluated initiatives to determine mission fit, adherence to the statement of faith, and the financial viability of such initiatives. The board’s involvement in strategic issues facing the school included actively participating in research and solution building, asking helpful clarifying questions in its review of proposals, and setting parameters to guide an initiative toward something that can be approved by the board and implemented by the administration and faculty. Overall, Mu said, “There’s been a lot of support at the board level on [key] types of strategic advances that are necessary for [the school to address] challenges that [it] face[s].”

A recent initiative designed to further the mission by engaging participants holding different viewpoints in discussions regarding current divisive cultural issues was discussed and approved by the board. Funding outside the general operations budget was also approved and given mainly by the board to finance the initiative. Tau described the reasoning this way: “The board approved that initiative because what it does is raise the profile of the seminary within the community as a voice that represents a Christian perspective but also welcomes the discussion of other perspectives and topical areas.”

Governing Board Culture

The ability to work through complex issues was enabled by intentionally focusing on developing relationships among trustees and between trustees and administration. In addition, focus was given to recognizing and acknowledging that the seminary's story is "a long history of God's intervention to keep the seminary active and vibrant even in the midst of very difficult economic times," as Tau said. The president gave intentional time to connect with each trustee on a personal level, board meetings contained time for intensive bible study and prayer, and new trustees were paired with seasoned trustees as part of the mentored orientation process. Mu said:

Building a strong relationship base with trustees [and administration] is, I believe, a key part of the way [the] board chooses to work . . . It builds those relationships of trust and appreciation that you need when you have a controversial decision or unclear decisions that you have to work out in a group.

Furthermore, the board responded to the rapid changes in seminary education over the last decade by understanding that adaptation, flexibility, and leadership were required to have a school that continues to flourish. The board did the hard work alongside the administration to change the culture within the board and the school to embrace expansion, adaptation, and engagement even when change disrupted past practices and structures or was uncomfortable. It took focused effort over several years to move from acting as a personality and issues board to a policy and strategy board. Now, it operated at the appropriate level to effectively cultivate the mission and identity of the school.

In sum, the governance structure of School 6 retained some elements from its history as a denominational school; however, it was now entirely governed by a self-perpetuating board. The board and administration regularly clarified the structure, role, and responsibilities of the

governance parties, leading to a tight governance structure with a strong board that provided effective oversight. Nonetheless, the board and president worked together with openness and trust within this structure. The board regularly engaged with the mission and strategic direction of the school, embracing opportunities to expand its mission and influence in creative ways. Adopting a well-defined and guiding mission statement embraced by the school community allowed the board to use the mission as a focus for its work, particularly as it addressed the school's financial, enrollment, and cultural pressures.

School 7

School 7 was a large, independent, nondenominational school located in the southern region of the United States. It had a broad mission of equipping individuals for service to the church worldwide, resulting in various locations, programs, and degrees. Like many other evangelical Protestant seminaries, it responded to the growing global church demand for theological leadership training. It gradually expanded its offerings to accommodate this increasing demand. It was financially healthy, enjoying steady enrollment, and a comfortable endowment and supporting donor base. It had a long history of service to the church and would soon celebrate 100 years at the time of this study. It was accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS and by another institutional accreditor.

Like other schools, it was experiencing the financial pressures of sustaining degrees and programs while keeping tuition appropriate. Enrollment was not a particular challenge, but the demand globally for accessible programs of study has continued to grow. The question of how to respond to the global market was a continual discussion among leadership and the governing board. The potential for challenges from accreditors to the school's conservative stance on social and sexuality issues existed, although the school was not experiencing any direct pressures

currently. Like other seminaries maintaining strict theological positions on these and other matters, it regularly fielded criticism on social media. Determining how and when to respond to something in social media remained a current discussion.

Denominational Influence

School 7 was an independent school since its founding and remained unconnected to a specific denomination or under the authority of any particular religious community. Despite lacking denominational connections, the school created a broad and deeply committed constituency base that provided a network of financial supporters; connections for board members, faculty, and personnel; and a community that can provide helpful input to the board and leadership.

Governing Board Structure

The governing board was self-perpetuating and consisted of 34 current members. Board members served for 5-year terms. There were no limits to the number of terms a member can serve, but a mandatory retirement age exists. The board was organized into two subsidiary boards, each with several committees that allowed board members to provide both focused and general oversight over the institution. One subsidiary board and its committees oversaw the school's academic activities, while the other subsidiary board and its committees focused on property and finances. Board members served on only one subsidiary board at a time, and certain general board members did not serve on either. An executive committee comprised of the board chair, the chairs of each subsidiary board, the president, and one at-large member existed to provide focused attention to the school and to act quickly as needed. The executive committee also functioned as the membership committee. Each committee's specific responsibilities and duties were clearly defined in the school's governing documents, and all activities taken by the

subsidiary boards or their committees were reported to the entire board at a regular meeting. The structure created a system of “healthy checks and balances,” as Psi said, for board governance at the school.

The board had a robust nomination, selection, and orientation process for new members. The process begins by evaluating what characteristics, such as age, sex, ethnicity, occupation, or skill set, are needed on the board as it anticipates movement off the board due to retirement or resignation. Any board member can nominate an individual as a candidate for the board, and a nomination triggers a robust process of interviews and review of nominees by the executive committee and then by the entire board. Once new members join the board, they begin an orientation process designed to prepare them for effective board service using their specific interests and skill sets. This new member process has developed over time. Omega said:

We do a much more thorough job [than we did before] of vetting board members because if [the institution is] going to go astray, you know, that’s going to be where it’s going to go from. Your board is going to help set the policies. They’re going to right the ship if it starts to go wrong. And so if they’re not really strong board members, you know, you could end up in a place that you don’t really want to be.

Governing Board Role

The board functioned as a policy-making board, ensuring sound management and sufficient financial resources to fulfill the mission. Board members know their role in governance; Omega said, “The board has done a really good job of being watchdogs of the mission and advocates for the mission.” One regular practice the board followed was the annual affirmation of the mission, core values, doctrinal statement, community covenants, and disclosure of conflicts of interest by each board member. Regular review and commitment to

these foundational aspects of the school were two ways in which the board intentionally cultivated the mission and identity of the school. All faculty, administration, staff, and students also affirmed the mission, core values, doctrinal statement, and community covenants. The board also underwent a focused effort in the last decade to explicitly connect its governance structure, policies, responsibilities, and processes to the foundational governing documents of the school, including its articles of incorporation, bylaws, and board policy manual. In this way, the board had to evaluate what it did against these key governing documents and discuss any potential deviations from what was recorded.

In addition, certain aspects of the school's identity and mission were codified in the governing documents. Psi said, "There's things that are embedded into the bylaws that are some safeguards for the stability of the school, so there aren't quick changes." The school recently underwent a review of and recommitment to its doctrinal statement. The bylaws stated the governing board must lead this process over 2 years. In this case, the board appointed a subcommittee of select members from the subsidiary boards, who conducted the initial review and developed recommendations. These recommendations were then reviewed by a second subcommittee comprised of different members appointed by the board. The resulting recommendations went to the entire board, where discussion and deliberation occurred for a year before a vote was held to adopt the new doctrinal statement. The lengthy and involved process allowed full transparency and participation by all board members on this key identity marker for the school.

Although the board was a policy-making board and not involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, Psi said, "[The board is] heavily engaged [as] a board that provides wisdom, counsel, affirmation, structure, guidance, and double checks to make sure [an action]

was in the boundaries of the mission and wise in regard to opportunities and strategic moments for the school.” The board must approve every degree program, major activity, and faculty member. A recent significant new initiative to address the growing demand from the global church for theological education was presented to the board for consideration. In reviewing the opportunity, the board appointed an ad hoc committee to research and determine how the initiative could be implemented legally and practically. After several months, the committee presented a recommendation to the entire board, which convened special meetings and used regular meetings to discuss the recommendations. Voting was delayed until every board member had all the questions answered. Following this slow, detailed process, the board approved the recommendations unanimously. Initiatives such as these were then added to the strategic plan, which Omega said, “Is evaluated as to how it fits with the mission and making sure that every piece of [the plan] does fit in the mission.”

One key distinction the board made as it deliberated the mission fit of various matters was between the core mission and peripheral activities. It also made the distinction between mission and methodology. The board recognized the institution’s core mission, which had not changed over time and could not change going forward. It also acknowledged that environmental and cultural changes require different programs, activities, and methods. Psi said, “[The] comfort level has been the core mission.” The board went through the process of evaluating whether a program, offering, activity, or methodology was consistent with the core mission and whether it would be permitted and consistent with what was stated in the foundational governing documents of the institution.

As it has grown in this function, the board was changing from being “a backward-looking board [to] being a forward-looking board [because this] is the best way [they] can use the skill

set of the board,” as Psi said. The board actively obtained feedback from various constituencies of the school. Board members of the academic subsidiary board regularly interacted with faculty members and students to maintain awareness of their experiences and the expectations and concerns of faculty members. Board members were part of churches and spiritual networks connected to the school, which allowed them to be aware of the needs of the church and spiritual communities. In addition, a recent change in process brought the executive cabinet into the regular board meetings, allowing the board to interact directly with the broader administrative cabinet regarding the activities, opportunities, and challenges facing the school.

This new process energized the board and invited members to participate in strategic and generative discussions. However, it also created some confusion about the proper role of the board and the necessary reporting structure to ensure sound governance. Board members wanted to be involved and help solve problems, but those actions need to be appropriately managed within the board’s governance role. Thus, Psi said, “We had to remind ourselves of the role of governance,” even as Omega stated, “The board as it stands right now, is probably more active than ever in engaging in [the] mission.”

Governing Board Culture

The influence of social media has been a challenge for the school due to its reputation and the public roles of many of its graduates. Omega said, “Navigating all of that clutter that’s out there, the noise of the world, and then trying to remain focused on what it is that you’re supposed to be doing when there’s some noise out there,” which has been a regular challenge facing the governing board. The administration and the governing board, particularly the executive committee, learned to work in sync with one another in a coordinated response when required and to use outside experts as needed. A benefit from experiencing this increasing

hostility from the world was that the board re-engaged in the regular practice of prayer and fasting. The board spent time praying and fasting as a routine matter and a focused spiritual practice to work through something, such as an issue that may arise from social media. In describing this culture, Omega stated, “The stuff you go through, to be able to say to the board – we would like for you to take a season of fasting and prayer for this – and to know that they’re doing that. That has been really healthy.”

Prayer and fasting as a board became an important practice during the leadership transitions experienced by the school. A crucial role of the board is the choice of president. Omega said, “The board’s gotta be good, but [the presidential] choice is critical [to the mission, identity, and sustainability of the school].” A good working relationship between the president, administration, and governing board is vital to fulfilling the school’s mission, so prayer and fasting were crucial in discerning God’s will for the institution’s leadership. This culture of the board is codified in the board handbook of the school, which stated:

The operation of the [board] is characterized by a spirit of deference. . . . The Lord owns the [school], and the [board] is made up of people who belong to him. Therefore, we believe the Holy Spirit will not lead the [board] in opposite directions, so we look for unity of Spirit in the conduct of the [board’s] affairs.

In sum, School 7 enjoyed a solid governing board that reflected a tight structure and clear responsibilities delineated in its governing documents. The board was actively engaged with the school’s mission, regularly engaging in various ways to further the mission. The school’s core mission remained the same throughout the school’s history, although the methods and outworkings of the mission adapted and grew over time in response to the needs of the church. The board actively engaged other stakeholders as it fulfilled its role and reinstated a culture

marked by prayer and fasting. The pressures from the influence of social media caused the board and administration to develop a strong working relationship that can respond quickly and appropriately as needed. The school benefitted from strong board leadership working in tandem with the administration.

Thematic Cross-Case Analysis

The previous section contained a case study narrative for each school describing the involvement of the governing board with the school's institutional identity and mission. This study was designed to allow theoretical replication across cases to create opportunities for analytic generalization. The case study narratives contained descriptions of each school and the structure and work of its governing board in its unique context. However, they also provided input on broader theoretical concepts and principles that crossed all the individual cases. Accordingly, this section summarizes the data according to those broader theoretical concepts and principles in the research questions guiding this study. These concepts are grouped into six themes identified directly from research questions or arising inductively from the data. The thematic analysis in this section allows the reader to determine the transferability of the findings to other schools and contexts. Tables and figures are used throughout this section to provide a visual synopsis of the data.

Actions by Governing Boards

The first theme arising directly from the research questions was the actions taken by governing boards as they cultivate institutional identity and mission. In general, the governing documents of every school set forth the responsibility of the governing board for oversight of the school's mission. In every case, the governing documents described a board that appointed the president, monitored the president's and the board's performance, and monitored progress

toward either the fulfillment of the mission itself or the fulfillment of specific strategic goals developed to support the mission. In addition, the documents directed the boards to engage in routine fiduciary oversight, which could include approving budgets, approving the disposition of assets, and overseeing the annual audit of the school's finances.

The interviews provided an opportunity for the board chair and the president to describe how the board has engaged in the oversight responsibilities outlined in the governing documents over time. All interviewees affirmed that the governing board was aware of its responsibility for the school's mission and took that responsibility seriously. They offered examples of board involvement with mission and identity and demonstrated how the board acted to fulfill that responsibility. Table 3 summarizes some of the specific actions the governing boards took as they sought to cultivate institutional identity and mission, as described by the interviewees.

Table 3

Actions Taken by Governing Boards

Action taken	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Provide strong orientation of new members	X	X	-	-	X	X	X
Pursue greater diversity among members	-	-	-	X	X	X	X
Regular affirmation of mission, faith statement, vision, values, etc.	-	X	-	-	-	X	X
Provide extended review process for mission/identity related changes	X	X	-	-	-	X	X
Actively engage in research and due diligence	X	X	-	-	-	X	X
Gather feedback from stakeholders	X	X	X	X	-	-	X
Make significant financial changes to advance mission	X	X	-	X	-	X	-
Define parameters around mission-related change	-	X	-	-	-	X	X
Engage in crisis management	-	X	-	X	-	-	X
Review and approve changes to mission statement	X	X	X	-	X	X	-
Approve new initiatives, programs, degrees, etc.	X	X	-	X	-	X	X
Appoint faculty and other executive leaders	X	X	-	-	-	X	X
Cocreate strategic plans/direction	X	X	-	X	-	-	-

Action taken	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Review and approve the strategic plan/direction created by the administration	-	X	-	-	X	X	-
Contribute actively to funding programs and/or fundraising for school	-	-	-	X	-	X	-
Actively participate in strategic goals	X	-	-	-	X	-	-

The activities listed in Table 3 are not exhaustive, and the boards of these schools likely engaged in similar activities even if not expressly described in the interviews. However, they demonstrate the broad purview of board actions related to the mission.

Governing Board Structure

The second key theme arising directly from the research questions was the influence of governance structure, including the specific structure of the governing board, on institutional identity and mission. The governing documents of each school specified the influence of the denomination, the composition of the board, the use of committees, the length of terms for board members, and the minimum number of meetings per year. In addition, many of the school's governing documents provided descriptions of the role of the board, the president, the administration, and, in some cases, the faculty to provide additional information about structure. The interviewees were asked several questions designed to glean information about the structure of institutional governance and the governing board. Analysis of the data across cases revealed that the schools varied in the tightness of the governance structure. Table 4 summarizes the relative tightness of the governing board structure for each school. The following characteristics evidenced tight structures:

- Explicit descriptions of roles and responsibilities in governing board documents.
- Use of committees to organize work.

- Alignment of committees with appropriate operational units of the school's administration and operational staff.
- Interviewee statements about the separation of the board from the administration and faculty.
- Effective use of committees as described by the interviewees.
- Robust recruitment, nomination, and orientation processes.

The following characteristics evidenced loose structures:

- Less detailed descriptions of roles and responsibilities in governing documents or different accounts by interviewees of board structure than those described in the governing documents.
- No committees.
- Problems with committees as expressed by interviewees.
- The intertwining of the board with other governance parties as expressed by interviewees.
- Limited recruitment, nomination, and orientation processes for new members.

Table 4

Tightness of Board Structure

Structure	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Tight ^a	-	X	-	-	X	X	X
Medium ^b	-	-	-	X	-	-	-
Loose ^c	X	-	X	-	-	-	-

Note.^a Tight reflects a board structure marked by robust processes, roles, control, and responsibilities.

^b Medium reflects a board structure that has processes, roles, control, and responsibilities but also provides opportunities for more informal interaction among the board or between the board and school constituencies.

^c Loose reflects a board structure without robust processes, marked by informal interaction between the board and school constituencies and limited control.

The tightness of the board structure is an attempt to create a visual image of the board as described by the interviewees and in the documents and to reflect the variation among the boards of the schools.

Denominational Influence

A theme arising from the data was the denomination's influence on the school's governance structure. Denominational influence affects the governance structure and how the governing board fulfills its responsibilities by placing requirements on the denomination for certain school governance elements. Most interesting to note was that the description of denominational involvement in the governing documents often differed from that the interviewees described. For example, the most common way described in the governing documents for denominations to influence the school was by appointing board members. However, in 3 of the 4 denominational schools, the interviewees discussed how the denomination struggled to fulfill this responsibility in one way or another. Another unexpected result was how vestiges of influence by a former denomination continued for an interdenominational school despite the direct statement of independence included in the governing documents. Table 5 summarizes several ways in which the denomination exercises influence over a school, as evidenced by the governing documents and the interviewees.

Table 5*Types of Denominational Influence*

Influence	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Nominate/appoint members	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Approve members	X	-	-	X	-	-	-
Retain powers over school	-	X	-	-	-	-	-
Require school reports	-	X	-	X	X	-	-
Board representation by denominational leaders	-	-	-	X	X	-	-
Common statement of faith, doctrinal position and/or church policy	X	X	-	X	X	-	-

The data analysis across the schools also revealed that denominations had varying degrees of influence over the school. The strength of influence was determined by looking at whether the denomination fulfilled its obligation regarding new board members, whether doctrinal statements or church policy affected the school in some manner, and the description of denominational involvement with the school given by the interviewees. Accordingly, Table 6 sets forth each school's relative strength of denominational influence.

Table 6*Strength of Denominational Influence*

Strength	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Very strong	-	X	-	-	-	-	-
Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Medium	-	-	-	X	X	-	-
Weak	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Very Weak	-	-	-	-	-	X ^a	-
None	-	-	X	-	-	-	X

Note: ^a School 6 was not currently affiliated with a denomination. However, the influence of its historic denomination remained in both the school's values and the board's role.

Denominations also influenced the schools through direct and indirect financial support, such as leasing real property or office space to the school, recruitment of students, and placement opportunities for graduates. These actions were not included in Table 5 due to a lack of data of this nature from every school.

Governing Board Role

Subquestion 3 addressed the influence of the governing board's role within the school's overall governance structure. Accordingly, another key theme was the role of the governing board. Across the schools, the most common way the governing documents and interviewees described the governing board's role was to use the phrase policy governance. Except for School 1, all governing documents stated that the board operated using a policy governance model. However, the descriptions in the governing documents and the responses to questions about the governing board's role from interviews revealed variations in policy governance models across the schools. Furthermore, the board's role and actions described by many interviewees differed from those detailed in the school's governance documents. From these case studies, it was apparent that boards adapted the meaning of policy governance to fit the specific role of the board at their school.

Table 7 compares the level of policy governance used by the schools. The level of policy governance was evaluated based on the following characteristics:

- The description of the board's role or governance model in the governing documents.
- The description of the board governance model given by interviewees.
- The description of board actions given by interviewees.
- The level of board involvement with other school constituencies as described by interviewees.

Table 7*Level of Policy Governance Exhibit by Board*

Level	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
High ^a	-	X	-	-	X	-	X
Medium ^b	-	-	X	X	-	X	-
Low ^c	X	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. ^a High reflects a board that focuses primarily on setting policies, engaging only with the president, and monitoring performance as described by Carver (2006).

^b Medium reflects a board that focuses on setting policies and monitoring performance but who also frequently engages with other school constituencies.

^c Low reflects a board that operates as an equal governance party within the school.

In addition, all the interviewees stated that the board was responsible for the mission and identity of the school. However, board engagement in school affairs as they related to the identity or mission of the school varied. Table 8 depicts the level of board engagement with mission and identity as expressed by the interviewees. These characteristics marked high engagement:

- Participation in strategy development.
- Active participation with other stakeholders across the school.
- Opportunity to engage in generative discussion on mission.
- Regular review of mission.
- Use of mission in decisions.
- Willingness to change the wording of the mission statement.
- Board-led changes to various school matters made to enhance the mission.

Table 8*Level of Board Involvement in Affairs of School Related to Mission/Identity*

Board involvement	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
High ^a	X	X	-	X	-	X	X
Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Low ^b	-	-	X	-	X	-	-

Note. ^a High reflects a board with a strong mission focus, is actively engaged in cocreating strategic goals, and assists appropriately in cultivating the mission.

^b Low reflects a board either unclear about the mission or less involved in creating strategic goals or actively enhancing the mission.

Again, every board was aware of its responsibility for overseeing the mission of the school, even those schools that reflected relatively low board involvement with school affairs.

Governing Board Culture

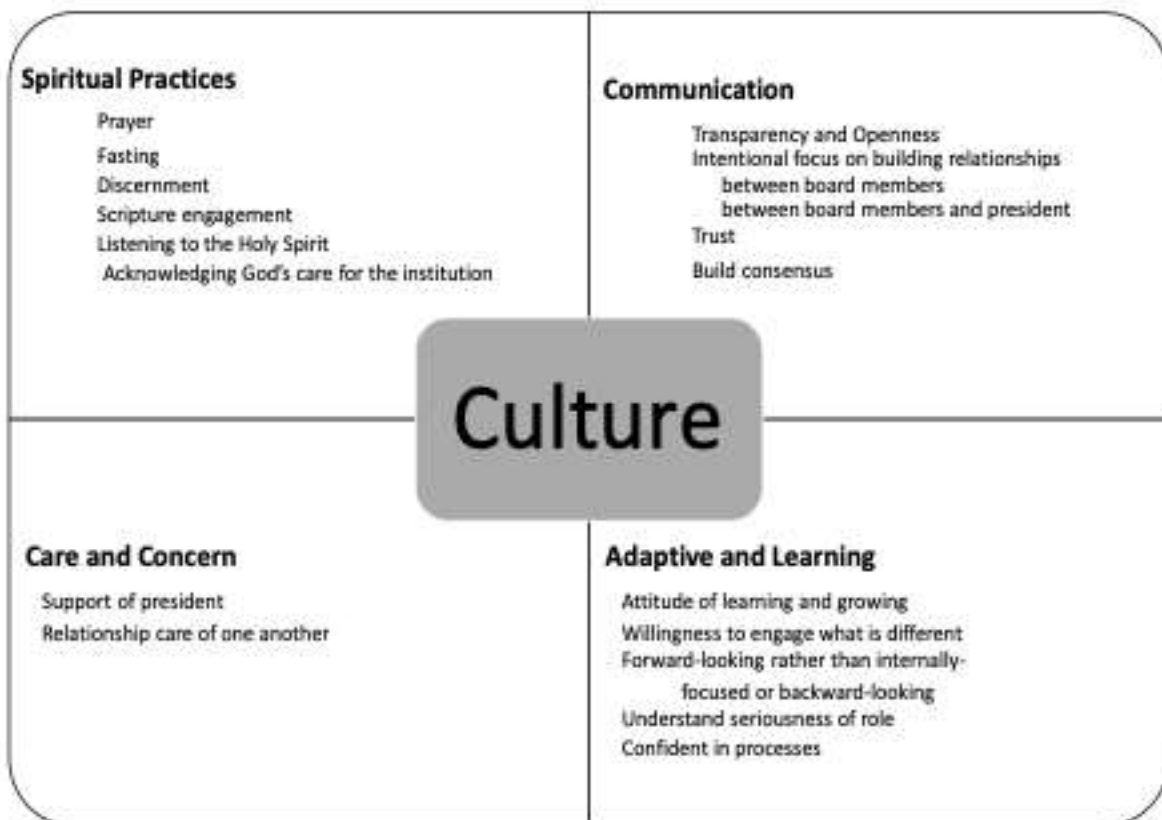
Another theme from the data analysis was the role of culture in the governing board's work. In describing the governing board's work and how it functions as its own governance body and in relationship with administration and other stakeholders, many interviewees spent considerable time sharing directly or indirectly about the board's culture. The data collected from the interviewees reflected four main aspects of culture. One marker of board culture was the use and reliance on spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, discernment, and Scripture engagement. Interviewees from several schools emphasized the spiritual aspects of governing. A second marker was evidence of a culture marked by relationships and genuine care and concern for one another, as well as care for the president by the board and vice versa.

Communication was the third marker of board culture, particularly transparency, openness, listening, and humility. Some interviewees referred to the importance of this culture

within the governance structure of their school. The final culture marker was adaptability and the ability to learn and change as needed. These four groups of culture markers are reflected in Figure 2. The culture of governance within the school directly affected the board's role and the fulfillment of its responsibilities.

Figure 2

Markers of Culture



Pressures and Challenges

The final subquestion focused on the theme of pressures and challenges. In the interviews, several common pressures and challenges the schools faced arose from the

conversations. Table 9 lists these pressures and challenges as described by the interviewees. This list is not exhaustive, but it does reflect some of the pressure points currently experienced by the schools.

Table 9

Pressures and Challenges Faced by Schools

Pressure/challenge	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Financial sustainability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Enrollment/declining pool of students	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Expectations of denomination	-	X	-	X	-	-	-
Global growth	X	-	-	X	-	X	X
Personnel needs	X	X	X	-	-	X	-
Scalability	X	-	-	X	-	-	-
Cultural challenges	-	-	X	X	X	X	-
Decline of church/denomination	-	-	-	X	X	-	-

In many cases, the interviewees described specific challenges unique to the school. Table 9 reflects a composite of those particular challenges into the broader categories presented.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 included the research questions guiding the study, described the sample studied, and provided an overview of the data collection methods. Seven specific case study narratives, one for each school in the sample, were used to present the findings from the data. Finally, a thematic cross-case analysis was provided using visual depictions of the findings related to six specific themes: board actions, board structure, denominational influence, board role, board culture, and pressures and challenges. Chapter 5 discusses and interprets these findings, suggests avenues for further research, and provides implications for practice.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research study was to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. Through an instrumental case study of seven theological schools using multiple data sources, the study sought to answer the following research questions.

Primary Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution's governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board's role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

The research findings were presented in Chapter 4 as seven separate case study narratives and a thematic analysis of common theoretical principles found across the cases. The narratives provided a contextual discussion of each school and the challenges it faces. In addition, each narrative explored the actions, structure, role, and culture of the governing board as it cultivated the school's identity and mission within its shared governance structure. Six theoretical principles, or themes, arose from the narratives to allow for analysis across the seven cases.

These themes include actions taken by governing boards, governing board structure, denominational influence, governing board role, governing board culture, and pressures and challenges. The cross-case findings were presented using visual tools, including tables and figures.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to discuss and interpret the findings as they relate to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and then to offer implications from the findings for both research and practice. The chapter first addresses each theme presented in the thematic analysis of Chapter 4, providing a discussion of how the findings answer the research questions guiding the study and inform the broader discussion of governing boards, theological schools, and institutional identity and mission found in the literature. It then suggests avenues for further research and offers implications for practice. Finally, a summary conclusion addresses the significance of the study.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The following discussion and interpretation of the research findings are organized by the study's guiding research questions and the themes identified in Chapter 4. The discussion does not follow a sequential discussion of the five research questions. Instead, it orders the subquestions to build to an overarching conclusion answering the primary research question guiding this study.

What Pressures Does the Institution Face That Challenge Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 4/Theme 6)

As seen in the literature presented in Chapter 2, theological schools, in general, face cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures. The findings of this study provided

evidence to support those claims. Table 9 in Chapter 4 summarized these pressures, and this section highlights a few common challenges found across the schools.

Cultural Pressures

None of the seven schools expressed immunity to the cultural changes in society over the last decades. As noted in Chapter 1, recent decades have seen considerable change in the religious landscape of the United States due to changing demographics (Nadeem, 2022; Zippia, 2021). At the same time, discussions of board governance have increasingly stressed the importance of diversity and inclusion and provided guidance on increasing a board's diversity (Moats & DeNicola, 2021; Warner, 2024). The governing boards of each school recognized the changing ethnic and racial demographics of society at large and among their specific student population. They responded to the call for increased diversity and inclusion by giving attention to the diversity of their board composition. Those schools that controlled the recruitment, nomination, and appointment of board members purposefully recruited new members who added to the diversity of the board, whether by age, ethnicity, race, or professional competence. When asked how the governing board changed over the last decade, most interviewees shared the board's composition changed from being dominated by white, older male pastors to a more diverse mix of ages, sexes, ethnicities, and professional backgrounds.

Furthermore, several interviewees described how the student population of their school was changing significantly and becoming more global and more diverse. Thus, the increase in diversity in board composition paralleled the rise in diversity of the student population. It was noted by the interviewees that increasing the diversity of the board was not always an easy task and, as was often recommended by corporate board consultants, it took focused attention (Moats & DeNicola, 2021). Certain schools benefitted from being in a more diverse region of the United

States or were part of a religious community or denomination with a diverse network of churches and groups to recruit board members. Others, however, experienced less diversity in these areas, making the task more difficult. However, the interviewees saw the increase in diversity as positive for the board's overall effectiveness and the fulfillment of the school's mission.

Several interviewees across the schools expressed concern about how the influence of the LGBTQ+ movement in society was challenging historic doctrinal positions on marriage and human sexuality. As G. T. Miller (2014) noted in his review of the history of theological schools, schools have wrestled with the implications of changing social mores for several decades. For the schools in this study, governing boards were vital in determining institutional response to this cultural influence. Two governing boards led an extended review and discussion with the school community to create and adopt comprehensive position statements on marriage and human sexuality. Another governing board sought to increase the diversity of its members to include sexual orientation after its denomination adopted changed positions on these issues. A fourth board regularly monitored how changes in the culture affected the churches and individuals comprising the denomination, anticipating a future need to clarify its position on this issue. These responses indicated that even within a grouping of similar schools—Evangelical Protestant—differing opinions and responses existed, a pattern confirmed in other reviews of faith group responses to LGBTQ+ issues (Gjeltin, 2021).

Schools responded creatively to the cultural changes seen in society and sought to engage the changes with their mission. Boards approved programs and initiatives specifically focused on engaging historically underrepresented populations with theological education, creating space and opportunity for regular public dialog on divisive issues between the Christian worldview and other viewpoints; teaching antiracism and cultural competency; and growing relationships with

diverse networks locally, nationally, and internationally. Most interviewees viewed these cultural challenges as opportunities to extend the school's mission and bring the transformation and hope found in the gospel of Jesus Christ to a needy world.

Educational Pressures

The predominant challenges facing most of the schools in this study were the growing demand for distance education, the development of digital tools to deliver education, and recruiting the technical personnel needed. Although online learning started before 2020, the widespread acceptance of online learning for theological schools accelerated following the COVID-19 global pandemic (Shimron, 2021; Tanner, 2017a, 2017b). Enrollment shifted to include a considerable percentage of students not engaged in on-campus learning, and most of the schools in this study developed fully online degree programs that were either in addition to or parallel to their in-person degree programs. Online education increased the opportunity to engage students globally, which resulted in the need for additional languages, adapted pedagogy to reflect different learning styles across cultures, and cultural competency in a variety of particulars. In considering these changes, boards approved new programs but also stressed the importance of the school's on-campus work. In the discussion of how to respond to these pressures, one interviewee described it as distinguishing mission from methodology. For most schools, embracing distance delivery and new populations of students required a change in methodology but not a change in mission. Psi described the discussion within theological schools regarding distance delivery and online education this way:

So it's like distance education and online education. I mean, the defense was, oh, that you know that is heretical, and it's like no, it's just out of your comfort zone, and you're not

comfortable with it because you don't know how to do that. And it's actually intimidating to you. That's a methodology. That's not a mission.

Indeed, for several schools, the global growth enabled by distance delivery and digital learning has expanded its mission by allowing the school to broaden its reach. Those studying trends within Christianity noted the shift in the growth of Christianity from the global north and west to the global south and east (Zurlo et al., 2019). This trend was mirrored within the student populations of theological schools as well. For example, leaders at School 4 saw the growth it is experiencing from the global denominational community as a catalyst to revive its mission even as the growth brought challenges of transformation to programs, pedagogy, and even governance structure. Similarly, leaders at School 2 saw its student population change due to the immigration of people from Latin and South America and the increase of Christianity among the Pacific Rim countries in Asia. Leaders at School 7 developed a nondegree program to equip those Christian leaders from the global south who lack a baccalaureate degree.

For those schools embracing online education and global growth, expanding the mission to include the online and global communities of students put pressure on institutions as they considered the financial and personnel implications of these new educational methods. As Tau stated:

Once you get too far behind [in these new educational methods], it's very, very difficult to catch up because not only financially, the investment it takes to put into the technology, but finding people who are capable of managing the technology and managing online education.

Financial Pressures

Every school in the study faced financial challenges due to rising costs and declining enrollment. Certain schools, such as School 2, operated in expensive locations, creating high financial needs for the institution and the personnel employed by the school. Others, such as School 3, experienced a decline in enrollment, leading to a decrease in tuition income and financial challenges despite owning no physical campus to maintain. Even large, financially sound institutions such as School 7 recognized the challenge of maintaining a reasonable tuition rate while funding the plethora of programs offered to attract students. As Mu stated, “The financial model for tuition-based theological schools is untenable, in most cases unsustainable.” Consequently, schools had been reducing costs, growing endowments by selling real estate, moving into new markets to attract students, and transforming their funding models to provide for long-term sustainability. Although the circumstances for every school differed, these seven schools reflected the common financial struggles seen among theological schools as a sector (Huffman, 2022a; MacKaye, 2009; Nelson, 2013; Ries, 2015; Tajanlangit, 2022).

Theological Pressures

As reviewed in Chapter 2, the history of theological schools and Christian higher education contained disruptions caused by changing theological positions, the adoption of different hermeneutical approaches toward Scripture, and the influence of secular worldviews on traditional Christian teachings. The response to these pressures varied among the theological schools across history (Arthur, 2008; Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021; G. T. Miller, 2007, 2014). This theme has continued as current schools wrestle with theological challenges. Certain schools, such as Schools 2 and 4, faced challenges for their school resulting from changes made at the denomination level. Changed policy on LGBTQ+ issues led to the

exodus of large numbers of churches and communities from the denomination supporting School 4, leaving it to find a way to continue to serve a declining denomination as well as many now independent churches. The denominational changes led the governing board of School 4 to consider its response to these issues by broadening the board diversity to include sexual orientation. School 2, on the other hand, anticipated a potential future challenge to its mission of preparing both men and women for ministry resulting from its denomination's tightening of church policy on leadership.

For other schools, the theological diversity seen among its community challenged its identity and mission. Some schools, such as School 1 and 3, were embracing theological openness, making it a key identity marker for the school, while also discovering the difficulty of "drawing the line," as Beta said, or "finding consensus," as Rho said, within this openness. Others, such as School 6, welcomed students from multiple traditions yet retained clearly defined doctrinal positions to which board members, faculty, administration, and staff must adhere. School 5 prioritized serving its church-related constituencies while welcoming students from other traditions as it faced the pronounced decline of the church in Canada. Even schools governed by very defined and detailed doctrinal positions, such as School 7, experienced pressures in discerning how to respond to attacks occurring in the cultural environment or as the result of social media.

Thus, the research findings confirmed that schools faced cultural, educational, financial, and theological pressures that may have influenced their institutional identity and mission. Each school was unique in its response to the challenges, and the case studies revealed that governing boards play a crucial role in helping the institution navigate these challenges.

How Does the Institution's Governance Structure Affect Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 2/Themes 3 and 4)

Governance structure refers to how power and authority are organized among the various institutional stakeholders—governing board, administration, and faculty (Hendrickson et al., 2013). As described in Chapter 2, the governance of higher education institutions is complex because the responsibility and authority are distributed among several stakeholder groups, and the processes for ordering and implementing this structure are complex to manage (Birnbaum, 1991; Lewis, 2009). In addition, governing boards develop structures to accomplish their work, which can affect the effectiveness of the governing board and the institution more broadly (Chait et al., 1993; Houle, 1989). For theological schools, governance is often affected by an outside denomination or other religious community because these schools exist to further the purposes of the church (Aleshire, 2008). Thus, this study sought to uncover how these various aspects of governance structure affect institutional identity and mission. This section first discusses denominational influence—the third theme identified in the cross-case analysis—and demonstrates how the findings answer this question. The section then discusses the governing board structure before considering the implications of the overall institutional governance structure on institutional identity and mission.

Denominational Influence

As described in Chapter 4, the sample contained four denominational schools and three schools that were either nondenominational or interdenominational. Table 5 listed several ways a denomination influences the schools. These include appointing board members, approving board members, and providing a common statement of faith, doctrinal position, and church policy. The denomination significantly influenced the identity of three schools—School 2, 4, and 5. These

schools communicated their relationship to the denomination on its website or in its name. Ties to the denomination were important to school leadership, and regular communication from the school to the denomination occurred through direct reports to the denomination. Denominational leadership was included on the governing board. In addition, board members, faculty, leadership, and personnel had to be affiliated with or members of denominational churches. Board members were either appointed by or approved by the denomination. Common statements of faith, doctrinal positions, and church policies tied the school and denomination together.

Schools 1 and 6 no longer directly connected their identity to their denomination. For School 1, the denomination was responsible for approving board members and providing a joint statement of faith, and communication between the denomination and the school existed. However, the interviewees described the relationship as one in which the denomination exercised little influence over the identity or structure of the school. For School 6, no denomination currently exercised any influence over the school and had not for several decades. Indeed, the governing documents clearly stated that no external organization, such as a denomination, was to have any authority over the school. However, both interviewees described how the school purposefully retained vestiges of its former denomination in its core values and certain board powers, such as faculty approval.

Schools 3 and 7 saw their independence from denominational affiliation as a critical identity marker. School 3 embraced its ecumenism and finds significant value in including all Christian traditions in its focus. Alternatively, School 7 relied on a detailed and defined statement of faith to serve as its identity marker instead of a denomination. Both had religious communities they served; however, these communities were not specific denominations.

Theological schools are closely tied to the religious communities they serve (Aleshire, 2008), and the findings revealed that the influence of the denomination strongly affected the identity and mission of the school. Previous studies examining the relationship of evangelical nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions to their religious communities revealed a dynamic relationship requiring navigation by institutional leadership (Laats, 2018; Schneider & Morrison, 2010). The findings of this study reflected the same dynamic as schools continually consider “what implications [the relationship] has for the viability of our mission and vision . . . in the future,” as Theta said. Changes within the denomination affected the schools in significant ways. School 4 had to adapt to the changing network of churches and denominational groups after a policy change made by its denomination regarding LGBTQ+ issues. Similarly, policy changes regarding church leadership by School 2’s denomination were creating questions among leadership about future implications on its mission. Even nondenominational schools were affected by what occurred in their supportive religious community, as seen in School 7’s regular awareness of how the behavior and comments by public figures connected with the school could lead to challenging conversations in social media.

The denominational decline was perhaps the most significant threat because most denominational schools “own [them] and populate [their] board,” as Kappa said. Thus, a declining denomination would “potentially be a challenge and a risk,” according to Iota, to the school’s identity and mission. In these cases, governing boards and administration must choose how to respond to a declining denomination and the implications for the school’s identity and mission. The findings reflected several school responses in this study, summarized in Table 10.

Table 10*Responses to Denominational Decline*

School	Response	Identity/mission impact
1	Broaden/change mission to reflect openness outside of denomination Embrace partnerships, faculty, students, and personnel outside of the denomination Maintain communication with denominational leadership Seek board members through partnerships rather than through denominational appointment	Adapt identity and mission to downplay denomination Broaden religious community
4	Maintain relationships with denominational churches and now independent churches Strengthen relationships with affiliated networks of churches Make changes to board composition to accommodate new denominational positions Seek to strengthen communication with denominational leaders Pursue engagement with the global denominational community	Maintain identity Broaden mission to embrace global community
5	Presidential recruitment and nomination of board members to assist the denomination in its role Maintain regular communication with denominational leadership Diversify enrollment of students from other Christian traditions Adapt education to prepare leaders for the future church and ministry outside the church	Maintain identity Slightly adapt mission
6	Separate from denomination and change board governance structure Create a new, broadly evangelical identity Retain vestiges of denomination in history, values, and certain board responsibilities Broaden networks to attract evangelical students from many different traditions	Change identity Broaden mission

Burtchaell (1998) argued that a changing relationship between a school and its supporting denomination is a significant catalyst for the movement away from the school's religious mission. Additional researchers have further argued the strength of commitment by the

denomination or religious community to the fundamental tenets of Christianity also directly affects how closely the school adheres to those same truths (Arthur, 2008; Benne, 2001).

Although the literature has primarily focused on liberal arts Christian higher education institutions, this current research revealed that the conversation on mission drift is also relevant for theological schools. The findings of this study indicate that denominational influence can require a school to respond in ways that affect its identity and mission.

However, it is not a definitive conclusion that these changes necessarily result in a loss of religious mission or Christian identity. Indeed, the experience of School 6 showed that a school with a religious mission and tightly bound to a denomination can adapt to the decline and death of the denomination by embracing its religious mission, retaining its commitment to the fundamental tenets of Christianity, and adapting its denominational identity into a broader inter-denominational evangelical identity. The other three schools experiencing a declining denomination were making specific changes, whether simply to behavior and practice or, more broadly, to identity and mission, to address the threat of denominational decline.

Thus, the denominational influence on an institution's governance structure does affect its identity and mission, as predicted by theorists studying the uniqueness of religious organizations (Chaves, 1994, 1998). However, the agency structure adopted by church-related schools gives them much control over their policies, activities, identity, and mission (Chaves, 1998; Cuninggim, 1994). Intentional work is required by school governance parties to ensure that the changes made in response to denominational influence do not lead to mission drift for the school, and the governing board plays a significant role in guarding and cultivating the mission. As Omega stated, "[The board's] going to right the ship if it starts to go wrong." The case studies in the current study revealed an awareness on the part of the governing boards to the

concern of mission drift and intentional effort given to oversight of the identity and mission of the schools.

Governing Board Structure

Except for School 1, the governing boards in this study structured themselves similarly. In general, boards ranged in size from as few as 10 members to over 40 members, used committees to organize their work, set term limits for their members, met at least 2 times per year, used an executive committee to conduct board work between meetings as needed, followed structured voting, and had governance manuals describing their work. Four schools had a denomination involved in appointing or approving board members. The remaining three schools had self-perpetuating boards that recruited, nominated, and approved new board members. School 1 differed from the others in its lack of committees, increased number of meetings per year, and lack of structured voting.

The case studies presented in Chapter 4 revealed that boards differed in the tightness of their structure, as summarized in Table 4. As noted in Chapter 2, the governance of higher education institutions has been analyzed using the theory of coupling in systems (Weick, 1976). Higher education institutions are often considered loosely coupled systems because they have distinct parts that interact with each other with varying frequency levels (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The theory of loosely coupled systems has been adopted to analyze these institutions across departments, academic and nonacademic units, faculty and staff, and other internal relational structures, particularly noting the adverse effect of unaligned units or parties in the overall operation of the institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Lewis, 2009; Manning, 2018). Analyses have considered whether an institution is tightly coupled through structures, processes, and control or whether the units are more loosely coupled through norms, customs, and social

interactions (Ramirez-Cardona & Calderón-Hernández, 2024). In addition, several analyses and models that consider the governing board often focus on power and authority, such as a political or bureaucratic model (Birnbaum, 1991; Manning, 2018). Studies have noted that university governance can change over time, and a spectrum of coupling exists within institutions (Hautala et al., 2017; Maassen & Stensaker, 2019). Although the current study did not set out to specifically analyze the coupling within the governing board or between the governing board and the administration, variation in the level of coupling among these structures, processes, and relationships arose from the data.

School 1 had a loose board structure and an open relationship between the governing board and the administration developed to purposely “equalize the voices,” as Beta said, in the school’s governance. Members were connected more through social interactions, shared mission, and values, a marker of loosely coupled organizations. On the other end of the spectrum, School 5 had a very tight and delineated board structure and a more formal relationship between the governing board and administration designed to remedy past overreach by the board into management. Similarly, School 4 strengthened its board structure following a crisis of board governance. However, Theta said, the school also sought to ensure “little formal distance between the board and administration.” Thus, one might consider it somewhere in the middle of a spectrum between tightly coupled and loosely coupled units.

School 7 purposely designed its board structure with a primary board and two subsidiary boards to provide a system of “healthy checks and balances,” according to Psi, for the board itself. It delineated specific responsibilities for each subsidiary board and the committees used by the boards. School 2 benefitted from a strong denomination that determined board composition and regularly appointed new board members previously unconnected to the school nationwide.

In response, the board developed a tight structure to prevent the regular member turnover from negatively affecting the effectiveness of board oversight over the institution. In addition, the large size of its board has led to significant involvement by committees because, as Delta said, “It’s just difficult to get 40 people together sometimes, and it’s easier to get a handful.” These schools reflected more tight coupling within the board and between the board and administration.

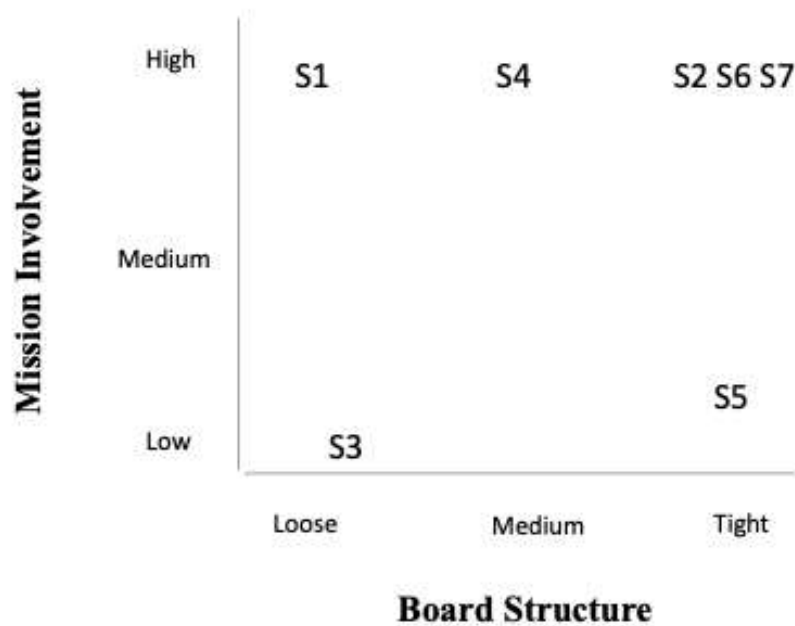
For School 6, regular attention was given by the board and the administration to board structure and processes. In the last decade, for example, the governance manual was revised at least 4 times to address inefficiencies in structure or process better. Finally, School 3 provided an example of how board structure can sometimes be detrimental. It lacked term limits but had experienced frequent turnover of board members. This turnover resulted in the long-term board members exercising more power and influence over the board than may be appropriate. Furthermore, School 3 used committees, but both interviewees described disagreements between committees and confusion over the responsibilities held by the various committees for the school’s overall strategy and mission. School 3’s governing board structure and the relationship between the board and administration might be considered loosely coupled and reflective of the potential difficulties in governance within loosely coupled systems.

Although board structure varied in its tightness across the schools, and the coupling within the governing board and between the governing board and the administration varied, every board recognized its responsibility for the school’s mission and sought to fulfill that responsibility in its work. Figure 3 combines the results of Table 4 with Table 8 to demonstrate the relationship between board structure and mission involvement. Looking at this comparison, the structure of the governing board itself does not seem to affect the board’s involvement with the school’s identity or mission. Loose board structures like School 1 can result in high mission

involvement. However, a tight board structure does not prevent high mission involvement, as seen in Schools 2 and 7.

Figure 3

Mission Involvement and Board Structure



These findings supported Cornforth's (2001) conclusion that board structure may be less influential in board performance. Nonetheless, the case studies reflected the focus of most schools on their board structure and the willingness to make changes to the structure necessary to improve board performance. The need felt by governing boards to enhance structure and processes provides evidence that board structure does matter in the effectiveness of a board as it relates to cultivating identity and mission. These findings also indicate that boards marked by tight coupling through structure and processes can also be tied to the institution and other governance units, such as the administration, through the institution's common identity, mission,

and values. The experience of the schools indicated that loosely coupled governing boards can be very effective in cultivating identity and mission, as seen with School 1, or they can be inefficient and struggle with those same tasks, as seen with School 3.

Similarly, tightly coupled boards can be very dynamic in their attention to identity and mission despite the controlled structures and processes, such as School 2. Alternatively, they can be more removed in their oversight, such as School 5. These findings indicated that looking at the implications of coupling on board effectiveness as it relates to identity and mission may be a fruitful avenue of research.

Although governing boards hold the ultimate responsibility for the school as reflected in every school's articles of incorporation and bylaws, boards operate within an overall institutional governance structure that involves sharing governance responsibility with administration and faculty. The board's role within this shared governance structure can affect what it does, which is the focus of the next section.

How Does the Governing Board's Role Within the Governance Structure of the Institution Affect What It Does to Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission? (Subquestion 3/Themes 4 and 5)

Considerable research has been done to understand the dynamics of shared governance in higher education institutions, as discussed in Chapter 2. Shared governance reflects how the key governance parties of the board, administration, and faculty share power, authority, and decision-making within a higher education institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013). As higher education institutions, theological schools also reflect shared governance models in which the board, administration, and faculty work together to govern the institution and fulfill its mission (Basinger, 2009). Governing boards often adopt and follow a form of policy governance.

However, it has been argued that policy governance models conflict with the principles of shared governance (Basinger, 2009; Wheeler & Ouellette, 2015).

As described in Chapter 2, policy governance models distinguish between the institution's ends or goals and the means through which it accomplishes its goals (Carver, 2006). Policy governance sets clear boundaries between the board and the president, with the board setting the ends, the policies, and the boundaries in which the president can work. The president then works to fulfill the ends within the constraints of the policies and boundaries set by the board, and the board monitors the president through regular assessment (Carver, 2006). The policy governance model focuses on the relationship between the governing board and the president and allows the president to oversee all the staff.

Policy Governance Models Among the Schools

As noted in Chapter 4, the governing documents of nearly every school described the board's role in policy governance. The case studies revealed that the governing board of each school ascribed to policy governance by focusing on mission, strategic direction, and assessment while taking care to avoid overreach into the management or operations of the school. For each school, the president was the primary relationship between the governing board and the school. However, for other schools, additional members of the administration had direct connections to work with the board as well. As summarized in Table 7, the schools exhibited different levels of policy governance in practice. Certain schools, such as Schools 3 and 5, adhered most fully to the policy governance model. In contrast, Schools 1 and 4 had a more engaged board than typical in this model. Schools 2, 6, and 7 provided examples of a board focused on policy governance that was also very engaged with the school's affairs.

The case studies provided evidence for how policy governance affects how the board works. Certain interviewees described the tendency for policy governance models to create a “disconnect,” as Rho said, between boards and other stakeholders at the school or to develop a “power silo,” as Kappa shared, between the board and the president. For School 3, the board tended to be uncertain about its role and, thus, was not fully engaged with its mission.

Interviewees described a coalescing of power by long-time missionally aware board members who could work closely with the president to determine plans and goals before involving the whole board. Although all board members had opportunities to engage with various school constituencies to personally gather regular feedback and receive regular reports from the administration regarding progress on strategic plans, the whole board struggled to engage with the school’s mission and the decisions necessary to further the mission. In this case, policy governance created both a disconnect and a power silo.

For School 5, past failures of the board to fulfill its responsibilities led the board to redesign and strengthen its role within the school’s governance structure. School 5 reflected a board focused on understanding and adhering to its role as a traditional policy governance board. Accordingly, it was careful to engage with and follow the president’s strategic decisions. School 5’s board received input from other stakeholders during its meetings and regular updates from the administration, but in general, it “leans heavily,” as Kappa said, on the president when engaging with the school’s affairs. To avoid a power silo, the president and the board took care to invite other members of the administration, faculty, and students to board meetings to increase communication and awareness among the school community of the work of the board. Nonetheless, the interviewees noted a distinct separation of the board from the school in many respects.

These two cases provided some evidence for how a policy governance model can negatively affect the role and actions of the governing board. However, one challenge in evaluating the effectiveness of the policy governance used at a particular school was an unclear understanding of what the term policy governance means for each institution. Critiques of policy governance frequently occurred due to a lack of knowledge and application of the model (Hough, 2002). The policy governance model, as theorized, assumes complete implementation and compliance by a governing board and the president (Carver, 2006). Even if an organization fully implements and practices the model perfectly, optimal governance is not guaranteed (Carver, 2006).

As noted in Chapter 2, empirical studies exploring board performance in higher education institutions have been uncommon, particularly those focused on the effectiveness of the policy governance model as implemented by an institution (Hough, 2002; Kezar, 2006). Although the current research provided some indication that policy governance may harm the board and its engagement with the identity and mission of the school, more focused analysis on the meaning and operation of policy governance within each institution is necessary to draw any substantive conclusions about whether the policy governance model as developed by Carver (2006) is an effective approach to board governance for a theological school. As Lambda noted, boards often move “in the direction of policy governance, more towards the Carver model, but who knows who practices the Carver model perfectly. You adapt it to your situation, and there are good reasons for it to be adapted.”

Furthermore, the shared governance framework commonly guiding governance can hinder the application of policy governance as a model in higher education institutions. This current study did not look at the interactions between the faculty and the board to enable a

complete evaluation of policy governance versus shared governance. However, for these institutions, the board exercised oversight of academic matters through committees, as in Schools 2, 3, 4, and 6, or through a separate board structure, as in Schools 5 and 7. Most of these schools revealed a governance structure in which the board was a stronger voice than the faculty. However, this impression could merely be the result of this study's design, which focused on the governing board's specific role.

Governance as Leadership Among the Schools

Recognizing that boards are often disconnected, unengaged, and underused, Chait et al. (2005) offered a model of governance that took board involvement beyond the traditional governance models and called on boards to provide leadership not only through fiduciary governance but also through strategic and generative governance. In these case studies, one key difference noted across the schools was whether the board engaged in strategic or generative leadership versus fiduciary leadership, particularly as it engaged with the school's mission. The findings of this study, as summarized in Table 11, reflect how the schools differed in board engagement with these types of leadership in their governance as it relates to mission.

Table 11

Type of Leadership Exhibited by Governing Board

School	Fiduciary	Strategic	Generative
1	x	x	x
2	x	x	x
3	x	-	-
4	x	x	x
5	x	-	-
6	x	x	x
7	x	x	-

Schools 1 and 4 had boards that reflected a lower level of policy governance but provided a high level of strategic and generative leadership in their governance. Alpha said, School 1's board was "one voice in the wider conversation about strategy" for the school. Because of this, the board was involved with administration, faculty, and staff in obtaining "a shared understanding of reality," as Alpha shared. These components included identifying the problems faced by the school, brainstorming ways to address the issues, and determining strategies to fulfill the mission by working through the problems. The board was invited into and regularly provided strategic and generative leadership, and the board officially noted such outcome as a strategic goal or action only after consensus was reached among the school community.

School 4 purposely included time in its regular meetings for generative discussion regarding the challenges faced by the school and potential opportunities to address those problems within the mission. The board actively engaged with the administrative cabinet to identify and set priorities and goals, and the board expected openness and transparency. Indeed, the interviewees like Theta expressed that there exists "little formal distance" between the board and the administration, allowing the board to exercise more leadership than a policy governance model might permit. For both these schools, the loose coupling of the board structure and the relationship between the board and the administration enabled the board to exercise these broader types of governance. The interviewees of both schools described engaged board members who were excited about the direction of the school and eager to work through the school's challenges and cocreate the strategic goals to fulfill the school's mission. Pursuing these types of governance has helped give greater purpose to the board, which is the goal of the model (Chait et al., 2005).

However, the findings indicated that boards can engage in generative and strategic leadership while acting within a strong policy governance model and a tightly coupled board structure. Schools 2 and 6 reflected strong policy governance boards that avoided operational involvement. Yet, the interviewees described a board that engaged in creative, strategic, and generative ways to cultivate the school's mission. School 2's board played a significant role in working with the administration to approve and implement a major change necessary to further the mission. Through that process, the board became more confident in itself and continued to actively engage with challenges, identifying problems and potential solutions while keeping the perspective that "mission matters most," as Gamma said.

Similarly, School 6's board led the administration and faculty to initiate and implement new initiatives and programs designed to expand the school's reach into new networks because it recognized the opportunities to "raise the profile of the seminary," as Omega shared, and extend the mission. Thus, regardless of the level of adherence of the board to policy governance, the ability of the board to engage in strategic and generative leadership alongside the other governance parties seemed to affect what it can do to cultivate institutional identity and mission. Uncovering more specifically what strategic and generative governance means for each of these governing boards and how it is implemented in real time with current struggles would help to determine whether engaging in this type of governance makes a significant difference in cultivating the identity and mission of the school.

Board Culture

The case studies revealed that the ability of a board to exercise leadership is directly related to the board's culture and the relationship between the board and the president and administration. Figure 2 summarized several markers of culture evident in the data, and the

culture markers related to communication are the most important to the board's role in working with other governance parties. Several interviewees highlighted the importance of transparency, openness, and trust between the president, the administration, and the board, indicating that the strength of this relationship affected board governance, particularly as the board navigated the balance of policy and accountability versus management.

The findings from School 2, a school with a strong policy governance model in which the board "sets policy and practices accountability," as Gamma said, revealed a relationship in which the board receives detailed and regular data and communication from the administration regarding the activities and progress of the school sufficient to allow the board to provide robust accountability. At the same time, the president could come to the board with problems, ask for appropriate guidance and help, and receive substantive counsel and direction. Gamma said ensuring open communication and complete transparency enables "good, confident board members [to] help especially religious organizations [because] they look at situations differently, and sometimes with more objectivity and more honesty." Both interviewees described a relationship based on humility and submission between the president and board and among the board members. This relational posture and open communication practice allowed trust between the board and the president. In response, the board can be a robust governance partner, engage at the strategic and policy level in institutional matters, and be equipped to engage deeply with the school's mission and goals. All interviewees attributed the success of the major change and the subsequent community decisions resulting from the change to this culture.

Similarly, School 4 purposely prioritized open and transparent communication between governance parties to avoid the disconnect that can result in a policy governance model. This level of relationship became a priority for the board following a crisis of governance resulting

from a lack of communication between faculty, board committees, and the whole board. Theta shared, the board “expects transparency from the CEO” and regularly sought to engage with students and faculty to ask questions, hear updates, and understand their experiences with the school and its mission. These conversations were then discussed with the president and administration in the cabinet and board meetings. The transparency and willingness of all governance parties to engage with one another regularly “fostered a huge amount of trust,” according to Theta. The interviewees noted the higher importance of a culture marked by relationship and communication over processes and policies designed for good governance.

Within School 1, all governance parties engaged with the mission and strategic direction of the school from a place of equal collaboration. The community embraced collaborative governance and codified this shared approach to governance in its governing documents. Collaboration required shared information, open communication, transparency, and permission for governance parties to ask questions and provide input into areas a traditional policy governance model would not encourage. One interviewee described the approach as encouraging faculty to ask about finances, board members to ask about curriculum, and administration to share significant challenges with everyone. This collaborative governance environment allowed the board to engage more deeply with the school’s affairs, particularly regarding mission and strategic priorities.

Although School 1 leaders specifically described its governance as collaborative, it was evident that all governing boards must learn to collaborate with the president, the administration, and other stakeholders to govern the school effectively. Collaboration and the relational elements necessary for effective collaboration have been the subject of research within various fields, including public administration and management (Getha-Taylor et al., 2019). Trust is assumed to

be the basis for collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012); however, collaboration research has recently considered whether it is possible to govern collaboratively without trust (Getha-Taylor et al., 2019). After reviewing literature on conflict resolution, psychology, and law, Getha et al. (2019) suggested collaboration is possible without trust. In this case, collaboration involves “reliance on principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures that articulate collective expectations” (Getha-Taylor et al., 2019, p. 60).

The boards in this study developed relational social connections that promoted trust and established principles, rules, norms, and procedures to share information, encourage communication, ensure transparency, and allow for oversight and accountability. These have become part of their culture. The findings indicated a board culture marked by relationships, open communication, and transparency with other governance parties enables the board to engage more fully with the school’s mission and fulfill its fiduciary obligations. Looking more deliberately at the collaboration process and the influence of social–relational trust versus policies, norms, and processes on the collaborative relationship would be fruitful in further developing recommendations for how boards can collaborate well with the administration.

Having now looked at the effect of governance structure and the boards’ role within that structure, the next section addresses what the governing board does to cultivate institutional identity and mission.

What Does the Governing Board Do to Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission?

(Subquestion 1/Themes 1 and 5)

Governing boards hold the ultimate responsibility for the institution and are tasked with ensuring the fulfillment of the mission in a manner that is financially and ethically sound (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2015; Hendrickson et al., 2013).

To that end, this research sought to uncover what boards do to cultivate institutional identity and mission. Some specific actions relating to the mission taken by the boards in this study are described in the case narratives and summarized in Table 3. As noted in Chapter 4, the specific actions listed in Table 3 do not include all mission-related actions taken by the boards and should not be seen as a comprehensive list. However, the boards engaged in similar actions as they sought to fulfill their responsibilities.

As discussed in Chapter 2, effective governing boards exhibit six distinct competencies (Chait et al., 1993). Furthermore, studies evaluating the influence of board structure versus board process generally have found that board process is more influential than board structure (Chait et al., 1993; Cornforth, 2001; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Kezar, 2006). Three specific processes have been shown to influence board effectiveness: board understanding its role and responsibilities, board member selection, and developing a shared sense of mission and goals. Table 12 categorizes the board actions uncovered in this research according to the six board competencies.

Table 12

Board Actions Characterized by Competency

Competency (Chait et al., 1993)	Action taken
Contextual	Regularly affirm mission, faith statement, vision, values, etc. Provide a review of institutional history, board history, mission history Consider mission and identity in deliberations and actions
Educational	Provide robust orientation for new members Regularly affirm mission, faith statement, vision, values, etc. Engage in research and due diligence on matters facing the school Seek input and feedback from institutional stakeholders
Interpersonal	Provide robust orientation for new members Provide mentors for new board members Give attention to building relationships with one another Seek consensus in decision-making Pursue greater diversity among members

Competency (Chait et al., 1993)	Action taken
Analytical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engage in research and due diligence before a decision is made Gather feedback from other stakeholders Review and approve new initiatives, programs, degrees, etc. to further the mission Review and approve changes to mission statement Receive, review, and know information and data shared by the institution Consider viewpoints of various constituencies
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather feedback from other stakeholders Include faculty and/or student representation at board meetings Include denominational representatives at board meetings Appoint faculty and other executive leaders Appoint the president of the institution Develop crisis management response
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cocreate strategic plans/direction Review and approve strategic plan/direction created by administration Actively participate in strategic goal Allow time to engage in strategic/generative discussion during meetings Define parameters around mission-related change Provide extended review process for mission/identity-related changes

The case studies showed that boards reflected different levels of success with the competencies, affecting how boards cultivate identity and mission. This discussion highlights the differences in four competencies related to the three critical processes noted previously.

Interpersonal and Educational

An essential process within both the interpersonal and educational competencies was new member recruitment, nomination, approval, and orientation. All boards indicated the existence of these processes for new members; however, Schools 1, 3, and 5 reflected weaknesses in these processes. School 1's newest members came from institutional mergers, leaving little ability for focused recruitment and a heightened need for orientation. This approach prevented the school from meeting its ratios for church-related board members required by the governing documents, impeded the board from pursuing greater diversity among its members, and resulted in members who did not understand its approach to governance or the school's mission. Accordingly, the

board was experiencing and responding to the challenge of orienting and retraining nearly half its members while governing a dynamic and changing school.

School 3's orientation of board members was not fully implemented, resulting in members who were unsure about the mission and ethos of the school and uncertain about their role in governance. As noted in its case study narrative, the board experienced the significant hindrance of having members who did not understand the mission and, as a result, were inclined not to engage with it deeply.

School 5's recruitment and nomination process was not followed by the denomination, leaving the president to recruit new board members. Although this allowed the president to focus on diversifying the board in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, viewpoints, and professional experience, this approach allowed a president to "pad the board" if desired, as Kappa shared. School 5 leaders anticipated that recent changes in the board's committee structure to provide for a governance committee would help the board develop its ability to recruit board members and work with the denomination to vet and approve them.

On the other hand, Schools 2, 6, and 7 developed robust recruitment, nomination, approval, and orientation processes for board members. School 2 did not control the nomination or approval of board members because the denomination exercised this authority over the school. To compensate for regularly receiving new members unfamiliar with the school, the board and administration developed a robust orientation process and mentoring relationship for new members. These processes helped new members understand the school's mission and goals and the board's role in governance.

Schools 6 and 7 had self-perpetuating boards that controlled recruitment, nomination, approval, and orientation processes. Both boards diligently worked to develop robust processes

and, over time, diversified the board according to age, sex, ethnicity, and profession. The result was boards that better reflected the student body, were mission-focused, and were equipped to govern effectively.

Empirical research on board governance has shown that the board process of recruiting and orienting new members influences board effectiveness (Chait et al., 1993; Cornforth, 2001). In addition, orienting board members to think about their service as a calling or a “religious vocation” (Greenfield, 1983, p. 13) was encouraged by those focused on the governance of religious organizations (Hester, 2000). Although none of the interviewees described the orientation process using the language of calling or vocation, this process can help the new member understand the importance of their role as guardians of the spiritual aspects of the school’s identity and mission. The attention to all interpersonal processes related to board personnel is a significant action boards take to cultivate institutional identity and mission because, as Omega shared, “If the school’s going to go astray, that’s going to be where it goes from . . . [The board’s] going to right the ship if it starts to go wrong.”

Contextual

Contextual competency includes processes to develop and maintain a shared understanding of mission and goals (Chait et al., 1993). Cultivating identity and mission begins with understanding the school’s identity and mission and then using these in deliberations and decisions. The findings of this research reflect different approaches to how boards engage in these processes. One approach was to regularly rehearse the school’s mission, values, and statement of faith, which several schools practiced. School 6, for example, required the board to rehearse these at every meeting. For School 3, mission understanding among board members was low, so the administration “[was] careful to keep the mission before the board,” as Rho said. For

School 7, key identity markers, such as the statement of faith, were codified in the organizational documents with detailed processes governing changes to them, and all board, faculty, administration, and staff must annually affirm their adherence to these core identity and mission markers.

A second approach was to codify the mission into a statement that either provided a sense of permanence or was regularly revised to reflect the actual practice of the school. Schools 2 and 6 engaged in a community-wide discernment process to codify the mission into one statement that the entire school community could embrace. The resulting statements carried permanence, served as unifying statements, and embodied the “life force” (Scott, 2006) of the school, helping leadership discern appropriate actions. Gemma said, there was an understanding for these schools that the “mission matters most,” and all institutional activity was to be vetted against the mission. In these cases, mission statements serve as “strategy statements” and “identity statements” (Cady et al., 2011, p. 65).

On the other hand, School 1 regularly engaged in a community-wide discernment process designed to review and revise the mission statement to reflect the school’s current focus as it engages with its constituencies. In this way, the mission statements act as legitimizing statements, communicating purpose and identity to the broader network of constituencies (Connell & Galasiński, 1998). Furthermore, School 1 framed its missional focus as discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit and thus embraced a willingness to change direction as God leads. In this case, the mission statement served as an identity narrative to help stimulate necessary change as the institution adapts to its constituencies while also serving as the “glue that holds members together” (Zenk & Louis, 2018, p. 15).

Finally, boards also focused on the core historic mission while allowing for changes necessary to respond to the current needs of the church. School 5 adhered to the mission established at its founding yet recently recognized the need to update the statement's wording to broaden the scope to include preparing people to serve God in various contexts inside and outside the church. Revising the statement was not to reflect a changed mission but to better focus the community's attention on the broad and varying ways and contexts the people it educates serve God and the calling God's people have to bring transformation to these various contexts.

School 7 regularly evaluated its initiatives and programs—the “umbrella of ministry,” as Psi said—to ensure each “falls in alignment with” the core mission that has guided the school since its founding. This approach enabled the board and leadership to refer to the founding purpose and mission of the school and extrapolate from it what was appropriate and consistent in the current cultural context. Preparing leaders to serve the church may have originally been limited to preparing male preachers for churches. Now, it also included preparing men and women to counsel and educate both within and outside the church walls.

School 4 embraced an expansion of its mission to meet the needs of the global denominational community while managing a decline among the North American denominational community that had been the bedrock of its existence since its founding. The mission remained the same, but it shifted focus from local and national to global. In these ways, the board ensured the mission was clear and understood by all constituencies.

Thus, the findings indicated that much like mission statements of other higher education institutions, theological schools use these statements to fulfill both the essentialist purpose of identity by noting what is central and enduring and the socioconstructivist purpose by allowing

the statement to serve as an identity narrative that responds to broader constituencies (Seeber et al., 2019). These governing boards recognized the mission's centrality and used the school's mission to inform decision making.

Strategic

Another competency in which boards differed was their involvement in strategic modes of mission-related governance. Strategic governance is marked by visioning and shaping institutional mission and direction (Chait et al., 1993). Certain boards, such as Schools 3 and 5, preferred to follow the expertise and leadership of others regarding strategic direction. For School 3, many of the strategic decisions shared by the interviewees were researched, reviewed, and recommended to the board by either the president or a committee of faculty, staff, and a few board members. The entire board followed the recommendations of these groups in approving the strategic direction but did not independently engage as a whole board in a discussion of the plan. The board demonstrated difficulty engaging in this mode of governance and preferred to rely on the expertise of others.

School 5 reflected a board with confidence in the president's leadership and sought to engage with the strategic direction after the administration has developed it. Although it did not desire to be part of creating strategic direction or specific goals, the board gave focused attention to "understanding what it is . . . and believing that it's doable," as Kappa said, before it approved new goals. As it approved the strategic objectives, the board communicated to the president and administration that it would be supportive and committed to the administration as it worked to fulfill the goals. In addition, individual board members offered practical assistance where possible in their fulfillment.

On the other hand, School 1's board was "one voice among many," as Alpha said, in creating strategic direction for the school. The board regularly engaged with the school community in envisioning, defining, and setting the strategic goals for the school. Members understood the problems that need to be addressed and the ability of the school to address them. The board also used the necessary discernment practices to define and codify the school's strategic direction. Similarly, School 6 had a board willing to identify strategic mission-related opportunities and set parameters around their fulfillment of them. The board demonstrated this competency in the approval of online and alternative degree programs to reach underserved populations and the initiative to use media to engage in conversations on culturally sensitive topics from a Christian worldview.

Whether boards follow the president's lead in determining strategy or cocreate strategy with the president and administration, attention is given to setting goals to fulfill the school's mission. As discussed earlier in this chapter, boards differed in their strategic engagement, and these actions reflected specific ways boards took strategic action to cultivate institutional identity and mission appropriate for their contexts.

Spiritual Practices of Boards

As noted in Chapter 2, board performance is influenced by the context in which the board governs (Kezar, 2006). Theological schools are religious and educational organizations (Aleshire, 2008). Accordingly, it can be expected that governing religious organizations includes not only the practice of good governance, but also spiritual practices found among religious communities. The findings of this study confirmed this expectation and revealed how boards used spiritual practices as they cultivated institutional identity and mission.

Spiritual practices comprise one aspect of board culture, as summarized in Figure 2. Several interviewees described the board's engagement in spiritual practices, such as prayer, fasting, and discernment. School 1 regularly engaged in discernment practices, which included Scripture reading, silence, prayer, and discussion, because the school community, including the board, listened to the leading of the Holy Spirit and stayed "open to where [their direction] might change over time," as Beta shared. This use of discernment in strategic decision making has been encouraged for religious organizations (Barbee, 2018; Benefiel, 2005; Delbecq et al., 2003; Holland, 2000). Using discernment practices enhances the ability of leadership to manage complexity and "allows leaders to become more holistic in their thinking, more inclusive in considering the impacts of their organization's actions, and more creative" (Delbecq et al., 2003, p. 171). Both interviewees described how the practice of following the Holy Spirit's lead was more important to the board and the school community than using the mission, vision, or other guiding principles in discerning the strategic direction for the school. Accordingly, School 1 creatively addressed many of its challenges holistically and involved the entire school community.

School 6's board regularly reviewed how God intervened at difficult points in the school's history to propel the mission forward as a practice intended to rehearse God's faithfulness and commit themselves again to trusting him. In addition, every board meeting included a time of intentional engagement with Scripture and prayer to set the tone for the meetings. An understanding from Scripture that Christians are called to engage the world with the transformative hope of the gospel informed many of the recent board approvals of new initiatives and programs focused on reaching underserved communities and engaging the broader community in the discussion of divisive cultural topics from a Christian worldview. In this way,

the governing board discerned and encouraged creativity and dynamism in the practical outworking of the mission in a way that aligned with the school community's reflections from Scripture (Delbecq et al., 2003).

Interviewees from Schools 2 and 7 described the rekindling of spiritual practices such as prayer and fasting as regular behaviors of board members but also used to help the board discern God's leading in critical decisions. Epsilon specifically noted the board's focused engagement in personal and corporate prayer as it deliberated the major change necessary to advance the school's mission. Similarly, Omega described the board's use of fasting and prayer while recognizing and appointing the school's president. Interviewees for these schools expressed relief in the resurgence of these practices by board members, acknowledging that the ability to govern well requires spiritual leadership. These practices are foundational for Christian communities that engage in discernment within their decision-making (Delbecq et al., 2003; Liebert, 2008; K. D. Miller, 2020).

In sum, the findings indicated engaging in these spiritual practices helps the boards focus on "what does it mean to be faithful to who God is calling [them] to be," as Alpha shared, as they attend both to routine board work and more significant mission-related matters.

How Does the Governing Board of a Theological School Cultivate Institutional Identity and Mission Within the Institution's Governance Structure Amid the Pressures Faced by the School?

This chapter's discussion addressed each subquestion, and each subquestion addressed various aspects of the overarching research question guiding this study. The discussion looked at the common pressures facing this grouping of schools. It discussed how the governance structure in terms of denominational influence and governing board structure affects the school's identity,

mission, and board involvement with the mission. Furthermore, it noted how the leadership role of a policy governing board and the existence of transparency and open communication within the governance structure affects what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission. Finally, it evaluated what actions the board takes according to distinct competencies found in effective governing boards and the relevance of spiritual practices in the actions of boards of theological schools. Thus, the discussion revealed much to answer how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission.

However, to conclude the discussion of what the findings revealed to answer the overarching research question, this section considers a final aspect of board culture in the case studies: a culture marked by adaptation and learning. Cultivating institutional identity and mission involves adaptation and learning because, as Tau stated:

In the last 10 years, 15 years, the rate of change that has taken place in seminary education is so dramatic that if an organization did not have strong leadership, did not have a board that understood what it took to run a business, a board that was flexible . . . and able to make the changes that were necessary to respond to the change in educational dynamics, they just weren't able to do it.

The case studies revealed various ways in which boards adapted and demonstrated learning as they navigated the challenges of the environment while cultivating identity and mission. These are summarized in Table 13. Some items on the list reflected changes to the governance structure or the respective roles of the parties. Other items reflected changes to programs or initiatives intended to further the mission. A few items indicated process improvement, especially around board recruitment and orientation. Still others reflected cultural changes within the board. Finally, some items reflected direct identity or mission-related

adaptation, such as codifying a mission statement, updating a doctrinal statement, or instituting processes to keep the primary focus on the mission.

Table 13

Adaptations and Learnings by Boards

School	Adaptation/learning	Theme
1	Restructured governance to embrace collaboration	Role
	Changed educational structure to serve more students and address financial challenges	Mission
	Merged with other institutions	Structure
	Opened communication to all parties	Role/Structure
	Regularly reviewed and rewrote mission statement	Mission
	Enhanced focus on spiritual practices	Culture
	Allowed partners to bring faculty, board members, and staff	Structure
	Pursued theological openness rather than denominational identity	Identity
2	Initiated and completed major change	Mission
	Created robust orientation for new board members	Process
	Sought feedback from the denominational community and all internal stakeholders	Role
	Made significant financial decisions to enhance the mission and develop a sustainable funding model	Mission
	Increased online offerings	Mission
	Prepared for future presidential transition	Process/Role
	Recognized the seriousness of the role and embrace it	Culture
	Developed a culture marked by humility, open communication, and transparency	Culture
3	Improved board orientation processes	Process
	Coordinated committee work (academic and finance) to address enrollment and financial situation through academic strategy	Role/Structure
	Increased board interaction with and feedback from stakeholders	Role
	Addressed diversity through adapted pedagogy for international students	Mission
4	Embraced global denominational community	Mission
	Addressed diversity of the board to better reflect denominational policy and ethnic diversity	Structure
	Focused on both on-campus and global/online students	Mission
	Approved cultural competency and antiracism work	Mission
	Approved programs to engage high school/college students in ministry as a career/calling	Mission
	Engaged in fundraising to help improve the financial situation	Role

School	Adaptation/learning	Theme
	Considered change to governance structure to allow representation by global partners	Structure
	Actively engaged in visioning for future	Role
	Appointed new president	Role/Mission
5	Renewed mission statement to broaden focus	Mission
	Renewed and strengthened the role of the board and understanding by the board of role	Structure/Role
	Updated committee structure to allow for board member recruitment and avoid involvement in management	Structure
	Supported president in strategic adaptations	Role
	Understood and approved strategic direction	Mission
	Offered practice assistance toward strategic goals	Mission/Role
	Welcomed other stakeholders to board meetings	Role
	Appointed new president	Role/Mission
6	Approved and funded initiative to engage the community in conversation on culturally sensitive topics from a Christian worldview	Mission
	Updated governance documents to address weak processes	Process
	Added requirement to rehearse mission at every board meeting	Mission/Process
	Created a statement on marriage and human sexuality	Identity
	Approved online degree programs	Mission
	Approved programs for underreached populations	Mission
	Strengthened diversity of board and recruitment, nomination, approval, and orientation processes	Structure/Process
	Changed focus to be an initiator of policy, not merely a reactor	Culture
	Codified community-wide mission statement	Mission
	Renewed spiritual practices	Culture
7	Changed board focus from backward-looking to forward-looking	Culture
	Invited executive cabinet into board meetings to gather more stakeholder feedback	Role
	Renewed practices of prayer and fasting	
	Appointed new president	Culture
	Evaluated and restated governance documents to tie all board responsibilities/processes to founding documents	Role/Mission Process

As seen by the variety of actions included in Table 13, the case studies demonstrated that adaptation and learning can occur with respect to any of the themes discussed previously and provide evidence that cultivating identity and mission involves adaptation and learning with a “spirit of adventure” by boards, as Kappa said.

Some work has been done using contingency theory to theorize how nonprofit governing boards can adapt their structures and processes to provide effective governance and leadership in complex environments (Bradshaw, 2009). This theoretical work argued that policy governance structures and processes are most effective in stable and certain environments. In contrast, complex environments and multiple stakeholder groups require structures, processes, and practices that allow flexibility and adaptation. Due to the uniqueness of each organization's environment, a contingency theory of board governance argues that no one model fits every organization. Accordingly, nonprofit governing boards were challenged to adapt their structures, processes, and practices to respond to the complexity of their organization's environment to govern well. Little empirical work has been done to test this contingency model among nonprofit boards; however, a recent study applied this contingency model for nonprofit board governance to evaluate the role of governing boards during the COVID-19 global pandemic, arguing that times of crisis require more flexibility and the exercise of leadership by governing boards (McMullin & Raggo, 2020).

Similarly, additional theoretical work has been done in the nonprofit sector to consider how boards of directors encourage innovation, arguing that governing boards can and should play a role in fostering innovation within an organization as it responds to the challenges of its environment (Jaskyte, 2012). In corporate governance literature, a recent meta-analysis of 96 studies evaluating the relationship between board characteristics and organizational innovation concluded that board structural diversity and board demographic diversity were positively correlated with organizational innovation; however, the effects of these variables varied depending on how innovation was measured (Sierra-Moran et al., 2024).

No empirical literature investigating how governing boards within higher education organizations adapt their structures, processes, and practices to provide effective governance within their complex and changing environment was found in the research. No empirical literature was discovered examining the relationship between higher education governing boards and innovation. However, the findings of this current study indicated the ability of governing boards to adapt their structure, processes, and practices and to encourage mission-appropriate flexibility and adaptation within the institution is a meaningful way to help cultivate institutional mission and identity. Overall, this study uncovered that cultivating institutional identity and mission requires a board to pay attention to its structure regardless of denominational status; pursue appropriate strategic and generative leadership in its role among other governance parties; and cultivate a culture marked by relationships, transparency, open communication, and the use of spiritual practices. Furthermore, it requires a commitment to the identity and mission of the school, an awareness of internal and external changes and challenges in the broader environment, and a willingness to be flexible and adaptive in its response to such challenges. The following sections include discussions of the implications of these findings for future research and specific practice before offering a summary conclusion to the study.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study had a limited scope in two ways. First, it focused on a limited sample of seven Evangelical Protestant theological schools in North America that differed in size, location, and denominational status. Second, the data sources used were limited, namely two interviews and governing documents. Accordingly, several avenues exist for further research to uncover how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission.

First, a broader sample of schools, particularly schools from other ecclesial families such as Mainline Protestant or Roman Catholic, would be a fruitful avenue for further research. Although all theological schools have faced similar challenges, it is likely that the particularities of Christian tradition affect the understanding of mission, identity, and board governance. In addition, Chapter 1 noted the rapid decline in enrollment seen among the Mainline Protestant schools, which mirrors the decline in these denominations in North America. Considering how boards of schools within these other traditions cultivate institutional identity and mission would enrich the findings, particularly regarding how schools navigate a declining and disintegrating denomination.

Second, except for School 5, all the schools in this sample were independent institutions not embedded into a more extensive university system. Thus, their governing boards could operate with a broad level of autonomy. Replicating this research with governing boards of embedded theological schools would provide an interesting look at how boards cultivate institutional identity and mission when they do not control the institution's governance.

Third, another avenue for further research would be to conduct survey research among a broad spectrum and number of schools to build upon the findings of this study and increase their generalizability. For example, a survey with questions related to all six themes uncovered in this research could be sent to all theological schools accredited by the Commission for Accrediting of ATS to be completed by members of their respective governing boards. This approach would increase the sample size and uncover the applicability of these six themes to a broad sample of governing boards of theological schools.

Fourth, the role of board culture was not a focus in this study's literature review or theoretical framework. However, the findings indicated that certain aspects of board culture

affect how the governing board cultivates institutional identity and mission. Further research could specifically focus on board culture, its development, what culture markers make a difference, and how cultures differ among schools.

Fifth, this study confirmed that theological schools have faced common challenges affecting their institutional identity and mission. Looking at one school's response to one challenge could offer a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in shared governance and how the parties navigated these dynamics to respond to a particular challenge and further the school's mission. For example, a focused case study on the major change experienced by School 2 or the shift from being a denominational school to an inter-denominational school by School 6 would provide an opportunity to evaluate more deeply how governing boards worked with other stakeholders to approve and implement major change considering the institution's mission.

Sixth, the findings indicate that all schools used mission in their decision making. This study did not focus on decision-making models; therefore, a potentially fruitful avenue for future research would be to study missional decision making practiced by governing boards. This avenue of research could evaluate standard decision-making models with the decision-making practices and processes used by governing boards as they apply a missional focus.

Finally, given the profound changes in the theological education sector over the last 2 decades, further research could focus on ways governing boards embrace adaptability and innovation. The findings from this study indicate that adaptability is essential in cultivating institutional identity and mission. However, board governance and shared governance are not generally known for promoting adaptability. Thus, research focused on adaptability and innovation within governing boards operating in shared governance environments could provide helpful recommendations for boards in this sector.

Implications for Practice

This study sought to uncover how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. The findings discussed in this chapter lead to several implications for practice for governing boards of theological schools.

Be Aware of and Engaged With the Challenges

Governing boards need to be aware not only of the immediate challenges facing their school but also the challenges facing the sectors of seminary education, the church, and higher education. As demonstrated in the findings, theological schools face common challenges across the sector, and governing board members can assist their institution by understanding them and being prepared to engage with the school's administration in crafting mission-appropriate responses to the challenges. Effective boards can recognize the problems, gather internal and external data and information, and consider responses to address the issues (Chait et al., 1993). The case studies revealed that those governing boards who were actively engaged with understanding the challenges faced by the individual school and the sector were better equipped to provide governance that supported the school's mission.

Consider the Influence of the Denomination/Religious Community

Theological schools exist to support their religious community; their existence is closely tied to the denomination or religious community they serve (Aleshire, 2008). This study's findings provided evidence of the denomination's positive and negative influence on its related schools. Denominations can positively influence the school, supporting its identity and mission through common statements of faith, board members affiliated with the denomination, financial support, placement for graduates in churches and ministries, and input into the leadership and

programming of the school. However, denominations can also negatively influence the school, particularly when it is in turmoil or decline. Several of the schools in this study currently struggled with the negative influence of the denomination and must respond in various ways to strengthen their identity and mission. It behooves governing board members, even if appointed by the denomination, to consider how the denomination or religious community is affecting the mission and functioning of the school and how the school needs to respond. The schools in the current study were responding differently to negative denominational influence, but each reflected an awareness of the influence and a willingness to respond.

Consider Board Structure

Although board structure may hold less of an influence on the identity and mission of an institution than other aspects of board performance (Cornforth, 2001; Kezar, 2006), the findings of the research provided evidence that attention to board structure can help boards cultivate identity and mission. The use of committees can assist the board in navigating the institution's complexity and enable it to provide helpful oversight through focused attention, as seen with Schools 2 and 7. Alternatively, it can lead to confusion about how the committees should collaborate to develop a unified strategy to address problems, as seen with School 3. In some cases, a redesign of the committee structure is warranted to help the board avoid overreach, as seen with School 5. In other cases, boards may avoid committees to create full awareness and avoid compartmentalization by board members, as seen with School 1.

The presence or lack of term limits for board members also affects how governing boards cultivate institutional identity and mission. Regular turnover of board members allows for the regular recruitment of diverse and qualified members, as reflected in several schools. However, it also creates a need for orientation to help new members understand the school's mission and the

board's role, particularly if the board is not self-perpetuating. Furthermore, a lack of term limits for board members can result in the coalescing of power by long-time members, making changing the board composition more difficult.

In addition, the results of this study indicated that boards can be engaged with the school's mission regardless of whether its structure is tightly defined and controlled or looser. Schools with a tightly defined board structure could engage just as fully with the mission as School 1 with its loose governance structure. Nonetheless, the results indicated that the boards in this study paid attention to their structure and were willing to make structural changes to improve board performance. Boards should consider how their structure affects their ability to function and provide mission-focused governance. They should be willing to adjust structures to improve performance.

Engage in Strategic and Generative Leadership Appropriate to Policy Governance

All boards in this study adopted a policy governance model in which the board set policy and practiced accountability. Policy governance is an appropriate focus for governing boards (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 1993, 2005). However, the findings of this research demonstrated that boards can exercise differing types of leadership within a policy governance model. As discussed previously, several of the schools in this study had governing boards that regularly engaged in strategic and generative leadership. Because of this, these boards were able to provide helpful and appropriate leadership alongside the administration to navigate the significant challenges the schools face and strengthen the schools' identity, mission, and financial situation. Thus, boards can better cultivate identity and mission by learning to provide not only fiduciary oversight but also "a different kind of leadership in a way, where it's so much more now about looking out and

where are [they] going and where do [they] need to go,” as Kappa said. Offering strategic and generative leadership can make a difference in the overall governance of the school.

Cultivate Open Communication and Transparency Among Stakeholders

Shared governance involves complexity, ambiguity, and overlapping authority (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Accordingly, higher education institutions are difficult to govern. The findings of this research revealed the importance of open communication and transparency among the governing parties, particularly the governing board and the president and administration. Avoiding a disengaged board or a power silo requires a willingness to practice humility, to invite open communication, and to value transparency. The schools in this study that reflected a culture marked by these attributes and practices created an environment of collaboration toward mission fulfillment.

Develop and Follow Robust New Board Member Processes

By design, board governance involves lay people volunteering their time to help a higher education institution fulfill its mission in a financially and ethically sound manner (Gooding, 2012; Hendrickson et al., 2013; G. T. Miller, 1990). The case studies revealed the importance of robust processes for recruiting, nominating, appointing, and orienting board members. Cultivating identity and mission begins with a deep understanding of the mission and the board’s role in governance. Schools that followed robust new member board processes had missionally aware boards able to govern effectively. Thus, boards should develop and follow good processes for recruitment, nomination, appointment, and orientation of new members.

Commit to the Identity and Mission While Recognizing a Need for Flexibility

The history of Christian colleges and universities, including theological schools, contains accounts of schools drifting from their founding identity, mission, and the fundamental tenets of

Christianity (Arthur, 2008; Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 2021). However, history has also shown that this pattern is not inevitable and can be avoided (Benne, 2001; Laats, 2018; Schuman, 2010). The schools in this study demonstrated a commitment to their identity, mission, and the Christian faith. They adopted varying approaches to maintain mission focus while embracing flexibility in advancing their mission. For these schools, “mission matters most,” as Gamma said, but they exhibited an understanding that fulfilling that mission requires, among others, new methods, new approaches, new networks, and new financial models. Cultivating an ability to adapt and learn while remaining committed to mission and identity is a crucial skill for governing boards to adopt as they govern.

Embrace Spiritual Practices

Finally, these findings confirmed that governing theological schools involves more than good governance practices. As institutions that find a part of their identity in the church (Aleshire, 2008), spiritual practices of discernment, prayer, fasting, and Scripture engagement are important to governing. Several of the interviewees in this study described how their boards engaged in spiritual practices as part of routine board work and even more deeply as the weight of governance was realized. Omega said, “So that stuff you go through [as an institution] that to be able to say to the board, we would like for you to take a season of fasting and prayer for this and know that they’re doing that . . . we feel at peace with that.” Embracing these practices alongside good governance practices helps confirm the spiritual identity of these institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, governing boards are vital in cultivating institutional identity and mission for theological schools. As the body holding the ultimate responsibility for the institution, the governing board is tasked with ensuring that the school fulfills its mission in a financially and

ethically sound manner. Yet, it does not engage in this task alone but shares governance with administration and faculty. Thus, its ability to work with others to faithfully lead the institution in a mission-focused manner is a fundamental skill increasingly needed by governing boards in this challenging time for higher education institutions, the church, and theological schools.

As organizations with one part of their identity as the church and another as educational institutions, theological schools face the cultural, educational, financial, and theological challenges both the church and higher education institutions face. These pressures challenge their identity and mission, requiring mission-appropriate adaptation and flexibility in response. The historic tendency for Christian higher education institutions to drift from their founding identity, mission, and even the fundamental tenets of Christianity, increases the importance of effective board governance because theological schools are closely tethered to their religious communities as the intellectual center of the church. As such, they are accountable to God for their work in furthering his purposes for his church and the gospel impact his church has on this world.

This study used a multiple instrumental case study approach to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivated institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure amid the pressures faced by the school. Chapter 2 used relevant literature to develop a theoretical framework that first looked at the organizational concepts of identity and mission and then discussed how these concepts had been applied in research of higher education institutions. After noting a gap in the literature, this research sought to extend the analysis of mission and identity to a specific type of higher education institution, namely, theological schools. After a brief excursus of the history and challenges of theological schools, Chapter 2 noted a second gap in the literature: research focused on the role of governing boards within shared governance models common to higher education institutions. Thus, the

theoretical framework was completed by reviewing the literature on shared governance, board governance, board effectiveness, and the uniqueness of governance for religious higher education institutions.

As described in Chapter 3, the study adopted a qualitative approach in its research design and used an instrumental multiple case study of seven theological schools. The unit of analysis was the governing board's engagement with the institution's identity and mission during the decade of 2012–2022. Two data collection methods were used, namely document analysis and in-depth interviews. Specific organizational documents for each school were collected and analyzed, along with publicly available data from the ATS annual data tables and the institutions' websites. In addition, interviews with the president and the current or former board chair were conducted, and transcripts were analyzed. Data analysis focused on understanding each case and then identifying common themes using a cross-case comparison.

Chapter 4 presented the findings in the form of seven case study narratives to provide a contextual discussion of each school and its challenges. In addition, each narrative explored the actions, structure, role, and culture of the governing board as it cultivated the school's identity and mission within its shared governance structure. Six theoretical principles, or themes, arose from the narratives to allow for analysis across the seven cases. These themes included actions by governing boards, governing board structure, denominational influence, governing board role, governing board culture, and common pressures and challenges faced by the schools. The cross-case findings were presented using visual tools, including tables and figures.

Chapter 5 provided a discussion and interpretation of the findings of this study to answer the guiding research questions. This study uncovered that cultivating institutional identity and mission requires a board to pay attention to its structure regardless of denominational status;

consider the influence of the denomination or religious community on the governance and mission fulfillment by the school; pursue appropriate strategic and generative leadership in its role among other governance parties; and cultivate a culture marked by transparency, open communication, and the use of spiritual practices. Furthermore, it requires a commitment to the identity and mission of the school, an awareness of internal and external changes and challenges in the broader environment, and a willingness to be flexible and adaptive in its response to such challenges.

The implications of this study for governing boards are broad, ranging from those related to board structure and processes to those intended to develop good working relationships with other governance parties and a culture marked by open communication, transparency, and spiritual practices. Ultimately, however, experience in the studied schools, as reflected in these case studies, provided examples of governing boards committed to the school's mission but willing to adapt as necessary to cultivate that mission in response to the school's challenges. Cultivating institutional identity and mission requires both a deep commitment to the identity and mission of the school as an agent of God used to further the work of his church in this world and a flexibility to adapt structure, process, culture, programs, networks, methods, wording, and financial models to further that mission. In this way, governing boards can lead their institutions in missionally appropriate ways to fulfill the school's calling to support the church in bringing the transformative hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a needy world.

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Appendix A – Participation Request

[Date]

[President]

[Board chair]

School Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear President and Board chair,

My name is Megan Herring, and I am a PhD Candidate at Johnson University in the PhD in Leadership Studies program conducting research for my dissertation on how governing boards of theological schools cultivate institutional identity and mission within their institution's governance model. Your school and its governing board were recommended for this study by Dr. Tom Tanner who is familiar with your school. Dr. Tanner believes that your school and governing board would provide valuable insight into the challenges faced by Christian higher education institutions and their governing boards in cultivating institutional identity and mission in this current cultural, educational, and financial climate. Your decision to participate in this study will help me with this specific research project but, more importantly, help other Christian schools and their governing boards who are wrestling with similar pressures.

This study explores what governing boards do as they consider questions affecting identity and mission and how they function as guardians of this identity and mission within the shared governance framework common to higher education institutions. I am looking for three to eight theological schools which are part of the Evangelical Protestant ecclesial family, are accredited by ATS, have stable and healthy governance, and are of varying size, location, and denominational background. As described more fully in the research summary, participation will

involve the permission and access for review of a handful of organizational documents, including past and current Bylaws, past and current Board Handbook, Board demographic data, and accreditation reports related to mission and governance, as well as virtual interviews with the President, the current Board chair, and potentially any additional individual you feel may be helpful in understanding your institution's history of mission and governance.

Please note that for an institution to participate in this study, both the President and the Board chair must agree to participate in the interviews and the institution must be willing to share at least some of the written documents.

I am addressing this letter to both you, President _____, and your Board chair. Because I do not have contact information for the institution's Board chair, I am asking that you forward this email and its attachments to the Board chair, requesting that he or she contact me directly about his or her willingness to participate in this study. I will then communicate separately with you, President _____, and the Board chair, in order to keep your respective participation in this study confidential.

In appreciation for your participation in this research, I will provide a summary of my final research report to your President and Board chair and will also be willing to present a summary of my overall research findings to your governing board.

I am enclosing a brief summary of my study including the proposed data collection methods, approval from the Johnson University Institutional Research Board, an Organizational Cooperation Agreement, and an Informed Consent. If you agree the school may participate in this research, please sign the Organizational Cooperation Agreement and return it to me via email.

In addition, I will require a signed Informed Consent from each participant, such as the President and the Board chair. In addition, as part of the interview, I will ask whether there are any additional individuals familiar with this topic who the interviewee would recommend I speak with on this topic. In this case, more information will be provided during the interview about the process involved in contacting this additional individual and obtaining their consent to participate in the research study.

Thank you for considering this request for participation in this research project. I will follow-up by telephone call in 10 days to answer any further questions. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me at xxxxxxxx@johnsonu.edu. You may also contact my committee chair, Alicia Crumpton at xxxxxxxx@johnsonu.edu, or the Institutional Review Board at Johnson University via irb@johnsonu.edu.

With gratitude,

Megan Herring

Megan Herring
PhD in Leadership Studies – Candidate
Johnson University

Appendix B – Research Summary

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to conduct a multiple embedded instrumental case study to explore how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure amidst the pressures faced by the school.

Primary Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure amidst the pressures faced by the school?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution’s governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board’s role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

Population and Sample: The population is Evangelical Protestant theological schools accredited by The Commission for Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools. A purposeful sample of three to eight schools varying in size, location, and denominational affiliation will be selected.

Data Collection Methods:

Document Collection and Analysis

The researcher will request to review the following organizational documents: current Bylaws and any previous versions in force during 2012–2022, current board handbook and any previous versions in force during 2012–2022, board demographic data during 2012–2022, accreditation reports, such as a self-study, responding to criteria related to mission and

governance, and any other relevant documents the institution recommends reviewing to understand its mission and governance structure and processes. The purpose of reviewing these documents is to gather official written data about the structure, role, practices, and processes of the governing board to specifically address Subquestions 1, 2, and 3.

In-Depth Interviews

The researcher will conduct at least two interviews. The interviews are the crux of the data collection, and participation in the interviews is required for the institution to participate. One interview will be with the current Board chair. A second interview will be with the President. The researcher will also conduct interviews with any additional individuals recommended by the President or Board chair as helpful in understanding the institution's history of mission and governance. The purpose of these interviews is to gather data specifically addressing all research questions. As described in the following section, responses will be kept confidential.

The format of these interviews will be semistructured open-ended interviews scheduled for 60-90 minutes. The interview will be conducted using Zoom electronic conference technology. Each participant will be sent a unique meeting ID and password for their interview. The researcher will utilize the virtual waiting room feature to control access to the meeting and will conduct the interview from a private location. Included in the appointment invitation will be instructions to choose a private location where they can speak freely, without fear of being seen or overheard. The Zoom transcript will be given to each interviewee for their review for accuracy before it is used for analysis and conclusions.

Confidentiality and Data Security

Your school will be assigned a code name, and each interviewee will be assigned an alias. The code names and aliases will be used throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting process as well as used in the final research report. All interview responses and organizational identifying information will be kept confidential. Any recorded audio and visual of interviews will be destroyed upon the approval by the interviewee of the written transcript. Data will be stored securely and accessible only to the specific individuals associated with this study. More information about data security is available upon request.

Appendix C – Organizational Cooperation Agreement

Date

VIA Email – xxxxxx@johnsonu.edu

Megan E Herring

xxxxxxx

xxxxxxx, xx xxxxx

RE: Approval of Participation in Research Project

Dear Megan,

Based upon our review of the research summary and approval from the Johnson University Institutional Research Board you provided on August 7, 2023, this letter serves to verify approval to conduct research at Wesley Biblical Seminary for your dissertation entitled *Cultivating Institutional Identity and Mission Within a Shared Governance Structure in Theological Schools: An Exploration of the Governing Board's Role and Processes*.

Sincerely,

_____, President
School Name

Appendix D – Informed Consent

Project Title: Cultivating Institutional Identity and Mission Within a Shared Governance

Structure in Theological Schools: An Exploration of the Governing Board’s Role and Processes.

Researcher: Megan Herring, a doctoral candidate at Johnson University

Introduction: I understand that I have been asked to participate in a study about the role and actions taken by governing boards in cultivating institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure amidst the pressures faced by the school. I have been asked to participate because of my position as ___ President or ___ Board chair or _____ of the institution.

Involvement: My participation in this research project involves a 60-90-minute in-depth virtual interview via Zoom, review of the interview transcript for accuracy, and oral or written responses to follow-up questions as needed. The interview will be recorded to accurately record my responses.

Risks and Benefits: I understand that participating in an in-depth interview on organizational processes may have potential risks due to the sharing of confidential organizational information. The research is intended to benefit governing boards of other Christian faith-based institutions as they wrestle with issues of institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I understand that my responses will be kept confidential, and an alias will be used in all written and oral reports concerning this project. No reference to me separate from the alias will be made in any written or oral communication concerning this research study. The school I represent will also be kept confidential in all written reports and oral communication concerning this research study. In addition to using code names and aliases,

institutions will be referred to according to general descriptive terms to provide general context. All recorded interview video and audio files will be deleted from the technology's platform once a transcript is made by the researcher, reviewed, and approved by me, and downloaded to the researcher's private, secure data file. The transcript will be de-identified to protect individual participants and the institution. Please note, however, that while every effort will be made to keep responses confidential, it is possible that a participant may be able to deduce the responses of other participants from their own institution. Because of this risk, the researcher is willing to redact any portion of the transcript requested by the participant during the participant review process.

Data Security and Storage: I understand that online activities always carry a risk of a data breach, but that the researcher will use systems and processes that minimize breach opportunities. All electronic data, such as interview transcripts, will be stored on the secure Johnson University provided Microsoft OneDrive account. The service offers 256-bit encryption, securing data both at rest and in transit. The service is password protected, with additional two-factor authentication (Microsoft Trust Center, n.d.). Only the researcher will have access to the data. All email communications with participants will be conducted using Johnson University's email service, provided by Microsoft. The service offers 256-bit encryption, securing data both at rest and in transit. The service is password protected, with additional two-factor authentication (Microsoft Trust Center, n.d.).

I understand that per Johnson University IRB policy, digital video and audio files will be retained only until transcription has been completed. Then these files will be deleted from the cloud storage and third-party services identified previously. Other digital files will be retained for the required five years and then deleted. Paper documents such as researcher reflection notes

will be retained for five years per Johnson University policy within a locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked home office. After five years, the documents will be shredded using a secure shredding service such as that currently offered through UPS stores nationwide.

I understand that the key for deidentified data will be separately stored on a password-protected USB drive kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office.

I understand that in the unlikely event of a breach of sensitive information, the researcher will notify me that the breach occurred and provide a description of the data that has been compromised.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I know that I may refuse to answer any question and that I may withdraw from participating in this study at any time by contacting the researcher by email. I understand that once I notify the researcher of my withdrawal, the researcher will promptly delete all my data from the study.

Contact Information: I am aware that I may request additional information about this research project from the researcher at xxxxxxxxx@johnsonu.edu, the researcher's committee chair at xxxxx@johnsonu.edu, or the Johnson University Institutional Research Board at irb@johnsonu.edu.

Consent: I am aware that I must be 18 years old to participate. My agreement below signifies my voluntary participation.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E – Document Review Guide

Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure?

Subquestions:

1. What does the governing board do to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
2. How does the institution’s governance structure affect institutional identity and mission?
3. How does the governing board’s role within the governance structure of the institution affect what it does to cultivate institutional identity and mission?
4. What pressures does the institution face that challenge institutional identity and mission?

Document Reviewed:

Type of Document:

Date:

Key Themes To Identify During Review: institutional identity, institutional mission, governance structure, board structure, board member qualifications/requirements, board responsibilities, governance policies, board process, board practice

Questions To Ask During Review:

1. What is the purpose of this document?
2. What does this document say about the institution’s identity?
3. What does this document say about the institution’s mission?
4. What does this document say about the institution’s overall governance structure?
5. What does this document say about the role and responsibilities of the governing board?
6. What does this document say about the structure of the governing board?
7. What does this document say about the board members (e.g., qualifications, selection, term of appointment, etc.)?

8. What does this document say about what the board should do?
9. What does this document say about board processes and practices?

Appendix F – Interview Guide

Research Question: How does the governing board of a theological school cultivate institutional identity and mission within the institution’s governance structure?

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project: As a PhD candidate at Johnson University, I am conducting research for my dissertation which focuses on institutional identity and mission, board governance, and theological schools. I am conducting an instrumental case study of multiple theological schools to discover how the governing board cultivates the institution’s identity and mission as it responds to its current challenges and how it functions within the overall governance structure of the school. Your input as the [Board chair] or [President] will provide useful data in addressing this research question. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study through this interview and subsequent review of its transcript. As a reminder, your responses will be kept confidential, and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Informed Consent Received:

Questions (to be finalized after document review):

1. How long have you served in this role?
2. How long have you been connected to the school and in what capacities?

Institutional identity and mission questions (All Q)

Opening comment: In the questions that follow, when I refer to the identity of the institution, I mean who the institution is – its central, enduring, distinctive, and sense-making

aspects that set it apart from other institutions. When I use the phrase “institutional mission,” I am referring to what is the institution’s distinctive purpose - what it is to do in this world.

1. Based upon my review of the website and other documents, I understand the institution’s identity and mission to be _____. How would you amplify this understanding, or in other words, what is distinctive about the institution in terms of its identity and mission? *[Important for me to know about the institution’s identity and mission?] (e.g., what is your 6-minute elevator speech)*
 - a. Please describe how the board reviews the institution’s mission and progress toward fulfillment of the mission.
2. Please describe any historical changes to the identity or mission of the institution. *[These can be either planned change or changes in response to circumstances. 2012–2022, if a time period is needed.]*
 - a. What were the circumstances prompting the need to review the institution’s identity or mission?
 - b. What was the process used to evaluate the situation and suggest changes?
 - c. How were those changes received by the various constituencies of the institution?
3. How do you manage what could be a tension between expanding the mission of the institution and guarding the mission?
 - a. Describe those factors used by leadership to discern staying true to the identity and mission.
 - b. Describe how the leadership uses identity and mission to inform its actions and decisions.
 - c. Describe how the board engages in strategic and creative thinking on topics such as this one.

Effect of environmental challenges on identity and mission (SQ1 and SQ4)

1. Thinking about the last ten years (2012–2022), please describe challenges faced by the institution, both pandemic-related and non-pandemic related? *[May need to prompt individual to think beyond financial challenges.]*
 - a. In what ways have these challenges pressured the institution to change aspects of its identity and mission?
 - b. How did the institution assess and address each challenge?

Governance Structure (SQ2)

Opening Comment: In this next section of questions, I would like to learn about both the structure of governance within your institution – how power/authority is shared, the organizational aspects and functioning of the board such as committees, terms, meetings – as

well as the philosophy of governance and how the board functions – policy-level, management-level, etc. Please consider and address both as you answer the questions.

1. Based upon my review of the website and [specific documents], my understanding of the institution's governance structure/philosophy is _____. How would you enhance my understanding of your governing board's structure/philosophy?
2. Thinking about a recent topic requiring board action, please describe in detail how the governing board considered the topic and took action.
3. Please describe an example of how governance is shared between the governing board and other stakeholders such as administration, faculty, denomination/religious community, students, and so forth.
 - a. How do the other stakeholders provide feedback or ideas to the governing board?
 - b. What is the process for evaluating such feedback?
4. Thinking about the board's three newest members, please describe how they moved from being unconnected to the board to being fully functioning board members.

Governing Board Effectiveness (SQ3)

1. Thinking about a change that could have affected the institution's identity or mission made in the past, what lessons were learned about the institution's governance through the entire change process?
 - a. How have these lessons been applied in subsequent circumstances?

Closing Questions

1. In thinking about board governance and institution identity and mission, is there anything outside of what we've talked about that you have experienced as a [board member/President] related to this interrelationship?
2. Is there anyone else you recommend I talk with who can provide helpful insight on the interrelationship between your institution's identity and mission and its governance, particularly at the board level? *[If one is offered, say: Thank you. I think it would be best for you to contact this individual about participating in this research study and ask the individual to contact me directly via my Johnson University email address. You may cc: me if you desire. I will then send the potential participant information about the study and the informed consent document.]*
3. Are there any other documents you recommend that I review to understand your institution's identity, mission, and governance more fully?

Appendix G – Participant Debrief Letter

From: Megan E Herring
Sent: DATE
To: [Participant Email address]
Subject: Thank you for your participation

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for taking time to participate in my research project by sharing your insights and experiences of the role and processes of the governing board in cultivating institutional identity and mission. This purpose of this study is to conduct a multiple embedded instrumental case study exploring how the governing board of a theological school cultivates institutional identity and mission within the institution's governance structure. Your honest responses were valuable for helping me understand your institution's identity and mission and the role and processes of the governing board within your institution's overall governance structure.

As shared with you previously, you were given the opportunity to review a de-identified version of your interview transcript and request that any portion of it be redacted and not used in the data analysis. In addition, if you recommended another individual to participate in this study, you were asked to contact that individual directly and request that he or she contact the researcher directly about their participation. No additional requests were made of you by the researcher as part of this study.

As a reminder, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. Know that your participation will remain confidential throughout the process. All identifying information will be removed from any presentations and reports that result from this study.

If at any time you have any concerns or questions, or if you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research

participant, you may contact me as the researcher, my supervising committee chair (Dr. Alicia Crumpton, xxxxx@johnsonu.edu), or the Johnson University Institutional Review Board (IRB@johnsonu.edu).

If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study were distressing, talking with a qualified mental health professional may help. You can reach one via the National Mental Health Hotline (866-903-3787 or <https://mentalhealthhotline.org>).

With gratitude,

Megan Herring
xxxxx@johnsonu.edu
PhD Candidate
Johnson University

Appendix H – Johnson University IRB Approval Letter



7900 Johnson Dr., Knoxville, TN 37996 • JohnsonU.edu
Dr. L. Thomas Smith Jr., President

August 5, 2023

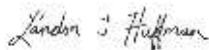
Dear Megan Herring:

I hope you are doing well. This letter documents that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Johnson University approves the research project titled *Cultivating Institutional Identity and Mission Within a Shared Governance Structure in Theological Schools: An Exploration of the Governing Board's Role and Processes* as described in the application and supplemental materials submitted by yourself on August 2, 2023. Please be reminded that should you wish to make changes in your procedures, you are required to seek approval from the IRB for any proposed changes in procedures *prior* to implementation.

Your dissertation committee chair, Dr. Alicia Crumpton, as well as IRB liaison, Dr. Keith Krispin, have been informed of the approval.

Please feel free to contact me should there be any questions or concerns regarding this notification or your research project. We wish you all the best in your research endeavors!




Sincerely,



Landon T. Huffman, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Professor, Sport and Fitness Leadership
Johnson University
(865) 251-3494
IRB@JohnsonU.edu

CC: Dr. Alicia Crumpton
Dr. Keith Krispin

Appendix I – CITI Certification

		Completion Date 18-May-2021 Expiration Date 17-May-2025 Record ID 42544537
This is to certify that:		
Megan Herring		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
Students (Curriculum Group)		
Students (Course Learner Group)		
1 - Basic Course (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
Johnson University		
		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5fab804d-2b41-4f89-bc1b-f5a93da2806d-42544537		