INTEGRATING CONTEMPLATIVE AND
STUDENT-CENTERED EDUCATION:
A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO DEEP LEARNING

A Dissertation Presented

by

DANIEL DAVID SEITZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

June 2009

Higher Education Administration Program
INTEGRATING CONTEMPLATIVE AND

STUDENT-CENTERED EDUCATION:

A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO DEEP LEARNING

A Dissertation Presented

by

DANIEL DAVID SEITZ

Approved as to style and content by:

___________________________
John A. Saltmarsh, Professor
Chairperson of Committee

___________________________
Dwight E. Giles, Jr., Professor
Member

___________________________
R. Eugene Rice, PhD, AAC&U
Member

___________________________
Judith I. Gill, Program Director
Higher Education Administration Program
ABSTRACT

INTEGRATING CONTEMPLATIVE AND STUDENT-CENTERED EDUCATION:
A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO DEEP LEARNING

June 2009

Daniel D. Seitz, B.A., University of Chicago
M.A.T., University of Chicago
J.D., Boston University
Ed.D., University of Massachusetts – Boston

Directed by John Saltmarsh, Ph.D.

Two important movements/paradigms have developed in higher education over the last ten to twenty years. The first reflects a growing interest within colleges and universities in student-centered educational practices that involve the utilization of a variety of active pedagogical approaches with the goal of deepening student learning. The second reflects a growing interest among many students, faculty and staff in more experiential and personal approaches to spirituality that are outside the realm of organized religion, and involves integrating—to a lesser or greater extent—a variety of spiritual/contemplative perspectives and practices into academic and extra-curricular programs.

This dissertation—a cross-case study of two of the leading institutions whose educational missions incorporate a contemplative/spiritually oriented educational
approach—describes the emerging paradigm of contemplative/spiritually oriented higher education. It also explores the ways in which the teaching-learning methods at these two institutions enhance and complement a student-centered educational approach. The research findings indicate broadly that contemplative/spiritual teaching-learning approaches do indeed complement student-centered approaches and that these two approaches are likely to prove synergistic—i.e., when used together, these approaches foster student learning on a deeper level than might occur when either approach is used alone. The findings also indicate that spiritual/contemplative approaches to education support and enhance the development of a number of important traditional academic skills such as critical and objective thinking, textual analysis, and problem-solving, as well as important affective qualities such as emotional intelligence, commitment to social engagement, a sense of purpose, the ability to listen deeply, compassion, meta-cognition, the ability to cooperate, and welcoming diversity. Furthermore, spiritual/contemplative approaches foster creativity and innovative thinking. Finally, conventional academic governance structures and qualitative approaches to outcomes assessment in higher education can effectively accommodate this emerging, unconventional approach to teaching and learning.

Given the wide diversity of higher education institutions, it is neither practical nor necessarily advisable to incorporate a spiritual/contemplative dimension into every program and institution. The research findings in this dissertation indicate, however, that higher education practitioners who are seeking ways to promote deep student learning should consider exploring the option of integrating spiritual/contemplative and student-centered educational approaches.
DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—my wife Trice Atchison and our children Evan and Cole—for their support, patience and understanding during the many months of research and writing.

I am deeply grateful for the guidance and encouragement I received from the members of my dissertation committee: Professors John Saltmarsh and Dwight Giles of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and Dr. R. Eugene Rice. In particular, I wish to thank my committee chair, Professor Saltmarsh, for his thoughtful feedback throughout the time I worked on the dissertation—from developing the initial proposal to making final edits to the completed draft—and for his suggestion early on that I look into the connection between student-centered education and spiritual/contemplative approaches to education. Not only did this prove to be a very rich topic of study, but also one that has opened new intellectual horizons and interests for me.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have studied higher education administration at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Returning to school mid-career proved to be a rewarding experience, for which I thank the committed and knowledgeable faculty in the program, the helpful administrative staff, and the wonderful mix of students in the EdD program and at UMass overall. It was also a pleasure to be among my cohort in the program, a diverse and humorous group who gave me insights into many aspects of higher education beyond my own experience.

I wish to thank the people at Naropa University and the California Institute of Integral Studies who made my research possible: the presidents, academic vice presidents and the faculty members I interviewed, as well as the administrative staff members who
helped out with numerous logistical arrangements. I felt warmly welcomed at each institution, and came away feeling inspired by the thoughtful people I met and their innovative approaches to higher education.

Finally, I wish to remember my parents, Irene and Sam Seitz, who were interested in many things spiritual and psychological and fostered similar interests in me, and to thank my stepmother, Laura Seitz, for having supported and encouraged me in my educational endeavors over the course of many years.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................. vi
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES ............................................................ x

## CHAPTER

| 1. INTRODUCTION .......................................................... 1 |
| --- | --- |
| Two New Paradigms in Higher Education | 1 |
| Background Information on the New Paradigms | 6 |
| The Educational Problem | 19 |
| Research Questions | 21 |
| Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks | 22 |

| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................. 28 |
| --- | --- |
| Introduction | 28 |
| Spirituality: An Emerging Phenomenon in Society and Higher Education | 29 |
| Defining Spirituality | 39 |
| Spirituality and Epistemology | 54 |
| Spiritual/Contemplative Pedagogy in Practice | 82 |
| Learner-Centered Epistemology and Pedagogy | 93 |
| Concluding Thoughts on the Literature Review | 108 |

| 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................. 110 |
| --- | --- |
| Rationale for the Research Design | 110 |
| Selection of Sites and Interviewees | 113 |
| Interview Protocol | 116 |
| Validity and Reliability | 118 |
| Generalizability | 121 |
| Ethical Issues | 123 |

<p>| 4. INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS .................. 125 |
| --- | --- |
| Introduction | 125 |
| CIIS Campus Narrative | 126 |
| History of the Institute and Chaudhuri’s Vision of Integral Education | 126 |
| CIIS and Integral Education Today | 137 |
| Role of Spirituality at CIIS | 157 |
| Teaching-Learning Structures and Approaches at CIIS | 163 |
| The Effect of Integral Education on Students | 170 |
| Academic Governance | 171 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naropa Campus Narrative</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the University and Trungpa’s Vision of Contemplative Education</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naropa and Contemplative Education Today</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Spirituality at Naropa</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching-Learning Structures and Approaches at Naropa</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Effect of Contemplative Education on Students</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Governance</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Case Analysis</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Aspects of Spiritual/Contemplative Approaches to Education</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Findings</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Learning Structures</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Theory</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Roles</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergy between the Paradigms</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Research for Higher Education</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenges of Implementation</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX

| A. MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE STUDY | 278 |
| B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS | 281 |

REFERENCES | 285 |
# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Two-dimensional Model of Deep Learning</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Two New Paradigms in Higher Education

This paper explores the relationship between two emerging pedagogical movements in higher education: spiritual/contemplative education and learner-centered education, both of which exhibit paradigmatic qualities. Before delving into these dynamic educational movements and their combined potential for deepening and transforming the educational process, it will be helpful to begin by clarifying the concept of “paradigm”—a term widely used in academic and popular works, and one that I will be using throughout this paper.

With the publication of his ground-breaking book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1996) introduced the idea of the scientific paradigm and examined the process by which new paradigms supersede existing paradigms. One of Kuhn’s key points is that an individual or group of individuals discover or develop a new paradigm or theoretical framework pertaining to a particular scientific discipline in response to an “anomaly” or “crisis” that cannot be addressed by use of—or within the context of—an existing paradigm. The anomaly or crisis Kuhn refers to is a growing recognition of the problems, contradictions, shortcomings or failures inherent in an existing paradigm: the very theoretical framework that a discipline had used effectively to
identify and solve problems in the past is now understood as an impediment to a solution. A common feature of new paradigms is that they also usually provide the basis for new discoveries in unexpected areas.

A new paradigm will only be adopted by the entire scientific community within the discipline if it is seen as offering a satisfactory resolution of many of the accumulated problems associated with the old paradigm without marked losses in those areas where the old paradigm proved effective. The transition from a current to a new paradigm does not, however, happen all at once, and it is often marked by controversy and conflict between those who hold the current paradigm and those who switch to the new paradigm. Hence Kuhn refers to these transitions as revolutions.

Although he was writing about scientific disciplines, Kuhn’s view of crises as a generative force for the emergence of new paradigms applies analogously to social science fields such as education, and the use of the word “paradigm” in describing an emerging theory that contradicts or conflicts with an existing theory has become widespread in the social sciences. In these fields, the failures or shortcomings are not in the explanatory power of scientific theories in regard to natural phenomena, but in the relative failure or inability of certain theoretical or conceptual perspectives and their associated practices to adequately meet important or fundamental human needs or aspirations. While attempts to address these problems are generally made at first within the existing paradigm, the intractability of the problems will eventually lead to a new way of thinking about them and a corresponding new set of practices—in short, to a new paradigm. As a well-known statement by Albert Einstein goes, “The significant problems...
we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

While Kuhn emphasized the idea of successive paradigms, it appears that within the social sciences ongoing development of a field may also proceed through what might be seen as the merging and harmonizing of paradigms. In this process, a more inclusive, overarching paradigm can result. This merging process may also pertain to some of the softer sciences such as medicine. Kuhn (1962, 1996) does note that an overarching theory can subsume two seemingly disparate theories, when he states that “[a] new theory might be a higher level theory than those known before, one that linked together a whole group of lower level theories without substantially changing any” (p. 95). Also, because social science paradigms, to an extent, reflect personal values and belief systems, there may ultimately be no definitive or objective way to decide among competing paradigms, and they may simply co-exist indefinitely in different contexts. I will return to these points and other aspects of paradigms later on in this paper.

In roughly the last 10 to 20 years, the two important movements noted above—learner-centered education and spiritual/contemplative education—have developed in higher education. The first reflects a growing interest within colleges and universities in educational practices that involve a variety of active pedagogical approaches with the goal of deepening student learning. The second reflects a growing interest among many students, faculty and staff in more experiential and personal approaches to spirituality that are outside the realm of organized religion, and involves integrating—to a lesser or greater extent—a variety of spiritual/contemplative perspectives and practices into academic and extra-curricular programs. As is discussed at greater length below,
proponents believe that these perspectives and practices offer a wide range of benefits to students, including enhancing and deepening cognitive abilities, and promoting the development of important personal and interpersonal skills and dispositions, such as effective listening, compassion and social engagement.

Both of these educational movements exhibit the qualities or traits of a paradigm. What are these paradigmatic qualities? Both movements emerged in response to perceived failures or major shortcomings in higher education; both reflect a fundamental shift in what is seen as the purpose of higher education and/or appropriate teaching methods; both aim to retain what is best in what higher education currently offers while enhancing the skills and values (e.g., cognitive, community-building, communication, social activism) that higher education institutions seek to engender in students; both are being resisted for a variety of reasons; and both face the challenge of adapting current educational structures to accomplish new goals. As noted below, this dissertation focuses primarily on teaching-learning approaches associated with these emerging paradigms, and does not examine in depth structural or institutional change issues that may be associated with these approaches.

The primary purpose of my dissertation, as outlined with greater specificity in the Problem Statement section below, is two-fold: To better understand and define the emerging paradigm of contemplative/spiritually oriented higher education—a phenomenon whose contours are not yet as well understood and described as those of the learner-centered education paradigm—and to explore whether spiritually oriented higher educational practices enhance, and perhaps complement, the effectiveness of learner-centered education in terms of promoting deeper learning.
I am interested in examining the potential synergy of these two paradigms because it appears that a few pioneering higher education institutions—two of which, the California Institute of Integral Studies and Naropa University, serve as the cases for this collective case study—have dedicated themselves to combining Eastern and Western knowledge, wisdom traditions and educational approaches, including learner-centered approaches. (Note that by “synergy” I mean the interaction or integration of these two educational approaches to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.) My central proposition is that while both of these paradigms individually enhance the effectiveness and meaningfulness of higher education, when combined they prove synergistic. Another way of stating this is that adding a spiritual/contemplative dimension to learner-centered education results in an even deeper, more effective and meaningful learning experience than would result through a conventional learner-centered approach alone. A better understanding of this synergy may lead educators to be more receptive to the idea of incorporating spiritually oriented practices into their institutions and to exploring creative ways to combine them with learner-centered practices—not only for the benefit of improving student learning outcomes, but also to deepen the sense of purpose and meaning that educators find in their chosen vocation.

Although not central to the primary purpose of my dissertation noted above, I will touch upon the applicability of the assessment movement to spiritual/contemplative approaches to education. I will also offer some observations on aspects of academic governance at the two institutions I studied and discuss how conventional and innovative
academic governance structures can support spiritual/contemplative approaches to education.

**Background Information on the New Paradigms**

Before moving on to a more formal statement of my research questions in the next section, the reader may benefit from some preliminary background information on the two educational movements/paradigms that are the focus of my dissertation and on the institutions that serve as my cases. This background information will set the stage for the Literature Review section below, and will enable the reader to better assess the relevance and significance of my specific research questions to higher education practice.

Two somewhat different factors seem to have sparked the development of the learner-centered and spiritually oriented educational movements. Learner-centered education arose out of the realization that the pedagogical approach or paradigm currently found in most colleges and universities—the “instruction paradigm” (Barr and Tagg, 1995)—is often ineffective and even counter-productive in inculcating the very knowledge, skills, abilities and values that educators deem important. In his book, *The Learning Paradigm College*, Tagg (2003) states that the way for colleges to foster deep, quality learning is for them to adopt a “learning paradigm” in contrast to the predominant “instruction paradigm,” which means that the educational focus is not on the information that instructors deliver, but on what students actually learn, how deeply and thoroughly they learn it, and how effectively they can apply it. Tagg also describes a number of pedagogical practices that, if used persistently and in combination, can create a learner-centered environment that promotes deep learning. As Alan Guskin noted in an article published in the September/October 1994 issue of *Change*, “the primary learning
environment for undergraduate students, the fairly passive lecture-discussion format
where faculty talk and most students listen, is contrary to almost every principle of
optimal settings for student learning” (quoted by Barr and Tagg, 1995, p. 12). Not only
does the instruction-centered approach lead to missed opportunities to educate students in
accordance with educators’ goals and ideals, this approach does active harm to students,
who learn a number of habits and outlooks on life that impede their ability to learn
effectively in college settings and to function capably in the world (Tagg, 2003, pp 89-
94).

Unlike the learner-centered educational movement which arose to address a
disconnect between what teachers thought they were teaching and what students were
really learning, the movement to integrate spirituality into higher education arose from a
different disconnect: the one that some students, faculty and staff feel between their inner
lives—their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, their moral and personal values,
and their aspirations to grow as human beings—and the outward, more one-dimensional
focus of higher education on developing the intellect, amassing information, and gaining
credentials to further career aspirations. In a 2004-2005 faculty survey entitled
“Spirituality and the Professoriate,” Alexander and Helen Astin of UCLA and their
fellow researchers documented the strong spiritual interests of faculty:

For many faculty, the spiritual dimension of life is highly relevant. Within today’s
professoriate, four in five faculty describe themselves as “a spiritual person.”
Nearly half say that they are spiritual “to a great extent.” In addition, more than
two-thirds view “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” as a very important
or essential goal in life. Over two-thirds say that they seek opportunities to grow
spiritually to at least “some” extent and that they engage in self reflection “to a great extent.” Similarly, for nearly half of today’s faculty (47%), “integrating spirituality in my life” is an essential or very important life goal (online report, n.d., p. 3, retrieved on September 15, 2008, from www.spirituality.ucla.edu/results/spirit_professoriate.pdf).

In a related survey conducted in 2004 on students entitled “the Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose,” Alexander and Helen Astin and their fellow researchers found that “today’s college students have very high levels of spiritual interest and involvement. Many are actively engaged in a spiritual quest and are exploring the meaning and purpose of life. They also display high levels of religious commitment and involvement” (online report, p. 4, retrieved on September 15, 2008, from www.spirituality.ucla.edu/spirituality/reports/FINAL_REPORT.pdf). Thus it appears that integrating spirituality into aspects of an institution’s academic and extra-curricular programs may enable the institution to be better aligned with the aspirations and values of some or many of its faculty and students.

While one of the primary impetuses for integrating spiritual/contemplative practices and perspectives into higher education has been the desire and need expressed by students, staff and faculty for a greater sense of personal meaning and authenticity in their academic endeavors, another important impetus for including these practices is that spiritually oriented educators have observed that they also contribute to the development of students into well-rounded individuals by enhancing cognitive skills and promoting
community oriented skills and values such as teamwork and compassion; this point will be discussed further in the literature review.

Recognizing the benefits that contemplative practices might provide to students and also seeking a greater personal sense of authenticity, faculty members at various conventional higher education institutions are increasingly incorporating these practices formally into courses in a variety of disciplines, including such disparate disciplines as physics, music theory and economics—though sometimes in the face of opposition from colleagues (Gravois, 2005). A survey conducted in 2003 aimed primarily at conventional North American higher education institutions indicated that most of these initiatives are at the course level, spearheaded by individual faculty members, and that in a few cases programs or departments have incorporated a spiritual/contemplative aspect or orientation (Duerr et al., 2003). The fact that this movement is primarily at the course level, rather than the programmatic or institutional level, would seem to indicate that despite what appears to be a rapidly growing interest in spirituality in our society, the movement to bring spiritual/contemplative knowledge and practices into conventional higher education institutions is moving slowly. An interesting recent example of an effort to move from integrating spirituality at the course level to the programmatic level, which may be indicative of a growing acceptance of spiritual/contemplative approaches, is the Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University, described as follows on the University’s website (retrieved from www.brown.edu/Faculty/Contemplative_Studies_Initiative/index.html, on October 3, 2008):

The Contemplative Studies Initiative is a group of Brown faculty with diverse academic specializations who are united around a common interest in the study of
contemplative states of mind, including the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of human contemplative experience.

[We] are working towards eventually receiving formal recognition as a Program, Concentration, or a Center to study and teach the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of human contemplative experience. Our goal is to develop a coordinated program in this rapidly emerging field that focuses on many of the ways that human beings have found, across cultures and across time, to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness as the gateway to cultivating their full potential and to leading more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Beyond initiatives in individual institutions, there are now collaborations across campuses, organizations such as the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (which seeks to integrate contemplative awareness into contemporary life and has established an initiative called the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education), teaching fellowships, research funding, and conferences that support efforts to integrate spiritual/contemplative approaches into higher education (Duerr et al., 2003). While interest in the spiritual/contemplative dimension within conventional higher education is clearly growing as evidenced by the discussion above and in the literature review chapter below, the results of this movement are still relatively modest.

At the same time that some faculty members and administrators in conventional institutions are exploring how to incorporate spiritual practices into individual courses, programs and other activities, a few higher education institutions founded on spiritual principles by individuals involved with various spiritual traditions (both Eastern and
Western) have created educational programs and institutional cultures aimed at fully integrating a non-denominational, non-sectarian spiritual orientation—a spiritual pedagogy—and a conventional Western orientation to education. Two examples (which, as stated above, serve as the cases for my dissertation) are Naropa University and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). What makes these two institutions interesting to study in tandem is that both are regionally accredited, multipurpose institutions that were inspired by Eastern spiritual traditions and founded within a short time of one another; moreover, both institutions integrated a spiritual/contemplative perspective into their missions and academic programs from their inception (Duerr et al., 2003).

Naropa University—originally Naropa Institute—was founded in 1974 by Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche (“rinpoche” is an honorific title), a lineage holder of both the Kagyü and Nyingma Buddhist traditions of Tibet. Trungpa’s vision was to integrate contemplative practices into a Western academic setting. As Naropa states on its website (retrieved on March 29, 2007, from www.naropa.edu): “[Naropa’s] approach to learning integrates the best of Eastern and Western educational traditions, helping students know themselves more deeply and engage constructively with others.”

The Naropa website also provides the following information on what is meant by “contemplative education,” which is the cornerstone of its pedagogy:

Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others, honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps
unexpected ways. Contemplative practice unlocks the power of deep inward observation, enabling the learner to tap into a wellspring of knowledge about the nature of mind, self and other that has been largely overlooked by traditional, Western-oriented liberal education.

CIIS’s history is, in some ways, similar to that of Naropa University. As noted on the CIIS website (retrieved on April 25, 2007, from www.ciis.edu):

The Institute was founded in 1968 by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, a philosopher, educator, and humanist from Bengal. In 1951, Dr. Chaudhuri was invited … to join the staff of the newly formed American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. He accepted the invitation, eager to implement in a Western educational institution the integral approach to education that he had developed as a student of Sri Aurobindo, the renowned Indian philosopher and yogi. Soon after his arrival in San Francisco, Dr. Chaudhuri and his wife Bina established the Cultural Integration Fellowship, from which emerged an educational branch later to become California Institute of Integral Studies.

Like Naropa, CIIS explicitly seeks to integrate spirituality into its educational approach. The following are examples, drawn from its website, of CIIS’s commitment to this integrated approach. The tagline on its website reads “Higher education honoring the spiritual dimension of intellectual life” (retrieved on March 29, 2007, from www.ciis.edu), and the first two of CIIS’s seven “ideals” are:

1. **Practices an integral approach to learning and research**

The Institute facilitates the integration of body-mind-spirit. It values the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, creative, somatic, and social dimensions of
human potentiality. Students are encouraged to take an interdisciplinary approach to learning by complementing their specialized program of study with courses in other departments.

2. Affirms spirituality

The Institute is committed to the study and practice of multiple spiritual traditions and to their expression and embodiment throughout all areas and activities of the Institute community.

While Naropa and CIIS appear to be the most prominent examples of well established, regionally accredited institutions of higher education exploring this new territory of combining Eastern and Western wisdom and practices, they are not the only ones. Another example of this phenomenon—the Tai Sophia Institute (formerly the Traditional Acupuncture Institute) in Columbia, Maryland—has grown since its founding in 1975 as small acupuncture clinic and school based on the Taoist philosophy of the Five Elements into a multipurpose healing arts college that is regionally accredited. As Tai Sophia states on its website (retrieved on April 25, 2007, from www.tai.edu):

Our name, Tai Sophia, represents the meeting point of the ancient healing traditions from the East and West; the Chinese word Tai means “great” and the Greek word Sophia means “wisdom.” Together, the two words – great wisdom – serve as the foundation of our mission and the root of all of our programs and services.

A final example of an institution that is integrating Eastern wisdom into a conventional Western academic setting is the Maharishi University of Management
(MUM)—also a regionally accredited, multipurpose institution—which offers a number of undergraduate and graduate programs in a variety of fields using a pedagogy that they call “consciousness-based education,” which is described briefly in the website (retrieved on February 25, 2007, from www.mum.edu) as follows: “In Consciousness-Based education, you’ll study traditional subjects. But at the same time, you’ll systematically cultivate your total potential from within.” As also stated on its website, MUM was “founded in 1971 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Vedic sage who has introduced to the world the most ancient continuous tradition of knowledge, the Vedic tradition of enlightenment.” Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is also known for having introduced the technique of Transcendental Meditation to the West.

By way of contrast to the four institutions just referenced that have their roots in Eastern philosophy, there are a number of smaller institutions of higher education—generally focusing on graduate level education and professional certificate programs—whose missions and programs integrate a non-denominational spiritual orientation from a more Western perspective. One interesting example is Sunbridge College, which grew out of a Western spiritual philosophy known as Anthroposophy (i.e., “wisdom of man”). Sunbridge is a multipurpose institution accredited by the New York Board of Regents that offers programs primarily related to Waldorf/Steiner education; it was founded in Detroit in 1967, and moved in 1986 to its current campus in Spring Valley, New York. Sunbridge integrates spiritual awareness and practices into its programs based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian-born philosopher/educator/scientist who created the Waldorf school model of holistic education as well as a number of other pioneering movements including biodynamic farming (an early form of organic agriculture that
emphasizes the interconnection of living systems), Anthroposophic medicine (a field of natural, holistic medicine), the theory of the three-fold social order (an approach to social renewal), Eurythmy (a movement therapy), residential therapeutic communities for developmentally disabled individuals (Camphill communities), and the above-mentioned spiritual philosophy known as Anthroposophy. On its website (retrieved on April 26, 2007, from www.Sunbridge.edu.), the college states:

The image of the human being as consisting of body, soul and spirit is central to all educational activities of Sunbridge College, as is the cultivation of a disciplined path of self-development as the source of individual creativity and service.

Among the components of its vision statement, Sunbridge includes:

- To be a center for spiritual research – a place out of which the contemporary needs of humanity can be met; and
- To include an explicit artistic and spiritual dimension in all the educational programs of the college.

What these institutional and programmatic examples all point to is, I believe, an emerging approach in Western higher education that integrates body, mind and spirit and that holds—at least for some disciplines and some institutions, and for a growing number of individuals—substantial interest, meaning and practical utility. While the widespread interest in Eastern thought that has grown over the past few decades seems to be a primary impetus in this development for reasons that will be explained later on, the example of Sunbridge College and other institutions (e.g., Southwestern College in Santa Fe, New Mexico) shows that Western spiritual thought and practices can also serve as an
impetus for—and inform—this movement (and certainly Western religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism have well-developed contemplative/meditation practices).

As noted earlier, the core issue I examine in this dissertation is the potential synergy or mutually reinforcing nature of the learner-centered and spiritual/contemplative pedagogy movements. What are the indications that these movements may, indeed, be synergistic and, beyond that, worthy of study in relation to each other? There are several. One indication comes from the use of language. While the movements may have arisen for different reasons, and while at first glance they might seem different in terms of their goals and the means used to achieve them, a further investigation reveals that both movements often espouse their philosophies and aims using similar or identical terminology (though sometimes with somewhat different meanings). The shared terminology includes expressions such as “deep learning,” “interconnectedness,” “learning community,” “holistic education,” “integrated learning,” “integrative learning,” “transformative learning,” “meaning and purpose,” “civic engagement,” and “mindfulness”—expressions that point to a qualitatively different educational experience from what some educators have described variously as “surface,” “superficial,” “atomistic” or “disconnected” learning. Surface learning is characterized by a focus on so-called “performance goals” (Tagg, 2003)—namely, external motivating factors such as getting good grades and gaining educational credentials for career advancement. The very practices and motivations that promote surface learning impede the interconnected, deep and lasting learning that grows out of an intrinsic motivation to learn coupled with appropriate pedagogies.
A second indication of the potential synergy of these educational movements is that they both seek to expand the capabilities of students by focusing on different developmental realms. The learner-centered movement focuses largely on the external realm of “performance” (not to be confused with “performance goals” as discussed in the previous paragraph), namely on interrelated, mutually reinforcing activities that move students to a deeper and more expansive engagement with knowledge (Tagg, 2003). Spiritual and contemplative practices, on the other hand, work inwardly on expanding cognitive and soul capacities that allow for deeper engagement with knowledge, while also helping individuals to connect with their inner sense of purpose and meaning and to relate with others more effectively. These practices also reveal the interconnectedness of people and phenomena, and often counter the passivity of many learners through a variety of group and individual processes. From this internal development can spring motivation for purposeful action in the world that might not arise simply from engaging in external activity alone, no matter how seemingly worthwhile. Of course, certain types of purposeful external activity transform a person’s inner life, and a transformed inner life eventually translates into changes in behavior—so the polarity or contrast I note here is meant to describe the relative emphasis of each approach.

A third indication of the potential synergy of these educational movements is that educators interested in integrating spiritual/contemplative dimensions into higher education are starting to use the vehicle of educational movements that are related to learner-centered education to make a case for and conveniently conceptualize this added component of higher education. Two movements in particular—transformative education and integrative education—seem to lend themselves to this type of conceptual expansion,
as will be discussed later on, since the integration of body, mind and spirit and transformation of the whole person are goals of spiritual and contemplative traditions.

The link between—and the potentially mutually reinforcing quality—of these two movements has not escaped the notice of educators. For example, Chickering et al. (2006), state that:

[T]his [i.e., six key learning-oriented pedagogical strategies] is a powerful example of how a thoughtful teacher integrates content and pedagogy in ways that help students connect with their own “inner landscape.” It illustrates how good learner-oriented teaching can use almost any curricular content to feed the spirit and nurture the soul. (p. 119)

Reflection [in the spiritual sense of quiet contemplation] is the absolutely necessary intervening activity that converts inputs—whatever the experiences are—into meaningful working knowledge that can be tested in other settings. (p. 143)

More recently, Lindholm and Astin (2008) found through a survey study they conducted that “faculty who self-report as being spiritual are much more likely to use a student-centered pedagogy in ‘most’ or ‘all’ of their courses—a choice that occurs independent of their personal characteristics, their fields, or their institutional affiliations.” They further note that

[G]iven the fundamental tenets of student- or learner-centered pedagogy, it intuitively makes sense that that spiritually inclined faculty would be more likely to employ teaching practices that invite student to engage actively in an academic
community and help them develop their capacity for interconnectedness, responsiveness and accountability. (p. 201)

Finally, they note that “much remains to be learned about the intersections between faculty members’ spirituality and their pedagogical choices” (p. 202). This dissertation, in part, seeks to shed some light on these intersections.

The Educational Problem

As noted above, the current instructional paradigm used in colleges and universities fails to meet the needs and aspirations of students in two important ways:

• It fails to educate students to their full potential and to prepare students intellectually for the challenges they will face later in life; in fact, it may foster perspectives on—and habits of—learning that tend towards ineffective learning and a lack of commitment to meaningful intellectual development; and

• It fails to engage students in a way that reflects their spiritual aspirations and desire for personal meaning, and fails to promote emotional and spiritual growth and awareness that would be beneficial to personal and societal well-being.

As also noted above, two new approaches to teaching and learning are developing in higher education institutions: one that promotes a learner-centered educational experience, and one that fosters a spiritual perspective and incorporates certain spiritual/contemplative practices into the educational experience. While a good deal has been and is being written about the benefits that these emerging approaches offer, it appears that only a handful of higher education institutions have been established as—or have successfully transitioned to—being largely learner-centered or spiritually oriented,
and fewer still are trying to combine these two approaches either on the programmatic or institutional level.

Finally, as also noted above, it appears that these two approaches to teaching and learning may be complementary or even synergistic in the sense of being mutually reinforcing.

These considerations indicate that exploring the connection and potential synergy between a learner-centered pedagogy and a spiritual pedagogy could yield important insights into ways in which to increase the effectiveness of—and to infuse a deeper sense of meaning into—teaching and learning in higher education. Why is this potential synergy important to higher education? Tagg (2003) provides a reason that I believe any serious educator would find compelling, whether or not he or she has a spiritual orientation:

It should now be clear that the quality of learning that an institution promotes is what gives that institution meaning and value. Underlying everything the institution does and overriding every other consideration, a college must promote a deep orientation to learning and discourage a surface one or it actively undermines its very rationale for being. Whatever our perspective on higher education, if that perspective is based in reality, we must accede to the primacy of quality learning. (p. 86)

However, a growing number of educators are now arguing that a deep orientation to learning—if it remains solely on the level of intellect and skills—is still incomplete. As noted by Awbrey et al. (2006):
The emphasis in Western education, and thereby in living and working in Western society, has been based on … learning to know and learning to do. These dimensions are important, but they should not come at the expense or neglect of learning to live together and learning to be. Taken together, all four components create wholeness, a kind of integrative learning, especially necessary in light of the problems created by the success of our rationality. (p. 1)

Therefore, the main purpose of this dissertation is to explore how bringing a spiritual perspective and spiritual practices into the classroom and coursework may advance the aims of the learner-centered approach to education and thereby deepen student learning.

Research Questions

My grand tour research question is:

What are the distinctive pedagogical practices and underlying educational philosophy or philosophies found in spiritually oriented higher education institutions, and in what ways, if any, do spiritual/contemplative approaches to higher education complement, advance and/or exemplify learner-centered educational approaches and thereby promote deep learning?

My ancillary research questions are as follow:

- Do faculty members who teach in these spiritually oriented higher education institutions share—either explicitly or in practice—a distinctive philosophy of education?
- How might the pedagogical practices in spiritually oriented higher education institutions be defined or described as a distinctive model or paradigm?

21
• What do the faculty in spiritually oriented higher education institutions see as the benefits—cognitive, emotional, spiritual and civic—that students derive from a spiritual pedagogy? What do the faculty see as drawbacks to this pedagogy? Are there certain disciplines that lend themselves to a spiritual orientation or pedagogy?

• What training and experiences are necessary to enable faculty to adopt and effectively utilize these pedagogical approaches?

• What are the salient professional and personal rewards and challenges of adopting these pedagogical approaches?

• How is a spiritual pedagogy similar to a learner-centered pedagogy and how is it different? Are faculty who utilize spiritually oriented pedagogical approaches more likely to also integrate learner-centered approaches?

• Can these two pedagogies be integrated in order to advance their respective aims and strengthen overall the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices?

As noted earlier, though not a focus of my dissertation, I will also briefly touch upon the issues of academic governance and how the assessment movement in higher education intersects with spiritual/contemplative approaches, since this information may be of use to higher education practitioners in conventional institutions who wish to incorporate some of the spiritual/contemplative teaching-learning practices discussed in this paper.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework for this study is paradigm theory, as most prominently articulated in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Kuhn, 1962, 1996). This framework
is useful for understanding the emergence of new educational movements whose values and practices may conflict with existing educational values and practices. As I noted above, both of the movements in higher education that I examine in this study exhibit the traits of a new paradigm. Studying these movements in the context of paradigm theory helps to clarify the challenges they face in being understood, accepted and adopted by higher education practitioners. Also, analyzing how these two paradigms are similar and different will help to illuminate the potential challenges and benefits of bringing them together to bear upon certain major problems in higher education. In short, paradigm theory provides a means by which the movements can be better understood individually and together. As the literature review below demonstrates, the interest in spiritually oriented educational approaches also appears to more generally reflect a paradigm shift that is happening in a number of other fields in the U.S.

The conceptual framework for this study is learner-centered education. (As discussed in the literature review section, there are several related movements in higher education such as integrative education and transformative education that share the idea of utilizing a variety of active and reflective pedagogies to encourage deep learning across disciplines; for the sake of simplicity, I will use learner-centered education as a representative of this family of related movements.) The fact that educators are extending terminology and concepts associated with learner-centered approaches to the spiritual/contemplative dimension of higher education indicates that learner-centered educational theory may serve as an effective lens through which to examine and better understand the potential benefits of spiritual/contemplative educational approaches.
Barr and Tagg’s (1995) formulation, elucidation and contrasting of the two competing paradigms—the instruction paradigm and learner-centered paradigm—starkly set forth key issues regarding student learning with a level of clarity that has, it appears, sharpened the debate over whether and how to move higher education in the direction of greater learner-centeredness. Indeed, the power of an emerging paradigm to serve as a catalyst for change lies to a large extent in its ability to articulate a unified theoretical perspective and provide a vocabulary with which to identify and describe existing problems and suggest approaches to solving them. Formulating an existing problem in terms of a new paradigm also provides the paradigm’s adherents a basis upon which to advocate for fundamental or transformational change; in contrast, efforts to address a problem within an existing paradigm that perhaps contributed to the problem in the first place are likely, by their very nature, to be slow and incremental (e.g., offering pilot programs, requiring some group projects in the context of a lecture course, etc.).

One of the ways in which Barr and Tagg present their paradigm is by articulating a series of polarities or contrasting qualities of the learner-centered and instruction-centered approaches to education. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to attempt to analyze my research data from the perspective of all of these polarities; rather, as presented below, I utilize those pertaining most directly to pedagogy and the role of faculty members.

It should be noted that deep learning for Barr and Tagg is primarily deep cognitive learning, not necessarily deep learning across the wider range of dimensions that fall within the realm of holistic education. This emphasis on cognitive development does not,
I believe, impede using Barr and Tagg’s work as a conceptual framework for my study, but it does necessitate applying some of their ideas to other developmental dimensions.

As noted in the Research Questions section above, my dissertation focuses on how spiritual/contemplative teaching approaches may complement, advance, and/or exemplify learner-centered teaching approaches, and thereby promote deep learning on the part of students. In this paper, I utilize Barr and Tagg’s basic polarities as a conceptual lens for analyzing the efficacy of spiritual/contemplative educational approaches; in particular, I examine whether spiritual/contemplative educational approaches share characteristics of learner-centered educational approaches (i.e., fall generally within the learning paradigm), and thereby are likely to support deep learning.

The following table presents the contrasting characteristics/qualities associated with the learning paradigm and instruction paradigm that are most relevant to my research. This table was adapted primarily from the table that appears in the Barr and Tagg article (1995, pp. 16-17), with several additions taken from Tagg’s book (2003, pp. 8, 101, and 124). Later on in this paper, I utilize the contents of this table as a basis for analyzing my research findings.

**Table 1: Contrasting Characteristics of the Instruction and Learning Paradigms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTION PARADIGM</th>
<th>LEARNING PARADIGM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching/Learning Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atomistic; parts prior to whole; learner focuses on learning discrete bits of information</td>
<td>Holistic; whole prior to parts; student sees how object of learning relates to prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time held constant, learning varies</td>
<td>Learning held constant, time varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-minute lecture, 3-unit course</td>
<td>Learning environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes start/end at same time</td>
<td>Environment ready when student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One teacher, one classroom</td>
<td>Uses varied learning experiences and settings to maximize learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent disciplines, departments</td>
<td>Inter-discipline/department collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covering material</td>
<td>Specified learning results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-course assessment/evaluation</td>
<td>Pre/during/post assessments; a high ratio of feedback to evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading within classes by instructors</td>
<td>External evaluations of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private assessment</td>
<td>Public assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree equals accumulated credit hours</td>
<td>Degree equals demonstrated knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work is viewed only by the course instructor</td>
<td>Requires frequent public student performances (i.e., demonstration of learned knowledge and skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time horizon is generally seen as successful completion of course or degree</td>
<td>Emphasizes learning for the long term, a long time horizon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEARNING THEORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge exists “out there”</th>
<th>Knowledge exists within each person and is influenced by individual experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge comes in “chunks” and “bits” delivered by instructors</td>
<td>Students participate in constructing and creating knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is cumulative and linear</td>
<td>Learning is a nesting and interacting of frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects the “storehouse of knowledge” metaphor</td>
<td>Reflects the “learning how to ride a bicycle” metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on the sign: the surface appearance of the text, problem, etc.</td>
<td>Focuses on the signified: the meaning of the text problem, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is teacher-centered and directed</td>
<td>Learning is student-centered and directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Live” teacher, “live” students required</td>
<td>“Active” learner required, but not necessarily a “live” teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inert/passive: learner receives what is given, information remains static</td>
<td>Active: learner is the conscious agent of understanding, shapes and works with information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The classroom and learning are competitive and individualistic</td>
<td>Learning environments and learning are cooperative, collaborative, and supportive; there are stable communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent/ability often perceived as rare</td>
<td>Talent/ability are perceived as abundant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes extrinsic goals and motivation; students motivated by grades</td>
<td>Emphasizes intrinsic goals/motivation; students are supported in developing and pursuing own goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May reinforce and be reinforced by mindless rote learning</td>
<td>Reinforces and is reinforced by mindfulness (inc. self-reflection &amp; meta-cognition)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nature of Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty are primarily lecturers</th>
<th>Faculty are primarily designers of learning methods and environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and students act independently and in isolation</td>
<td>Faculty and students work in teams with each other and other staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers classify and sort students</td>
<td>Teachers develop every student’s competencies and talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff serve/support faculty and the process of instruction</td>
<td>All staff are educators who produce student learning and success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any expert can teach</td>
<td>Empowering learning is challenging and complex, and seen as a skill apart from expertise in a subject area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line governance; independent actors</td>
<td>Shared governance; teamwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the Literature Review section, I cover the literature in several of the key areas relevant to my dissertation, including the growing interest in non-denominational spirituality in higher education and society at large, how spirituality is defined in contrast to religion, spiritual epistemology and pedagogy, and learner-centered epistemology and pedagogy. Since the combined literature in these areas is extensive, my goal is not to present an exhaustive summary and evaluation of the literature, but to reference and weave together a representative sampling of the literature in order to provide the reader with a basis for understanding and assessing my research findings and conclusions.

Most of the literature review pertains to spirituality/contemplative practices in the context of higher education, since this is the primary focus of my research. However, I also briefly review some of the literature pertaining to learner-centered education that appears to be closely related from a conceptual standpoint. Throughout this dissertation I draw upon paradigm theory as presented by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962, 1996); I have not, however, systematically presented his ideas or reviewed any of the voluminous commentary on this work, as that is tangential to my research questions. The literature that pertains more specifically to the
two cases I am studying is covered in the context of the institutional narratives, though I also reference some of this literature in the literature review chapter.

**Spirituality: An Emerging Phenomenon in Society and Higher Education**

As one might expect, the growing interest in spirituality in the world of higher education is not a phenomenon isolated from the rest of American society. In the last few decades, there has been a rapid emergence in the U.S. of a loose, non-denominational multi-faceted spiritual movement. As Paterson, Hayworth, Turner, and Raskin (2000) note, “Books on religion, spirituality, and inspiration, once a small segment of the literary markets, are now outpacing every other category, and books often appear on best-seller lists for months at a time” (p. 200). There are now, in fact, entire bookstores devoted to selling works on spirituality and related subjects. The spiritual and political leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama—whose works on Buddhism and spirituality are widely available—has become internationally renowned, meeting with world leaders and speaking to large audiences. *The Boston Globe* noted that “Unchurched spirituality is thriving,” and predicted that “Religion without churches will exert considerably more influence on the nation’s religious life in the decades ahead” (Fuller, 2001).

The growing interest in spirituality is reflected in a number of related societal movements, perhaps most notably in the increasing acceptance of what is referred to variously as holistic, complementary, alternative or integrative medicine—medical modalities that, to a lesser or greater degree, recognize the importance of the mind-body-spirit connection. It is estimated that during 1997, these practices were used by 42 percent of the U.S. population (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Harvard Medical School now sponsors annual conferences on the subjects of spirituality and medicine and on complementary
and alternative medicine, and roughly two-thirds of conventional medical schools in the U.S. also now offer courses in these fields (Wetzel et al., 1998).

Spirituality and holistic philosophies are also influencing other fields and professions. As Neal (1997) notes, there is now a fairly extensive body of literature that explores the ways in which spirituality can be integrated into business, management and leadership practices. Titles in this genre include: *Moses on Management; The Diamond Cutter: The Buddha on Strategies for Managing Your Business and Your Life; Jesus Christ, CEO; The Tao of Leadership; Real Power: Business Lessons from the Tao Te Ching; Soul of a Business; and Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit.* Similarly, there is an emerging field of holistic law, reflected in organizations such as the International Alliance of Holistic Lawyers, and a number of lawyers are seeking a greater inner balance and a spiritual orientation to working with clients through contemplative practices (Keeva, 2006). The ecological movement is also, for many individuals, grounded in a spiritual perspective that sees the Earth and all of life as sacred (Lydon, 1995; Kinlicheeney, 1995). These various movements indicate that the boundary between spirituality as a personal and private matter and the public expression of spirituality is starting to dissolve.

Spirituality is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Spiritual and religious values have always informed human activities to a lesser or greater extent, depending on the historical times, prevailing cultural values and societal norms, and individual proclivities. What appears new, however, is that for a growing number of people spirituality is no longer invariably grounded in conventional religious beliefs, practices and organizations. While many individuals still express their spirituality in the context of conventional
religions, many others have a spiritual orientation independent of conventional religious beliefs and practices. In fact, it appears that “a growing number of people are developing their spirituality outside of traditional, organized religion” (Elkins et al., 1988, p.7). Included in this group are college students (Laurence, 1999). It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to investigate extensively the reasons why spirituality is becoming increasingly important in our society at this time in history; why it is influencing a number of diverse professions, fields, and activities; and why spirituality is developing increasingly as a phenomenon independent of religion. It is interesting to note, however, that as spirituality develops as an independent phenomenon, there is emerging a more neutral, flexible and less emotionally evocative vocabulary to describe spiritual beliefs, views and experiences. Buddhist philosophy, for example, has tended to utilize a more neutral, non-theistic vocabulary, and the growing interest in Buddhism in the West has, I believe, been a major force in promoting the development of this non-sectarian spiritual movement by providing a ready-made terminology free of emotional charge for people who might have negative associations with organized Western religions. Humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology have also contributed to the development of a non-religious non-theistic spiritual vocabulary and, to some degree, there is even scientific language developing to describe spiritual experiences—an example being the “relaxation response” or “stress reduction” that results from meditation practices. While until recently it has been the case that “cultural norms in the United States dictate that issues related to religion or spirituality are private matters” (Love & Talbot, 1999, p. 362), it is perhaps precisely because there are now nonsectarian and even non-theistic ways to express spiritual ideas and engage in discussions on spirituality that individuals
feel more comfortable openly acknowledging their spiritual interests and more explicitly integrating spirituality into otherwise secular activities, including higher education apart from religiously affiliated institutions.

My reference in the section heading above to spirituality as “an emerging phenomenon” in higher education pertains to this idea of a person having a spiritual orientation apart from formal religion, since spirituality in the context of formal religion has a long history in American higher education. As Strange (2001) states,

> From its inception, American higher education has long honored a relationship between the intellectual and the spiritual. Particularly in the beginning, education of the whole person—knowledge, talents, body, soul, and character—guided the enterprise, and questions of the ultimate formed the discourse of the day…. What was once a familiar conversation to most members of the academy has now become a disjointed discussion, as attention to the human spirit has all but faded from the landscape of liberal learning. (p. 60)

As noted above, given the growing interest in spirituality in society at large, it is not surprising that spirituality is also beginning to influence the world of secular higher education in a variety of ways; after all, the academy is both a reflection of society and a place for innovative thought. It is only recently, however, that spirituality has once again become an accepted topic of discussion in higher education. As Raper (2001) notes, although “spirituality played an integral role in the early American college,” the influence of the Enlightenment on American higher education at the end of the eighteenth century—followed more recently by the Scientific Age—has resulted in “the influence of religion on higher education being dissipated until it was negligible” (p. 13). Raper notes
further that, in general, “spirituality is treated as a taboo topic” in higher education, and that “religious and spiritual issues do not enjoy great respect academically” (p. 15). Raper also notes that the reluctance to discuss spiritual matters publicly relates not only to prevalent attitudes towards religion and spirituality, but also to misunderstandings about the Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state: While America’s founders intended to prohibit the establishment of a state religion, they did not proscribe the expression of spirituality (p. 15).

There are ample signs that on college campuses these negative attitudes towards spirituality, and the reluctance to engage in discussion on this topic, are in the process of changing—perhaps profoundly. In the late 1990’s, Wellesley College convened a “national gathering to explore the impact of religious diversity on higher education and the role of spirituality in the educational process,” and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst sponsored a conference called “Going Public with Spirituality in Work and Higher Education.” In 2002, the American Association of Colleges & Universities and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators were sponsors of a conference called “Spirituality and Learning: Redefining Meaning, Value, and Inclusion in Higher Education,” at which Alexander Astin—a leader in higher education—was the keynote speaker. The Wellesley College website describes a project started in 1996 at Wellesley called the “Education as Transformation Project”; under the Project’s auspices, several hundred colleges and universities across the country are engaged in a dialogue about spirituality and religious pluralism in higher education, and are developing processes for addressing these themes on college campuses. The Project’s primary purposes, as listed on its website (retrieved on April 30, 2007, from
www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/transformation), include working with colleges and universities to explore “the role of spirituality in educational institutions, and particularly its relationship to teaching and learning pedagogy; the cultivation of values; moral and ethical development; and the fostering of global learning communities and responsible global citizens.”

The on-line *Journal of College and Character* (retrieved on April 30, 2007, from www.collegevalues.org) includes a section entitled “Spirituality on Campus” that provides information and commentary on books, events and issues pertaining to spirituality and higher education. This section of the website contains “A Position Statement from the Initiative for Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education” (Astin et al., February 6, 2002 draft) signed by 15 prominent individuals involved with higher education. One of the Initiative’s primary goals, as stated in the conclusion, is “to have issues of purpose, authenticity and identity, spirituality and spiritual growth, become a regular part of higher education’s landscape.” Since the position statement was published, there have been a number of publications, conferences and other activities related to spirituality and higher education that indicate that a discussion on the place of spirituality in higher education is, indeed, taking place nationally, and that a number of prominent educators and institutions are involved.

It should come as no surprise that in addition to faculty members and leaders in higher education, student affairs professionals are also increasingly becoming interested in the role of spirituality in the campus community. Student affairs professionals are sometimes the first group to become aware of changing interests and trends among
students, and they are also often on the front line in dealing with the emotional and spiritual problems that many students face in college. As Jablonski (2001) states:

Today many students are coming to college as believers in some faith; participating in practices such as community service, meditation, or yoga; and seeking answers to questions about purpose, mission and values. … As we are beginning to add the spiritual perspective to a number of fields of inquiry and outside of classroom experience, we student affairs professionals need to become more inclusive of spirituality in all the programs and services we offer. (p.3)

Like many individuals in other walks of life, students are also trying to find meaning and purpose in their lives; as Kazakian (1998) notes, “Today’s students, whatever their religious traditions and spiritual perspectives, are asking for a college community where the life of the mind is not separate from the life of the spirit.” Today’s college students are also dealing with the increasing stress of modern life. In recent years, college counseling services have seen dramatic increases in the numbers of students seeking counseling (Berger, 2002); the events of September 11, 2001, have only accelerated this trend (Brownstein & Hoover, 2001).

While spirituality is not a panacea for the myriad difficulties of growing into adulthood, it is an important area to explore. As Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke note, “Studies show that religion plays an important role in coping with stress. Prayer and faith in God have been cited as two of the most common coping resources” (p. 3). Meditation and other contemplative activities, yoga, self-help groups, engaging in spiritual and religious practices, connecting with nature, attention to a healthy lifestyle, and other activities that have a spiritual or holistic orientation may provide effective means of
helping students with the difficult adjustments associated with leaving home and starting college, as well as the difficult transition to meaningful, effective and contented lives as adults. “Spirituality is especially important in the learning and experience of college students because late adolescence is a time of heightened sensitivity about personal identity, relationships, ideology, and decisions about the future” (Dalton, 2001, p. 18).

Undergraduate students are not alone in experiencing personal challenges due to changes in their lives—many graduate students also face the challenges of making a significant life transition. As Strange (2001) states,

[F]or most the graduate school experience is a time of personal inventory and significant change, not unlike other periods of transition in life when fundamentals of self identity, relationship with others, and ultimate direction are open to examination and reformation. Such considerations have long served the purposes of higher learning but only now are beginning to reappear in our discussion in more resolute form under the rubric of authenticity, faith and spirituality. (p. 58)

While books, articles and conferences continue to discuss, in general terms, the appropriate role for spirituality on college campuses, individual faculty members and various organizations and institutions have, at the same time, begun to translate these ideas into concrete pedagogical practices. Through a variety of seminars and conferences, interested faculty and higher education practitioners can gain the understanding and learn the techniques they will need to integrate spiritual ideas and contemplative practices into courses and other activities. These sorts of educational activities show that the movement to integrate spirituality in higher education has reached a level of acceptance where
efforts are shifting from defining, describing and justifying this new pedagogical approach to providing educational opportunities that will allow for more systematically developing and disseminating spiritual/contemplative teaching approaches. This reflects the normal evolution of a paradigm where, once a critical mass of acceptance is achieved, the focus of activity shifts from describing the broad outlines of the paradigm—and arguing over its legitimacy or correctness—to more practical activities in the field. In scientific fields, Kuhn refers to these activities as “normal science”; in higher education, these “normal” activities might include developing taxonomies and teaching methodologies, carrying out research on the effects of the teaching methodologies, and writing texts and journal articles on specific topics aimed at individuals in higher education who accept the legitimacy of this approach to education.

One example of this shift to a more practical focus on how to integrate spirituality into higher education is a week-long annual seminar on “Contemplative Curriculum Development” offered by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CCMS), which began offering these seminars in 2005. The following information from the CCMS website (retrieved April 30, 2007, from www.contemplativemind.org) describes the seminar:

There will be sessions on pedagogical issues, including the relation between course content and contemplative practice and the benefits of stabilized attention and other qualities of mind fostered by meditation, as well as on practical issues such as evaluation, grading, instructional techniques, and use of off-site facilities. We will also consider issues such as communicating course intent with colleagues and college administrators. There will be discussions on how contemplative
practices in the curriculum are affecting teaching and learning nationwide. Local scholars and contemplative teachers not listed as faculty will visit and engage in the discussions. Each day will also include substantial contemplative practice time, which will introduce participants to practices from a variety of traditions as well as practices that have been adapted successfully for secular classroom settings. The summer session aims to prepare participants to return to their classrooms with a deeper understanding of the practice of contemplative teaching and a fully developed course.

The summer session builds on the work of the Contemplative Practice Fellowship Program, administered by the American Council of Learned Societies and made possible by funding from the Fetzer Institute. These fellowships seek to restore and renew the critical contribution that contemplative practices can make to the life of teaching and scholarship. At the heart of the program is the belief that pedagogical and intellectual benefits will be discovered by bringing contemplative practice into the academy. While contemplative practices are part of all major religious and spiritual traditions, they have also had a place in intellectual and ethical inquiry, including secular educational environments. Contemplative practices are defined in a variety of ways, but they can be broadly understood as methods to develop concentration, deepen understanding and insight, and cultivate awareness and compassion.

Another example of this shift in focus was a conference in February 2007 co-sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Fetzer Institute entitled “Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education: Integrative Learning for Compassionate
Action in an Interconnected World.” As noted on the conference website (retrieved on April 30, 2007, from www.heartofeducation.org), the conference covered a wide range of topics around the integration of spirituality and higher education, including the relationship between:

• Curriculum and values
• Intellectual, aesthetic, and moral intelligences
• Technical competency and compassionate action
• Critical reasoning and contemplative inquiry
• Vocation and life purpose

Prominent speakers at the conference included Alexander and Helen Astin of UCLA, Parker Palmer, Diana Chapman Walsh, former president of Wellesley College, and Robert Kegan of Harvard University; other presenters included individuals from many mainstream colleges and universities. Among partnering organizations were the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and the Council of Independent Colleges. What all this indicates, again, is a maturing of this movement to the point where specific practices are being discussed and developed, and where faculty and administrators in mainstream—and even highly prestigious—institutions are willing to “go public” with their commitment to this emerging paradigm.

**Defining Spirituality**

As spirituality has emerged as a topic of discussion in higher education over the last ten years or so, much of the literature on the subject has included a description or definition of spirituality, and a discussion on how spirituality differs from religion. These
attempts at definitions and distinctions make sense from the standpoint of paradigm theory, since individuals who are investigating or developing the new paradigm need to explain and/or justify it to other individuals who—whether or not they are open to it—view spirituality through the lens of older paradigms. As indicated above, these older paradigms comprise a number of perspectives, such as: spirituality as an aspect of—not something separate from—organized religion, and therefore its inclusion in higher education raises issues regarding the separation of church and state; religious and spiritual beliefs are personal matters that should have only a small circumscribed place, if any, in secular higher education; and the primary if not sole focus of higher education should be on cognitive and skills development. What I seek to accomplish in this section of the literature review is to provide a sampling of the definitions, indicate how they might be synthesized, and to note their limitations.

Spirituality, like any broad concept based on inner human experiences, is inherently challenging to define and inevitably somewhat ambiguous. Moreover, the concept of spirituality has grown to encompass both experiences within the context of organized religion and without, adding another layer of complexity. As Love and Talbot (1999) assert, based on their review of the literature, “There is no commonly accepted definition of spirituality” (p. 363). Going one step further, Barnett et al. (2000) state “The definition of spirituality is so diverse across individuals that … students and teachers will never attribute the same meanings when they use the same word in the classroom”; the authors note, however, that “this is a highly functional ambiguity when used in the context of inquiry” (p. 564). I think these observations are somewhat of an overstatement, and that the actual situation is not quite so dire as the one Alice encountered in Through
the Looking Glass in her conversation with Humpty Dumpty ("‘When I use a word,’
Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean,
neither more nor less.’"). As the definitions and descriptions below show, there are
common themes in many of the definitions that make spirituality a workable concept, and
several writers make this point.

One challenge to understanding and defining spirituality, as discussed earlier, is
that it has traditionally been linked to religion; in fact, Love (2000) notes that there is a
“strongly held societal assumption that somehow religion and spirituality are
synonymous” (p.1). As noted above, however, spirituality has also developed as a
phenomenon apart from religion, and a number of writers make this distinction in
defining terminology. For Love, “Religion begins as, and is for the most part, an external
phenomenon,” while “Spirituality begins as and is perpetually an internal process, though
there is a moving outward from oneself through transcendence….” Rogers and Dantley
(2001) make a similar distinction: organized religion is “an outward, public process” and
spirituality is “inward” and “private” (p. 591), though it should be noted that because
something has an inward source doesn’t mean that its expression cannot be shared; also,
an aspect of organized religions involves the cultivation of inner capacities. Graham, et
al. (2001), condensing points made in earlier works, state that: “Religion generally refers
to an integrated sense of beliefs and activities, whereas spirituality is seen as the meaning
gained from life experiences that may or may not be theistic in nature. A belief in God
can be integrated with meaningful life experiences, but individuals without a belief in
God or a higher power can also have spiritual and meaningful experiences in life.” Elkins
et al. (1988) note that both Abraham Maslow and John Dewey saw spirituality as a
human phenomenon “more basic than, prior to, and different from traditional expressions of religiosity” (p. 6). The fact that the world’s major religious traditions essentially grew out of the mystical experiences and insights of individuals such as Buddha, Christ, and Mohammad confirms Maslow’s and Dewey’s idea that spirituality is prior to religion, and further supports the distinction that writers make between religion and spirituality. It should also be noted that there is naturally an overlap between religion and spirituality (both, for example, generally recognize a transcendent aspect of life and involve certain practices), and religious individuals can be deeply spiritual—though spiritually oriented individuals need not be religious (Love, 2000). Given the observations above, the distinction between religion and spirituality seems to make good conceptual sense.

Another challenge in defining “spirituality” is that definitions often reference other equally elusive terms and concepts, such as “the ultimate” and “sacred.” Palmer (1998), in grappling with the concept of “sacred,” states: “What do I mean by sacred? It is a paradoxical concept—as one would expect when exploring the most profound truth of all.” Palmer goes on to offer the following definition: “On the one hand, the word points to an ineffable immensity beyond concept and definition…the numinous energy at the heart of reality. On the other hand, sacred means, quite simply, ‘worthy of respect’” (p. 111).

Some authors offer brief, sometimes impressionistic, definitions of spirituality that either focus on significant aspects of the spiritual experience, or attempt to distill the essence of other definitions. For example, Briggs (1998) conveys the following ideas: “the sense of transcendence of self and an awareness of the patterns of sense in the universe,” the sense of “flow,” the “aha experience,” and “getting-connected-with-a-
world-bigger-than-I-am sense” which points to “experiences larger than affect and larger than mind” (p. 88). Briggs also offers this brief synthesis:

For a meaningful life, people must be able to see and feel daily events as experiences that connect them to themselves, to others, and to larger forces in the universe. Sensing these connections is a potentially transformative event, and many events that transform do so because they have brought connections into focus. (p. 88)

Harlos (2000) offers the following brief definition of spirituality based on her research into the literature: “secular or sacred values aimed at transcendence toward our ultimate value” (p. 615).

While some writers have developed relatively simple definitions of spirituality with which to work, others such as Elkins et al. (1988), Mitroff and Denton (1999) and Love and Talbot (1999) have sought greater definitional precision, clarity and comprehensiveness. As Elkins et al. state, based on a fairly extensive literature review, “It became increasingly clear that spirituality could not be defined simply and that it was a complex, multidimensional construct composed of several major factors” (p. 9).

In order to try to provide a more comprehensive sense of what the concept of spirituality entails, I next summarize a few of the more detailed definitions of spirituality by the authors noted above, offer the perspectives of a few other writers, and try to identify some of the key commonalities among definitions. Following that, I identify and describe some of the ways in which the definitions and descriptions of spirituality seem incomplete to me.
In developing a definition of spirituality, Elkins et al. embarked upon a process that involved several distinct steps. First, the authors articulated four foundational assumptions that are echoed by other writers:

1. There is a dimension to human experience characterized by certain values, attitudes, perspectives, emotions, etc., that can best be described as “spirituality.”
2. Spirituality is a human phenomenon that exists, as least potentially, in everyone.
3. Spirituality is not the same as religiosity.
4. By means of theoretical and phenomenological approaches, it is possible to define and describe spirituality. (p. 8)

Next, Elkins et al. reviewed seminal works of major authors—including William James, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, John Dewey, Erik Fromm and others—who have examined spirituality from a phenomenological perspective. Based on their review of this classic literature, the authors developed a brief definition of spirituality that they elaborated upon by means of identifying nine key “components.” Having formulated a definition and key components of spirituality, the authors interviewed five individuals from diverse religious traditions who were identified by the authors as being “highly spiritual” (the method of selection was not described); the purpose of the interviews was to determine whether the components of spirituality seemed accurate and appropriate, and to further refine them based on conversations with these knowledgeable individuals.

Based on this research, the authors articulated the following definition:
Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning “breath of life,” is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendental dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

(p. 10)

The nine components that elaborate this definition are summarized as:

1. *Transcendent dimension*. The spiritual person has an experientially based belief that there is a transcendent dimension to life, and that harmonious contact with—and adjustment to—this unseen world is beneficial.

2. *Meaning and purpose in life*. The spiritual person has emerged from the quest for spiritual understanding with the conviction that life is deeply meaningful, and that one’s own life has a purpose.

3. *Mission in life*. The spiritual person has a sense of vocation, and a sense of responsibility to life.

4. *Sacredness of life*. The spiritual person believes that life is infused with sacredness, and does not see a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular; such a person may experience reverence and awe even in “nonreligious” settings.

5. *Material values*. The spiritual person can appreciate material goods and circumstances, but does not seek ultimate satisfaction in them, or to use them as a substitute for spiritual needs.
6. **Altruism.** The spiritual person believes that we are “our brother’s keeper,” is touched by the pain and suffering of others, and has a strong sense of social justice.

7. **Idealism.** The spiritual person is a visionary committed to the betterment of the world and the actualization of positive potential in all aspects of life; at the same time, he or she can love people and circumstances for what they are.

8. **Awareness of the tragic.** The spiritual person is solemnly conscious of the tragic realities in life, including human pain, suffering and death. Somewhat paradoxically, the awareness of the tragic does not diminish a spiritual person’s joy, appreciation and valuing of life.

9. **Fruits of spirituality.** True spirituality has a discernable, beneficial effect upon a spiritual person’s relationship to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers the ultimate. (pp. 10-12)

Mitroff & Denton (1999) also offer a somewhat detailed description of spirituality in which they identify common threads in definitions of spirituality offered by other writers:

- In contrast to religion, spirituality is not formal, structured, or organized.
- Spirituality is non-denominational.
- Spirituality is broadly inclusive; it embraces everyone.
- Spirituality is universal and timeless.
- Spirituality is the ultimate source and provider of meaning and purpose in our lives.
- Spirituality expresses the awe we feel in the presence of the transcendent.
• Spirituality is the sacredness of everything, including the ordinariness of everyday life.
• Spirituality is the deep feeling of the interconnectedness of everything.
• Spirituality is integrally connected to inner peace and calm.
• Spirituality provides one with an inexhaustible source of faith and willpower.
• Spirituality and faith are inseparable. (pp. 23-25)

Love and Talbot (1999) take a slightly different approach from the two definitions above. While the above definitions describe spirituality more as state of being, Love and Talbot set forth the following five central propositions that describe the process of spiritual development:

1. Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one’s current locus of centricity—going beyond one’s current limits toward more inclusive and holistic levels of awareness.
3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.
4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose and direction in one’s life—growing in enlightened knowledge and impersonal love.
5. Spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing. (pp. 364-367)
As might be expected, the more comprehensive definitions cover much of the same ground. There is a personal, internal feeling-intuition-awareness that gives an individual a sense of joy, meaning, calm, peace, well-being, direction and freedom. There is an interpersonal element that provides a sense of connectedness and oneness with others, which manifests both on a feeling level as love or goodwill, and on an action level as service to others, and living in accordance with life-affirming values. And there is a relationship with the unseen, transcendent, ultimate dimension of life that manifests as communion, awe, reverence—in fact, it is the connection with the transcendent dimension that brings about the inner qualities and feelings on the personal level, and the interpersonal sense of connectedness and desire to be of service.

It is interesting to note that none of the definitions set forth in this paper refer to God. This is no accident. As Love and Talbot (1999) point out, “Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism are profoundly spiritual traditions, yet make no reference to God” (p. 367). The idea of an unseen, transcendent, universal aspect of life is, of course, evocative of the idea of God; however, the perception of what God is, so to speak, is often different for a conventionally religious individual and a person who is more spiritually oriented in the non-religious sense. While conventional religions often portray God as an entity somewhat separate and apart from man, spirituality tends to see God as the totality of being and life that infuses every level of existence, including human existence. Mystics from all epochs have written and spoken of the experience of being one with God—for these individuals God is not an object of belief and faith, but rather an actual, ongoing and evolving experience. The idea of spirituality being both an ongoing process and experiential is very important—one never reaches a settled destination, and there is
always a deepening of awareness and understanding; these are qualities that make the
spiritual path analogous to developing mastery of a musical instrument, but in this case
the instrument is oneself.

Reflecting on the various definitions and perspectives on spirituality in the works
cited above, it is important to note the obvious: there is a great deal of overlap among the
definitions of spirituality, despite the fact some writers assert that it is not a concept that
can be easily defined. This seems to indicate that developing a reasonably comprehensive
working definition of spirituality for both research and instructional purposes is feasible.

It’s also important to note that some definitions treat spirituality as an observable
human phenomenon that can be operationally described, so to speak. These definitions
capture what spirituality appears to be without deciding the question of whether a
transcendent dimension of reality exists. Other definitions take the existence of the
transcendent for granted, which gives these definitions a different flavor. Perhaps one
reason for this difference in emphasis is that the idea of introducing spirituality into
conventional higher education institutions may be more palatable to individuals with a
scientific-materialist view of reality if spirituality is presented as a psychological need or
orientation of human beings rather than a transcendent characteristic.

Finally, some definitions look at spirituality more as a state of being, while others
look at it more as a process of learning and living. Perhaps this difference is due to
whether one is looking at spirituality from the outside or living it from the inside, so to
speak, or whether one is focusing on highly realized or ordinary individuals. While this
distinction is not so crucial, it’s important to note that faculty and students at places like
Naropa and CIIS generally view spirituality as an ongoing process whose end point will never be reached.

While the above definitions and descriptions of the phenomenon of spirituality and the process of spiritual development are fairly comprehensive, I believe they are incomplete in a few important regards. First, the definitions tend to emphasize what might be termed the “positive” aspects of spirituality. After learning about these aspects of spirituality, why would anyone not want to embark on a spiritual journey? After all, who would not want to feel peaceful, joyful, a deep sense of purpose, connected with others, inspired, and so on? And who would not want a means of avoiding a personal sense of depression even while acknowledging the tragic in life or being of service to those in tragic circumstances? In short, the attainment of spiritual awareness seems to offer nothing but personal and interpersonal benefits. While the ultimate fruits of spirituality are, I believe, accurately described, the spiritual process is not fully described in any of the definitions. As some of the great works on spirituality attest (perhaps most notably Saint John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*), the spiritual path is not only difficult, but also fraught with fear, anguish, doubt, and other forms of psychic pain. Moreover, the likelihood of complete success in one’s spiritual endeavors (measured by the attainment of what Maslow calls self-actualization and spiritual traditions often call self-realization) is small for the average individual within the span of a lifetime. The classic work of Indian philosophy, *The Bhagavad Gita* (Anonymous, trans. 1962) in fact places dismal odds on an individual succeeding fully in his or her spiritual quest. As Krishna, one of the divine incarnations of God, says to his human disciple Arjuna, “Among thousands of men, perhaps one strives for [spiritual] perfection; and among
thousands of those who strive perhaps one knows me in truth [i.e., attains full realization]” (p. 74).

The reason why the subjective experience of the spiritual path is at times so bleak—while the fruits of a spiritual orientation towards life are so profoundly rewarding—is explained in a number of works on spirituality, both ancient and modern (e.g., *A Course in Miracles*). It is simply that, for most people, engaging in a spiritual search for meaning involves a major re-direction of one’s focus and energies from the familiar material world to the unseen world of transcendent consciousness. In the process, one must over time increasingly relinquish mental and emotional attachment to everything that offers a sense of security and identity in order to connect ever deeper with the unseen source of ultimate reality that is, by its very nature, beyond logical proof and full intellectual understanding (even if it can be known and experienced in some sense), and often characterized by paradox. This process of deepening one’s spiritual awareness is subtle, painstaking and even painful and, for each individual, involves moving into and through uncharted territory. As Parker Palmer (1993) notes of this inward process, “we can be engulfed by internal darkness, by a cloud of doubts and anxieties and guilts, of recriminations, and resentments and regrets” (p. 123). In order to emphasize its subtlety and difficulty, Indian philosophy refers to the spiritual path as walking along the “razor’s edge.” Other traditions speak of a “pathless path,” which indicates how uncertain the direction of the spiritual path can be. If the inner process were not already confusing and hard enough, many individuals also encounter doubt, misunderstanding and even rejection from those around them regarding their spiritual activities.
Fortunately, though the spiritual path is difficult, the intangible inner benefits described in the definitions begin to accrue early on—for example, individuals may feel an occasional sense of peace and connectedness at a level deeper than they had previously experienced. Other experiences, such as moments of transcendence in the presence of beauty, in the warm company of loved ones, or for no seeming reason at all, also provide at least tentative insight into the nature of the ultimate, and strengthen motivation for continuing one’s spiritual investigations.

Another important aspect of spirituality not mentioned in the definitions and descriptions relates to the profoundly divided nature of human beings. As Elkins et al. note, all human beings are in part oriented towards ultimate, transcendent consciousness (whether or not they are aware of it). This transcendent aspect of human consciousness is what draws individuals to the spiritual path in the first place and what connects each individual with the unseen, ultimate reality. And this universal aspect—which we all share—is loving, accepting, compassionate, and innately wise. However, the transcendent aspect of human nature is, unfortunately, balanced by a temporal, body/mind based belief system that is referred to as the “ego” in some spiritual traditions such as Buddhism (note that the term “ego” in this context is different from the psychological concept used by Freud). The ego aspect of human beings, from the Buddhist or Eastern perspective, feels itself to be separate from every other being, and confined to the body and mind; by its nature, it is fearful, unstable and in continuous conflict and competition with its surroundings because of its sense of separateness and impermanence. The ego ceaselessly and fruitlessly seeks security and certainty in the external material world—a goal impossible to realize in a world characterized by incessant change and ultimately physical
death. Thus the ego inevitably feels endangered and powerless in the face of external circumstances, and victimized by the outside world; it is the source of hatred and the desire to attack, as well as of the feeling of guilt.

This division between the transcendent and materially oriented aspects of human nature is the source of individual suffering and interpersonal conflict; in fact, one of the Buddha’s greatest contributions to spiritual understanding was that human suffering—individual and collective—is inescapable so long as we are ruled by the ego-dominated mind, rather than oriented to the so-called higher Self. Echoing this understanding is Henry David Thoreau’s observation, “Most men lead lives of quiet desperation....” The internal division that all human beings experience further explains the arduousness of the spiritual path described above. Not only does the spiritual path require a deepening awareness of the transcendent, but it also requires ongoing self-reflection to identify old habits, patterns, viewpoints, and other conditioned aspects of one’s being, and a steady relinquishment of them. These more challenging characteristics of the spiritual path or process indicate that integrating spiritual practices into college courses and programs may be opening a Pandora’s Box of sorts. One can imagine that some students might be ill-equipped to deal with the inner challenges that can arise through spiritual practices, especially if these practices are new to them. So as spiritual/contemplative practices increasingly find their way into higher education, it should be understood that difficult psychological issues may arise with some students and there may be some students for whom spiritual/contemplative practices are not appropriate, at least without psychological support.
Spirituality and Epistemology

Reviewing literature that addresses the epistemological implications of spirituality in regard to higher education presents the challenge of sheer volume, with potentially relevant works spanning more than twenty-five centuries. Moreover, the discussions of spirituality in the context of higher education veer into a variety of related topics that are major areas in their own right, such as service learning, values-oriented education, inculcating affective qualities such as compassion, and promoting democracy and other civic virtues. Given this abundance of information and perspectives my goal for this section of the literature review is to first sketch some of the broad issues and challenges associated with what might be termed a spiritual epistemology, including the potential benefits and drawbacks of such a pedagogy, and then examine some of the higher education literature in this area. As noted above, I will not attempt an exhaustive presentation, but rather an illustrative one that elucidates the key themes relevant to my dissertation.

As a starting place, it is important to emphasize a point that is evident from the definitions and descriptions of spirituality discussed above: the existence and nature of transcendent or universal consciousness—like any first principle or fundamental paradigmatic perspective—cannot be proved logically or demonstrated empirically in a way that would compel acceptance by skeptics and non-believers. Rather, factors such as life experience, temperament, familial values, or societal conditioning may or may not predispose one to be open to phenomena that point to the existence of a spiritual reality. Another way of saying this is that one’s existing worldview (i.e., paradigm) determines profoundly how one interprets what is perceived, and even what data and experience one
will allow to register in one’s consciousness—a phenomenon described by Kuhn (1962, 1996). As Kuhn also points out, individuals who subscribe to competing paradigms pertaining to a common area of interest cannot, in some sense, fully communicate with one another even though they may to a certain extent use similar terminology and share similar values.

Another important point to emphasize is that while universal consciousness can be apprehended by individuals through intuition or certain experiential processes, the felt understanding or experience of an individual cannot be transmitted to another except through very inadequate, often paradoxical, terms. This is why information derived through spiritual/contemplative practices is often dismissed as “unscientific” or “subjective.” So conveying and working with spiritual concepts and practices in the classroom presents an entirely different pedagogical challenge to faculty members than imparting information grounded in the external material world.

Given the ultimately unprovable nature of universal consciousness and related spiritual principles from a conventional or logical perspective, perhaps the first question to ask is whether the truth of the spiritual realm even matters when considering a spiritual pedagogy. Rather than concerning oneself with the truth of spirituality, one can choose instead to study it as a widespread psychological phenomenon or need characteristic of human beings (the above definition of spirituality offered by Elkins et al., for example, takes a phenomenal approach). The unprovability of the transcendent has not, after all, prevented some of the greatest thinkers from embracing a spiritual perspective and living accordingly. For the purposes of my dissertation, it is not necessary to attempt to prove the reality of non-material realms of existence or other ultimate questions. Instead, I will
start with the assumption that there is a spiritual dimension to life, and will investigate whether certain spiritual perspectives and contemplative practices may be beneficially integrated into higher education. With these points in mind, I now turn to a review of the literature more specifically related to higher education in order to elucidate some of the epistemological and pedagogical implications of integrating spirituality into higher education. This literature describes the benefits of this integration—why this emerging approach deserves consideration—as well as the methodology of this approach.

One of the themes of the literature I reviewed is that integrating spirituality into higher education helps to develop the civic virtues of students. Dalton (2001), for example, notes that:

One outcome of a higher education that integrates spirituality with intellectual and personal development is a committed life of moral and civic responsibility.…. Such civic activism is essential to our political and social system since democracy requires citizen participation and commitment to such core values as justice, fairness, respect for others, and the common good. Higher education that ignores the spiritual dimension of learning and development … makes it less likely that graduates will be engaged citizens willing to do the long and arduous work of creating a good society. (p. 24)

Jane Fried (2001) sees spirituality as a means of restoring civility to college campuses. She notes that a “common understanding of what constitutes civility seems to have disappeared” (p. 262), a phenomenon she ascribes to a number of factors, including: “a wave of consciousness and self-definition that includes ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and class, and a range of other aspects of personal identity”
and the fact that people are “changing their residence faster than ever.” The result is that “we don’t know much about each other’s codes of courtesy or civility.” The growing consciousness of—and the emergence of self-definition among—traditionally marginalized groups are, of course, positive and necessary developments in our society, but they are developments that point to a need for a broadened means of communicating respectfully across cultural and other social boundaries. Fried also notes that “the competitive nature of academic life functions as a major barrier to … civility” (p. 286). Spirituality, which can be understood as “the ability to experience connections and create meaning in one’s life” (p. 286), can play an important role in restoring civility.

Laurence and Kazanjian (2001) see the integration of spirituality into college life as an important way of helping students to develop an appreciation of pluralism at a time when they are developing their own worldviews. This has potentially far reaching effects. As the writers state, “If spirituality creates openness, then rediscovering the spiritual dimension of education offers students, and consequently American society, the possibility of embracing diversity as a necessary step toward the actualization of a global community.” Eventually, “colleges will see themselves as global learning communities in which all kinds of diversity … are essential elements in a vital and vibrant educational experience.” This kind of education may therefore “play a significant role in leading the world into a more just and peaceful future” (p. 71). Though this is a utopian vision of the positive effects spirituality can have on strengthening the sense of community at every level, it captures the idea that spirituality can serve for many as a bridge between diverse faiths, and draw people together in a shared search for meaning despite their many personal and culturally acquired differences.
Civic engagement, embracing diversity, and restoring civility rest upon the ability of individuals to develop effective and meaningful relationships, which in turn requires the development of emotional intelligence. As Daniel Goleman notes (2006), contemplative practices strengthen what he sees as the four elements of emotional intelligence: “self-awareness” (“knowing what you are feeling as you are feeling it”), “self-mastery and presence” (“the ability to handle our disturbing emotions effectively”), “empathy” (“the ability to sense what other people are feeling”), and “resonance” (“managing relationships with another person” and “connecting heart-to-heart”) (pp. 147-152). It is only to the extent that a person engages in this inner growth that he or she can be an effective agent for positive change in the world. Additionally, Goleman sees emotional intelligence as the primary basis for effective leadership, and as another way of knowing the world—one dimension of intelligence among the “multiple intelligences” recognized by many psychologists, educators and writers. Increased emotional intelligence also enhances academic performance through enabling students to achieve a greater mastery over distressing emotions that might otherwise impede focused attention and sustained effort.

Another aspect of multiple intelligences is the capacity for intuitive-creative work, the capacity that allows for such things as scientific insight and artistic creation. As Kabat-Zinn (2006) notes, “Many of the great insights in science arose when individual scientists dropped their thinking minds for a moment and somehow gave themselves over to not knowing” (p. 160). Insight also grows out of a deep ability to contemplate phenomena, a heightened capacity to see and engage with the world (Zajonc 2006). This “delicate empiricism” helps one to apprehend the “essential features” of a phenomenon.
(p. 75); in fact, cultivating the ability of deep contemplation “creates a new organ of perception in us” (p. 69, quoting Goethe). Thus science and spirituality working together can bring about greater understanding of a phenomenon than would be possible by what might be called conventional observation, reason and analysis alone.

As noted earlier, spirituality is also seen as offering a way—difficult though it may be—to achieve a measure of personal happiness, well-being, joy and a sense of purpose. In this sense, spirituality is good in and of itself. As the Dalai Lama (1999) states, “What is the purpose in life? Of course, I believe that it is happiness. Our culture, our education, our economy—all human activities—should be meant for that goal. Nothing else” (p. 85). From the spiritual perspective, genuine personal happiness (meaning a calm feeling of joy and peace, rather than the mere experience of pleasure or the satisfaction of desire) goes hand-in-hand with compassion and service to others, and are mutually reinforcing. Unhappiness, on the other hand, often lies at the root of anger, greed, hatred and other socially disruptive emotions. Unhappiness also impels some to pursue pleasure, material goods, or other external means of achieving personal happiness, which tend to isolate individuals rather than engage them in community, and therefore exacerbates rather than ameliorates societal problems. So based on the understanding of spirituality developed above, one might say that what is conducive to genuine inner peace and happiness is also conducive to the collective good.

If spirituality is innate to human beings—psychologically or transcendentally—then facilitating its development and expression might also be considered good in and of itself, regardless of whether spiritual truth can be proven. For example, the philosopher Rudolf Steiner considered the body, mind and soul as forming an essential unity,
viewed education as the process for assisting the natural, timely and healthy unfolding of
the innate mental, physical and spiritual aspects of children and young adults (Oelkers,
2001). This unfolding process continues throughout life, which is why holistic
approaches to post-secondary education are important to consider. Achieving this type of
inner integration and unity supports a balanced and purposeful orientation to life, with the
obvious benefits that accrue to self and society. Similarly, the holistic education
movement (Miller, 1999), aims at developing the body, mind and spirit to form a unified
whole. The fact that human beings possess multiple intelligences—such as emotional,
intuitive, physical and spiritual, to name a few—indicates why a holistic approach is
likely to prove beneficial for the full development of an individual’s capacities. If
nurturing an individual’s innate developmental process through a holistic/spiritual
orientation to education leads potentially to a greater sense of personal well-being,
enhanced cognitive ability, greater creativity, the growth of wisdom and understanding,
and other personal and social benefits, it follows that inadvertence towards, ignoring or
actively stifling the innate developmental process—including the development of the
spirit—is stultifying and damaging, and ultimately alienating and destructive. These costs
are not only personal: as the unprovoked U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrates, the
psychological issues of unbalanced human beings can play themselves out in large scale
ways that are exceedingly destructive of human life, wasteful of resources, and
antithetical to civic values such as those enshrined in the Constitution and international
law.

As noted above, many writers have identified the benefits of integrating a
spiritual/contemplative dimension more extensively into higher education. What are the
possible downsides of this integration? Dalton (2001) notes an argument raised by one author to the effect that spirituality “promotes an internal feel-goodism that only infrequently inspires dedication to some higher claim” (p. 23). From Dalton’s lifetime experience of working with college students, he observes that “it is not a concern with feel-goodism that drives [students] to reflect on spiritual questions, but rather the relentless and fundamental questions they encounter about purpose and direction in their lives.” My own reading and observations also support the idea that most individuals who engage in spiritual studies and activities do so as a response to existential suffering and out of a genuine desire to find truth and meaning, not as an escape. In an era of binge drinking and rampant consumerism—not to mention Internet, media, video game and other addictions—the possibility that some students turn to spirituality for the sake of feeling good is probably the least of our worries. Of course, spirituality, like any other activity, has the potential for being used as an escape, and there is also the danger of cultism; so it is reasonable to be concerned that spiritual self-reflection might deflect individuals from seemingly more productive, outwardly focused activities.

It is also useful, however, to consider the possibility that some students might need a prolonged period of inwardness to sort out their own values and perspectives from those inculcated during a lifetime of external conditioning through education, family life, media and all of the many other factors that influence our beliefs and perspectives. It may be for some students that genuinely useful external productivity is only possible when sufficient self awareness and emotional control is developed (Goleman, 2006). Many of the great spiritual figures spent prolonged periods in silence and contemplation before setting forth on more public activities such as teaching or political activism. Rudolf
Steiner saw spiritual development as an essential aid to living effectively in the world, since it helps individuals develop inner balance, wisdom, equanimity, patience and other psychological traits necessary for effective action on all levels, and great figures such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King certainly evidenced in their lives the profound source of strength that is derived from a religious and spiritual orientation to life.

Probably a stronger possible objection to spirituality from a philosophical or epistemological perspective is that it might lead to a dangerous degree of subjectivity. Parker Palmer (1993)—one of the most influential contemporary advocates for reintegrating spirituality into higher education—notes that the pre-modern subjective mentality had a dangerous tendency to veer into “superstition, crude ideology and gross psychological projection” (p. 26). As discussed below, Palmer sees certain modern-day epistemological approaches, such as the scientific method, as providing some protection against pre-modern subjectivity, and many of the faculty that I interviewed for this collective case study clearly supported the idea that integrating spirituality into academic programs should not be at the expense of intellectual rigor. Succumbing to a dangerous degree of subjectivity will always be, of course, a possibility for some individuals, just as succumbing to greed or dishonesty will be a possibility for others. Living in accordance with a spiritual perspective does not, however, require one to surrender one’s intelligence and discernment; to the contrary, it appears from the literature and my research that certain spiritual practices enhance intelligence and discernment.

As noted earlier, a third potential drawback to integrating spirituality into higher education is that spiritual practices may trigger confusion, a feeling of inner darkness and other difficult emotions and mental states; this is certainly a possibility, and not every
student is ready to engage in spiritual practices. Finally, from the standpoint of more traditional pedagogies, I would imagine that many faculty members in conventional colleges and universities might be concerned that time spent on inner spiritual development would detract from time spent on curricular content and cognitive development; depending on one’s paradigm of higher education, this could certainly be considered a reasonable objection.

As discussed above, a number of authors state that spiritual perspectives and practices foster a number of personal and civic virtues, provide personal meaning, enhance creativity and intuition, and help individuals grow in the direction of greater happiness and peace. For those reasons alone, the questions of whether and how to integrate spirituality into higher education deserve full consideration. Next I look further at how spiritual/contemplative practices may expand and deepen our ability to know and understand the world, and how they might be integrated into the classroom—the epistemology and pedagogy of spirituality. To keep my literature review to a manageable length, I focus primarily on the writings of higher education practitioners who have considered these issues—with an emphasis on the works of Parker Palmer, since many of his views are representative of how a number of other writers have approached epistemology; also, Palmer’s ideas foreshadow some of what I learned conducting interviews at the two institutions I used for this case study. In the discussion of these cases, I will examine some additional literature on spiritual/contemplative epistemology and pedagogy that is pertinent to understanding these particular cases. Within the field of theology there may also be a rich literature on spiritual epistemology; however, it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to review this literature.
Parker Palmer (1993) considers the following the central questions of epistemology: What is the nature of the knower? What is the nature of the known? And what is the relationship between the two? In his work *To Know as We Are Known* (1993), Palmer engages in an extended epistemological discussion where he makes many points that are similar to the briefer epistemological observations offered by other writers (though sometimes with differing emphases). Palmer discusses how our views of knowledge are shaped by the very words we use—words like “fact,” “objective,” “theory,” and “reality.” He states that we come to believe in the truth of our own linguistic artifacts: that human beings are able to define reality by developing theories, through objective observation, based on facts that they perceive. Palmer terms this mode of knowing “objectivism,” and goes on to describe its methodology in detail, concluding that “Truth, by this view, consists of propositions or reports that conform to canons of evidence and reason, reports that can be reproduced by other knowers operating by the same rules [e.g., the scientific method]” (p. 27). The danger with objectivism is that it leads to an “estrangement and alienation” between the knower and the known. As Palmer states, “in our quest to free knowledge from the tangles of subjectivity, we have broken the knower loose from the web of life itself,” which, among other things, “has led to the collapse of community and accountability between the knowing self and the known world” (p. 26). So if we are to explore more effective ways of knowing the world, we must first realize that we are to some extent prisoners of our own mental concepts, models and theories, and are boxed in by the words we use to describe them.

It’s important to note that while Palmer writes of the limitations of modern ways of knowing, he also has great respect for their power and utility. He states that the
modern ways of understanding “are incontestable, not only in applied science but in the realm of culture as well” (p. 26). Also, as noted above, Palmer recognizes the dangers inherent in the pre-modern subjective mentality. He also notes that “The commitment to objectivity has helped untangle some very twisted strands of the human soul, distortion we must stand ‘over against.’ Indeed, the commitment to objectivity has good spiritual grounding. It can be a hedge against the sin of self-centeredness which affects everything we do, including knowing…,” and that “modern knowing has the capacity to turn upon itself and open itself to correction, a capacity pre-modern knowledge did not possess” (p. 26). The problem is not that rationality, logic, and the scientific method are flawed ways of understanding, but rather that dogmatic adherence to these methods and dismissal of other avenues of knowing—such as through contemplation, intuition, emotion, and spirit—dangerously limit our capacity to fully know and fully relate. Nor are we forced to choose between modern and spiritual ways of knowing. One of the most insightful observations that Palmer makes is that “prayer and contemplation have their counterparts in secular education.” He points out that:

The purpose of these disciplines [i.e., prayer and contemplation] is to see through and beyond the appearances of things, to penetrate the surface and touch that which lies beneath. In secular education, this purpose is served by research and analysis, by various forms of empirical study and logical thought. (p. 19)

The point that Palmer makes, in a variety of ways, is that integrating a spiritual perspective into how we learn about and understand reality does not require that we jettison other valuable means of knowing based on rationality and logic, but rather provides a way of augmenting our ability to understand reality.
How does Palmer envision navigating between the perils of alienating objectivity and dangerous subjectivity? He offers the following:

In truthful knowing we neither infuse the world with our subjectivity (as premodern knowing did) nor hold it at arm’s length, manipulating it to suit our needs (as is the modern style). In truthful knowing the knower becomes co-participant in a community of faithful relationships with other persons and creatures and things, with whatever our knowledge makes known. We find truth by pledging our troth [i.e., agreeing to engage in a mutually accountable and transforming relationship], and knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love. (p. 32)

In his discussion on epistemology, Palmer (1993) makes a short but profound observation: “The way we interact with the world in knowing it becomes the way we interact with the world as we live in it. To put it in somewhat different terms, our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic” (p. 21). Since our pedagogical methods reflect collective beliefs about how we know and learn, and what is worth knowing and learning, it is natural that incorporating a spiritual dimension into higher education will, over time, have an impact on how individuals relate with others and the world; indeed, this is an essential reason for considering this pedagogical approach.

Parker Palmer’s work, The Courage to Teach (1998), can in part be considered a primer on how to utilize spiritual understanding in the classroom. Since Palmer’s book is partly in response to prevailing pedagogical methods, it’s useful to first describe in some detail what Palmer sees as the dominant pedagogical approach, and then present some of his key ideas regarding pedagogy. As noted above, Palmer terms the dominant
epistemological model “objectivism.” The pedagogy that reflects the objectivist model of knowing can, in somewhat simplified terms, be described as follows:

1. *Objects* of knowledge residing “out there” in pristine form are what constitute the “facts,” concepts, theories and so on in a given field.

2. *Experts*—trained to know these objects without allowing subjectivity to influence their understanding—are the bearers of objective knowledge, and the individuals responsible for teaching.

3. *Amateurs*—students and others without training and full of bias—rely on experts to learn about objects.

4. *Baffles* exist at every point of transmission—between objects and experts, between experts and amateurs—that allow objective knowledge to flow “downstream” from object to expert to amateur, while preventing subjectivity to flow back up. (p. 100-101)

The objectivist model of pedagogy has several implications, among which are the ideas that the goal of education is to impart as much objective information as possible, and that one should distrust intuition and other seemingly non-rational approaches to knowing. As Palmer points out, this pedagogy also inevitably places the teacher at the center of the classroom as the main or sole authority, where his or her command of knowledge in the field and ability to lucidly impart this knowledge are considered the key ingredients for effective teaching. These views bear obvious similarity to the “instruction paradigm” described earlier.

The drawbacks of the objectivist pedagogical approach include not only the inability of students to retain and meaningfully assimilate large amounts of information
when conveyed through conventional teaching methods, but more importantly this approach creates an educational culture characterized by alienation, disaffection and fear—for students and teachers alike. Palmer summarizes the ills of our current pedagogy in what he calls four “broken paradoxes”:

- We separate head from heart. Result: minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think.
- We separate facts from feelings. Result: bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote, and ignorant emotions that reduce truth to how one feels today.
- We separate theory from practice. Result: theories that have little to do with life and practice that is uninformed by understanding.
- We separate teaching from learning. Result: teachers who talk but do not listen and students who listen but do not talk. (p. 66)

As I examine later on, the educational approaches of Naropa University and CIIS very much address these broken paradoxes, though the faculty would not necessarily use Palmer’s terminology.

Palmer, in constructing his model for effective pedagogy, starts from an entirely different set of assumptions than those underlying the objectivist approach. His main premise—one that appears to be widely shared by individuals who integrate spiritual/contemplative practices into their courses—is that a person cannot hope to be an effective teacher without cultivating self-knowledge and self-awareness, a point he makes in several ways at the outset of his work:
Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to my soul. If I am willing to look into the mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. (p.2)

Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are…. And when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will only know it abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (p. 2)

The work required to “know thyself” is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight. (p.3)

From a spiritual perspective, it makes sense that self-knowledge is a critical—if not the critical—foundation upon which effective teaching stands. First, to the degree that we lack self-awareness, we tend to act out of our conditioned “ego” nature. This means that we project onto others our own motivations, look to others to assuage our inner sense of lack, and—when things don’t go our way—tend to blame others and external
circumstances. In short, no matter how objectively a teacher tries to conduct the learning experience, the spiritual and psychological states of teachers and students must inevitably come into play in the process. If, for example, a teacher is trying in the classroom to prove how knowledgeable he or she is in order to assuage psychological needs, the role of students in the learning process will inevitably be diminished as the teacher seeks to impose his or her views, attacks the “incorrect” opinions of the students, and so on. This process inevitably breeds fear in the students and, as Palmer insightfully states, “The behaviors generated by fear—silence, withdrawal, cynicism—often mimic those that come with ignorance….” (p. 46). A teacher who lacks self-reflection, sensing the lack of spirit in the classroom, will tend to project onto students reasons why the classroom is so lifeless—that the students are brain-dead, don’t want to learn, are negatively influenced by the media, lazy and so on—further eroding the learning environment.

While it’s reasonably obvious that a teacher’s degree of self-awareness would influence the psychological condition of the classroom, it is less obvious that the teacher’s understanding of his or her discipline and the depth of his or her scholarship would also be affected by the degree of self-awareness, especially in disciplines considered more objective such as the sciences. This may be because ego-oriented individuals do not feel as comfortable living with their own internal unknowing and the fundamental mystery of existence, and therefore may have a harder time accessing the silent, formless dimension from which creative inspiration arises. They may also be more invested in the correctness of their currently held conceptual models and the information that defines them as experts, and fearful of perspectives that may put in doubt their expertise (this is another reason why individuals may tend to hold onto their current
paradigms). Furthermore, in their quest to be objective, they cut themselves off from a realm of experience that could inform the understanding of their discipline at the deepest level. In reflecting on the connections between self-understanding and pedagogy, and self-understanding and knowledge, it is interesting to note that Socrates, one of the greatest teachers and thinkers of all time, is reported to have said: “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being” and that Socrates—who professed to know nothing—was declared by the local deities to be the wisest man in Athens.

Recognizing that none of us are completely self-aware and that we must all work within a set of prevailing social structures and belief systems, how does one begin to address the internal challenge of one’s own relative lack of self-awareness and the external challenge of incorporating different pedagogical approaches in the face of the widely accepted objectivist model of pedagogy? Palmer offers two important correctives for the situation. The first corrective involves an inner process of developing what Palmer refers to as one’s “identity” and “integrity,” and deepening one’s “connectedness.” Palmer offers a number of related observations on these ideas, such as:

- “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10).
- “Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging on the irreducible mystery of being human” (p. 10).
- “Identity lies at the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death” (p. 13).
• “Authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity, remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from the depths of my own truth—and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind” (p. 33).

• “If we want to develop and deepen the capacity for connectedness at the heart of good teaching, we must understand—and resist—the perverse but powerful draw of the ‘disconnected’ life” (p. 35).

• “The culture of disconnection that undermines teaching and learning is driven by fear. But it is also driven by our Western commitment to thinking in polarities, a thought form that elevates disconnection into an intellectual virtue” (p. 61).

These thoughts echo a number of the ideas mentioned in the definitions of spirituality discussed earlier: developing a sense of wholeness; recognizing the essential connectedness of all individuals and all of creation; recognizing one’s vocation; being honest with oneself and others; the necessity of growing in awareness and transcending one’s current self limitations; connecting with one’s inner voice (what Palmer refers to as the “teacher within”) and so on. Naturally, Palmer does not expect teachers to first reach exalted heights of self-understanding before they set foot in a classroom—otherwise we would have mostly empty classrooms. Palmer understands that everyone, including himself, is a work in progress; he recounts, in fact, a few of his teaching fiascoes due to his own unexamined ego needs—fiascoes that happened long after he had become widely known for his philosophy of pedagogy and his skill as a teacher. Palmer sees the classroom as a laboratory for teachers to continually learn to transcend themselves through honest appraisal of short-comings and analyses of what does not work—a
process aided by teachers coming together to frankly discuss their experiences, both positive and negative. Once again, it’s important to note that a genuine spiritual orientation is anything but “touchy-feely,” or lacking in a kind of intellectual rigor—what Palmer is talking about is a process of relentless introspection—informed by experience, experimentation and communication—that continually generates new insights that lead to new experiments in the classroom. These new experiments are in turn evaluated.

A second way to address the excesses of the objectivist pedagogy is to transform the classroom from being “teacher-centered” to being “subject-centered.” According to this model, the teacher and students form what Palmer terms a “community of knowing” or a “community of truth” where the subject is at the center of discussion, rather than the teacher. Here are some of Palmer’s observations on this approach:

- “To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced” (p. 90).
- “Reality is a web of communal relationship, and we can know reality only by being in community with it” (p. 95).
- “The clues that allow us to know anything come from our relatedness to reality—a relatedness as deep as the atoms our bodies share with everything that is, ever has been, or ever will be” (p. 98).
- “As we gather around the subject in the community of truth, it is not only we who correct each other’s attempts at knowing, rejecting blurry observations and false interpretations. The subject itself corrects us, resisting our false framings with the strength of its own identity, refusing to be reduced to our self-certain ways of naming its otherness” (p. 106).
Just to note the obvious: the “teacher-centered”/“subject-centered” polarity is similar to the “instruction-centered”/“learning-centered” polarity presented by Tagg (2003), which again shows that the two educational paradigms focused on in this paper may be complementary and mutually reinforcing.

There are two underlying reasons—related to the spiritual ideas discussed earlier—why this approach is so powerful for stimulating learning. First, it reflects the essential unity and equality of human beings—a unity that enables insight, truth, useful observations and digressions, and other important contributions to a discussion to flow from every participant in the learning process, not just the teacher. Even ignorant and antagonistic remarks allow for important learning to happen when creatively explored. The second underlying reason is that everyone and everything in the world has a “voice”—is able to speak to us in some mysterious and meaningful way—if we are willing to suspend our preconceptions and existing knowledge. This process can happen when we’re alone, but it also can happen in groups—in an almost alchemical way—provided that the teacher is able to create and allow the silence and space necessary for new insights to arise. Within the spiritual perspective is the understanding that we are not responsible for imposing meaning on the world, but rather that meaning or truth is contained, in a sense, in every aspect of creation if we can learn how to be receptive to it. The idea that silence and space are necessary for allowing insight to arise is reminiscent of an old Zen story of a monk who was having tea with a samurai warrior. As the monk was pouring a cup of tea for the warrior, the warrior asked the monk to teach him all he knew. The monk continued in silence to pour tea even after the cup was full, soaking the warrior in the process. The warrior was about to strike the monk with his sword when—
fortunately for the monk—the warrior realized that the monk was demonstrating that before he could learn anything meaningful, he had to first free his mind of preconceptions—not to mention free himself from conditioned emotional responses like his angry outburst.

In the context of discussing the subject-centered approach, Palmer discusses the idea of using the “microcosm” to learn about the “macrocosm.” Palmer notes that teachers are constantly faced with the temptation to teach as much factual information as possible; however, delivering information through lectures is sometimes an ineffective teaching method. Using the metaphor of the hologram, Palmer observes that every discipline has some key problem or critical aspect that, if well understood, illuminates the underlying logic of the discipline, providing a solid basis for learning factual material (this is yet another paradox—the whole can sometimes best be understood by examining a small part). Parker describes how this subject-centered, microcosmic pedagogy was tried successfully at a medical school. Instead of attending lectures during the first two years, students right from the first day were brought into clinics, where they gathered in small circles around patients with real-life problems. After six years of conducting this pedagogical experiment, the medical school found that not only did the students exhibit improved skills in softer subject areas such as bedside manner and medical ethics, but also scored better on standardized tests on factual subject matter, despite the lack of more systematic delivery of content material.

To complete this overview of Palmer’s perspectives on pedagogy, I mention a series of paradoxes that encapsulate some of Palmer’s other key pedagogical ideas:

1. The [learning] space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and “charged.”

3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.

4. The space should honor the “little” stories of the students and the big stories of the disciplines and tradition.

5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.

6. The space should welcome both silence and speech. (p. 74)

These paradoxes show that teaching, like the spiritual path itself, has a razor’s edge quality that demands total attention to the moment and also the devotion to craft that is essential to doing anything expertly. This approach to teaching demands the highest level of alertness and involvement from the teacher, who must constantly gauge when to intervene and when to step back, when to create structure and when to allow for more free-form discussion. It also demands knowledge of technique and an awareness of which techniques work for oneself, without slavish adherence to any particular one. Ultimately it takes great presence, courage and openness to allow for the dynamic moment-by-moment unfoldment of the classroom conversation. This dynamic conversation, with unexpected twists and turns despite the most meticulous planning, is one important aspect of effective pedagogy.

One thing that is evident in the approach Palmer describes is that just as it is possible to describe a spiritual orientation to life without necessarily invoking a belief in God, it is also possible to develop a spiritual pedagogy without explicitly engaging in discussions on religion or spirituality in the classroom. In fact, his approach could be
used for any type of subject in any classroom setting, without the subject of spirituality ever being mentioned. The key for Palmer is the inner orientation of the teacher.

As noted above, a number of other writers also address in varying levels of detail the question of what it means to integrate spirituality into education at different educational levels. John Miller’s work, *Education and the Soul: Toward a Spiritual Curriculum* (2000), examines fairly comprehensively what he terms “soulful education.” Although the book focuses on primary and secondary education, Miller covers material that is equally relevant to post-secondary education. For example, he describes the following “Principles of Soulful Learning”:

1. The sacred and secular cannot be separated.
2. The dominance of the secular has led to a repression of our spiritual life.
3. An awareness of soul can restore a balance to our educational vision.
4. We can nourish the student’s soul through various curriculum approaches and teaching/learning strategies.
5. The authentic and caring presence of a teacher can nourish the student’s soul.
6. Soulful education must be accountable.
7. Teachers need to nourish their own souls. (pp. 139-142)

Although Miller’s terminology is somewhat different from Palmer’s, there is a great deal of overlap in their thinking. First there is the idea that the teacher’s inner qualities play a major role in how students respond to—and and whether they flourish within—the learning environment. Second, integrating spirituality into the classroom should not be at the expense of having diminished expectations of academic rigor and performance on the part of students, though performance may need to be assessed
differently. (Palmer also explores how student assessment could be designed in ways that are in line with his other principles for effective pedagogy, in order to increase the learning and motivation of students and foster a sense of community rather than competition.) And Miller and Palmer share many observations regarding the harm that results when the sacred and secular are artificially separated, and the secular is given predominance.

The writer and teacher bell hooks is also an advocate for bringing spirituality into higher education, a subject she covers at some length in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). In her essay “Embracing Freedom: Spirituality and Liberation” (1999), she offers some impressionistic thoughts on this subject, based in part on the inspiration she derives from the Buddhist writer and teacher Chögyam Trungpa who, as noted above, founded what is now Naropa University. Hooks states that “we can’t begin to talk about spirituality in education until we talk about what it means to have a life in the spirit,” which points again to the central idea that the individual teacher’s self-awareness and spiritual wisdom provide, in the end, the only foundation upon which spirituality can be meaningfully integrated into education. Hooks points out, however, that “living the life of the spirit is difficult. It is not a life that is about how much people are going to like you” (p. 115). Not only is the life of the spirit difficult for the teacher, but for students as well. As hooks notes, “… often, when we meet a teacher who plunges us into deep and profound mystery, we don’t like it. It’s not easy, and it’s not easy to be such a teacher.” This brief observation reiterates the key point made previously: the ego aspect of human beings seeks certainty and desires to continue pleasantly in its current set of habits. The objectivist pedagogy—though deadening and alienating—is also, in a sense, safe in that it
does not drive us to confront our own inner contradictions. Embarking on a deeper connectedness with oneself and others in the context of the classroom is a little like waking up from an operation and experiencing the anesthesia wearing off—a greater sense of well-being and normality will eventually result, but not first without an intensification of the pain. A spiritual pedagogy may produce pain, anger, resistance and other disruptive emotions—many of which will be aimed at the teacher—precisely because a community of truth is collectively pushing beyond familiar outer and inner territory. Students may consciously find such a process dissatisfying in the short run, no matter how deeply educational it may be, which adds another challenge to developing a spiritual pedagogy.

As noted above, Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual philosophy offers insight into the connection between spiritual development and cognitive development. An important aspect of Steiner’s thought is that human beings possess a range of latent abilities that, if activated through certain types of spiritual exercises, enable them to experience and know the material world more deeply and accurately, and also to know and experience what he terms “higher worlds” as well—subtle or non-material realms of existence or reality (Easton, 2008, provides an excellent introduction to Steiner’s wide-ranging works). Basically, Steiner notes that various soul qualities—most notably thinking, feeling and willing—can be developed and heightened in such a way as to enable a far deeper understanding of all phenomena, both inner and outer. The normal thinking and feeling processes are often conditioned and fragmentary, and so lead the individual into well-worn, unproductive intellectual and emotional ruts; the heightened thinking and feeling that Steiner writes about, in contrast, allow the individual to tap into the intuitive, creative
immediacy of the present moment from which new insights, concepts and syntheses arise. Meanwhile, the development of the will capacity is essential for being able to redirect one’s energies and to act with purpose and precision in the world. The relevance that Steiner’s thought has to higher education is the idea that basic aspects or capacities of human nature—intellectual, psychological, emotional, etc.—are far from being fixed. In fact, through patient and persistent effort they can be greatly and even radically transformed. These heightened capacities serve both the individual in terms of increased knowledge and abilities, and the world in terms of a greater orientation to service to others. However, the transformational process is engaged through activities not normally found in conventional educational settings: spiritually oriented activities such as contemplation, meditation, wordless non-judgmental observation, and so on. These sorts of activities are also found in other spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, and are discussed or alluded to in Palmer’s work.

Arthur Zajonc—a physics professor at Amherst College who founded the organization noted earlier, Contemplative Mind in Society, and currently serves as the president of Sunbridge College—is one of the leading advocates for the integration of spiritual/contemplative knowledge and practices into higher education courses and programs. As a scientist, his observations on epistemology are particularly interesting, given the objectivist/materialist epistemology prevalent in Western culture, particularly in the hard sciences. He claims that intellectually we are operating according to the following “false map” (2006, p. 57):
Faith vs. Reason
Belief vs. Knowledge
Religion vs. Science

While these polarities have their conceptual usefulness, Zajonc states that “‘spirit’ actually resides on and animates both sides of this mapped polarity,” by which he means that spirituality—the more direct, lived personal experience of the transcendent discussed earlier—allows individuals to access the “common root” of science and religion through “an active and refined use of appreciation and insight” (p. 58). This may lead to a deeper, more integrated knowledge of phenomena and to tapping the intuitive-creative source from which knowledge is initially derived. Zajonc quotes Emerson’s observation in this regard: “And never did any science originate, but by a poetic perception” (p. 64). Like many other writers cited in this dissertation, Zajonc clearly values intellectual skills such as reasoning, analysis, conceptualization and so forth; he recognizes, however, that such skills by themselves tend to lead to a formalistic engagement with knowledge, where “models become idols” rather than “vehicles or aids to engagement with their true object” (p. 76). The solution to this limited perspective is “cycling between … formalisms and direct apprehension” (p. 77); this process involves “an interplay between our participation in the world, insight regarding the adoption of an apt perspective, formulation in terms of concepts and ideas, and further (hopefully enriched) participation” (p. 76). In short, Zajonc is envisioning an enlarged epistemology, rather than an alternative epistemology. Why is this enlarged epistemology necessary? Zajonc offers the following reason:

The world view on which contemporary higher education is constructed is too limited. Its impoverished and largely reductive understanding of the world
inevitability leads to partial solutions to the problems we face in such areas as education, health care, agriculture, and economics ("A New Vision for Higher Education: Re-Imagining Sunbridge College," retrieved on November 2, 2008, from www.sunbridge.edu/files/New Imagination, on November 2, 2008).

**Spiritual/Contemplative Pedagogy in Practice**

It is one thing to formulate and justify a new paradigm in a given field and quite another to operationalize it. As noted earlier, once a paradigm has been accepted by a critical mass of practitioners within a field, a new set of activities commences aimed at applying the paradigm to a range of specific problems. For scientific paradigms, as noted earlier, Kuhn (1962, 1996) refers to this set of activities as “normal science,” which involves such things as testing hypotheses that flow from a paradigm, developing new equipment to measure phenomena that reflect the new paradigm, and verifying aspects of the paradigm through experimentation. Kuhn views these types of activities as a form of puzzle-solving, where the puzzles are supplied by the paradigm (pp. 35-42).

In the same vein, one would expect that adherents to the spiritual/contemplative/holistic paradigm in higher education would, at some point, shift from a focus on broad definitions, descriptions, explanations and justifications to the practical details of implementation (i.e., puzzle-solving-type activities). Along with the questions of how to implement a spiritual/contemplative pedagogy, one might expect to observe a variety of “normal” research activities that, for example, might demonstrate more specifically the relative efficacy of certain spiritually oriented practices in the classroom. From the literature review and my research, it appears that these types of implementation and research oriented activities are to some extent underway; however,
the main focus within mainstream higher education, it appears, continues to be on defining and justifying the spiritual higher education paradigm.

It’s important to be mindful that Kuhn formulated his paradigm framework in regard to the natural sciences, and that most of his examples pertain to chemistry and physics. For such fields, new paradigms fully replace old paradigms—a classic example being the Copernican revolution, which led to the relinquishment of the Ptolemaic earth centric view of the universe and the simultaneous adoption of a heliocentric view. For the arts and social sciences—and for some of the more “artful” sciences such as medicine—such a neat progression of paradigms obviously does not happen. Certain paradigms may gain prominence and subsequently wane in popularity, only to reemerge at a later time, often under a new name. Incompatible paradigms may also simply exist indefinitely, since they are based on a different philosophic understanding or belief regarding the nature of reality. I don’t expect either the spiritual paradigm or the objectivist paradigm in higher education to triumph anytime soon, and I can imagine Naropa University and MIT both going strong indefinitely while reflecting very different worldviews. Also, some paradigms that began as separate phenomena may merge under a new, overarching paradigm. Integrative medicine, which is attempting to marry “evidence-based medicine” and alternative/complementary medicine, is a good recent example of how this can happen. (As a side note, one interesting aspect of this merger of paradigms is that evidence-based medicine and alternative/complementary medicine were initially in nearly complete opposition, but there has been an evolution in both types of medicine that has allowed for harmonization of the paradigms. It should be noted, however, that integrative medicine is still far from being universally accepted within conventional medicine.) So
while there are many indications of a growing acceptance of a spiritual/contemplative epistemology in higher education and increased use of spiritual/contemplative pedagogical practices, one should not expect a linear process to unfold that will result anytime soon in a complete transformation of the higher education landscape — though one could imagine a process that might lead to a radical change in higher education philosophy over a long period of time. With these considerations in mind, I now come back to ground level, so to speak, to examine how the broad ideas concerning spiritual epistemology and pedagogy are being translated into concrete educational activities.

Apart from places like Naropa University and CIIS where faculty have been experimenting with utilizing a spiritual/contemplative pedagogy for more than 35 years — and apart from a relatively small number of individuals like Palmer and Zajonc who have on their own, so to speak, developed more comprehensive spiritual/contemplative approaches to higher education within conventional higher education settings — it appears that most faculty who are interested in this area are still somewhat tentatively exploring what it means to integrate spirituality into the classroom in the context of individual courses. From my research, it appears that program-wide or department-wide initiatives to integrate spiritual/contemplative knowledge and approaches are few and far between in conventional institutions, with one notable exception being the psychology department of the University of West Georgia, a state university that offers BA, MA and PsyD programs. On its website, the department describes itself as having “a unique emphasis in humanistic and transpersonal psychology,” and states that “The whole person is our concern. Literature, history, art, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, neuroscience, and philosophies of the East and West inform and enrich our program.” Their programs
are designed to promote “understanding of oneself and others,” and they “see this understanding as the basis for personal growth and development, insight into psychology itself, and preparation for professional life” (retrieved on November 4, 2008, from www.westga.edu/~psydept/). This approach is similar in content to the psychology programs offered by Naropa University and CIIS. In the case narrative sections below I examine how faculty within a spiritually oriented institution integrate a spiritual/contemplative pedagogy into courses and programs; the remainder of this section is devoted to examining how this pedagogical approach is being developed in courses within conventional higher education institutions.

As indicated by the discussion above, integrating spirituality into the classroom could consist of no more than the teacher having a certain type of self-awareness, an internal sense of transcendent consciousness, and a spiritual orientation towards the students and the subject matter that together inspire his teaching methods and influence his behavior in the classroom. An individual teacher with a strong spiritual practice might, after all, prefer not to explicitly address spiritual issues in the classroom, either for personal reasons or because it seems inappropriate to the subject matter at hand or the nature of the academic environment in which he or she works. As Palmer and others note, the inner orientation of the teacher inevitably has a profound impact on the classroom environment—including the level of student engagement, the way in which subject matter is taught, and how well students learn—regardless of whether the teacher consciously sets out to alter his or her instructional methodology. The way in which a spiritually oriented teacher engages with students and academic subjects is in itself an expression of his or her spirituality, since what we believe influences how we relate to
others. A teacher’s unspoken, inward approach to integrating spirituality is what one might call a one-sided spiritually oriented pedagogical approach, in that it does not explicitly require students to engage in spiritual practices or consider spiritual subject matter, but rather is aimed at creating a classroom culture that nurtures the spirit.

Spiritual subject matter and practices can also be more explicitly integrated into courses, and logically there appear to be at least three ways to do so: (i) spiritual information, concepts, and other ideas can be presented as a body of knowledge, just as a course on Medieval history might cover the religious beliefs of the people of that time; (ii) spirituality can be welcomed as a topic of discussion in a course and as a perspective through which to view the course material, and students can be encouraged to freely bring up spiritual issues; (iii) spirituality can be introduced more experientially through certain processes and activities, such as meditation and contemplation, that provide avenues to students to deepen their own self-understanding, expand their awareness, and tap into other ways of knowing. Additionally, these approaches could be combined.

As noted earlier in this paper, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society offers annual seminars to assist faculty in the development of syllabi that incorporate spiritual/contemplative material and practices, and Chickering et al. (2006) have compiled a few illustrative samples of course syllabi that have a strong spiritual orientation (see pp. 294-309). These illustrative syllabi include: a first year seminar at Amherst College entitled “Eros and Insight,” which among other things seeks to introduce students to “contemplative knowing”; a Duke University course entitled “Agony and Ecstasy: Spirituality through Film and Literature,” which uses these two art forms as a way of developing understanding of important spiritual concepts such as
“faith, humility, simplicity and tradition”; and a course entitled “Spirituality and Business Leadership” taught at Santa Clara University (a Jesuit inspired institution) that draws upon spiritual literature and contemplative practices from a variety of traditions to address a range of topics such as “Integrating Business Leadership as a Calling into the Spiritual Journey.”

Each of the above courses has an explicit content focus on spiritual philosophy and a varying degree of experiential practice, with the primary focus being on an intellectual understanding of spirituality. One can imagine a different approach where, for example, contemplative practices are introduced as a way of heightening awareness of otherwise conventional subject matter, but spiritual philosophy is not otherwise part of the course content. Barnett et al. (2000), in their discussion on approaches to integrating spirituality into a management course, assert that it is not really feasible to address spirituality in the usual content-focused way. Noting the “paradoxes and conundrums” involved in trying to define spirituality, and the fact that spiritual paths and understandings vary from person to person, the authors recommend that the professional focus of teachers should be directed “away from course content” and towards “the instructional process that enables students to learn about their own spirituality” (p. 564).

Barnett et al. mention what they see as two challenges related to teaching about spirituality: “Manag[ing] the paradox of teaching personal knowledge”; and the fact that, for many people, discussions on spirituality lead to “arguments and advocacy” about religion. The authors further observe that, as a result of these factors, discussions on spirituality can become so uncomfortable and intense as to “shut down students’ listening abilities” (pp. 574-575). The potential for discomfort and conflict to arise in an academic
course that engages students in a spiritual process is, I believe, a key issue that only
sometimes is noted, but that needs to be researched and understood fully. Much depends,
of course, on the type of institution where a course that includes a spiritual component is
offered. Students who attend Naropa University or the California Institute of Integral
Studies are aware that these institutions integrate spirituality and contemplative practices
into their programs and, in fact, choose these institutions because of this orientation; even
in those institutions, however, tension can arise in regard to expressions of spirituality.
Students who attend a conventional business school are not, I would venture, anticipating
encountering spiritual topics and practices in their courses—especially required
courses—although the research conducted by UCLA’s Higher Education Research
Institute cited earlier indicates that many students might welcome the inclusion of some
spiritual content in their studies.

In order to counter the possibilities for conflict, the authors recommend starting
any discussion on spirituality with a “clear statement that (a) distinguishes spirituality
from religion, (b) promotes broad acceptance of the notion that spirituality emerges from
a great diversity of sources, and (c) respects individuals’ needs for having their personal
and private spiritual experiences as and how they choose” (p. 574). This seems a
thoughtful set of points for an instructor to make in any course that seeks to explicitly
incorporate spirituality, either as subject matter or process, in any educational institution
where there are likely to be students with strongly differing perspectives on spirituality
and religion—especially if there is no express institutional or departmental commitment
to the inclusion of such material.
How do Barnett et al. suggest incorporating the process of spirituality without what they consider the paradoxical informational component? Basically, they have constructed several exercises that ask students in writing to reflect on their own spiritual experiences and process of spiritual development, as well as to discuss the spiritual nature and process of someone each student considers to be very spiritual. Based on these reflections, the teacher asks questions to encourage discussions on spirituality with the ultimate aim of “engaging students in self-discovery about their deepest energy source, the spirit, and how they can develop it to fulfill their and their organizations’ larger purposes and meanings” (p. 578).

In contrast to the approach to teaching spirituality described by Barnett et al. (2000), Patterson et al. (2000) describe in detail how spirituality was integrated into a graduate-level course in family therapy in a way that focused more on objective subject matter than on the spiritual process. The course was meant to address the fact that, due to the lack of attention the spiritual dimension in their training, “family therapy students often overlook the systemic effects of a person’s spirituality on the self and the system.” Additionally, the authors state that “not only do spiritual issues have meaning and relevance for clients but also the students needed training in the spiritual domain. Furthermore, another premise is that therapists in training can benefit if they are also caring for themselves by attuning to personal values, beliefs, and ways of knowing” (p. 202). The authors provide a detailed outline of the course, including assigned readings, writing assignments and discussion topics, all of which contributed to the students learning about a variety of spiritual traditions and perspectives, and to encouraging students’ reflection on their own spirituality. Self-reflection—which also appears to be
used heavily at Naropa University and CIIS, and is one of a number of learner-centered
techniques—represents a way to engender in students greater self-awareness without
potentially causing controversy through the introduction of contemplative practices.

Patterson et al. make the interesting observation, in line with some of the
observations on the demanding nature of inner spiritual work offered earlier in the
literature review chapter, that students had much stronger personal reactions to the course
on spirituality than to other courses in the curriculum—and that the course material could
“evvoke equally strong reaction by the instructor or classmates” whenever an individual
student in the group seemed to be pursuing a personal agenda (p. 207). These types of
reactions point to the added challenge of introducing spiritual concepts and practices into
a heterogeneous academic environment that lacks a shared commitment to a process of
inner exploration and personal growth. Finally, the authors state, “the most commonly
noted strength of the course was its value in a clinical practice” (p. 207). This latter
point—that the ability to practice a profession can be enhanced by learning about
spirituality—was noted by other authors as well, and is an important justification for
deepening our understanding of how to most effectively and appropriately integrate
spirituality into different academic disciplines.

In concluding this section of the literature review, I should note that most of the
literature I have touched upon in the literature review chapter of the dissertation was
written by individuals in conventional higher education institutions who are sympathetic
to the idea of a there being a place for spirituality in these institutions, but who otherwise
may not be deeply involved with this movement. This literature tends to have more of an
exploratory, cautious and descriptive quality about it; depending on the article or book,
the focus tends to be on demonstrating that there is an emerging spiritual paradigm in conventional higher education, helping the reader understand the dimensions of the paradigm, and showing that this approach has the potential to help meet some of the major challenges faced by educators, such as promoting civic engagement and tolerance of diversity. There is also a focus in a number of works on harmonizing the spiritual/contemplative paradigm with other conventional higher education paradigms, such as liberal education and the assessment paradigms, as a way of building support for what is still a controversial area in conventional higher education.

Some of the literature was written by committed spokespeople for this emerging paradigm, such as Parker Palmer and bell hooks, who generally work within conventional higher education settings but operate comfortably within this paradigm; this literature evinces a deeper understanding of this dimension of higher education and also seeks to persuade the reader of the value of integrating spirituality more comprehensively into the fabric of higher education institutions.

The case narratives offer the perspectives of individuals who incorporate a spiritual/contemplative approach to higher education within the context of institutions that fully embrace this paradigm; these perspectives reflect and enlarge upon much of what has been covered in the literature review, and also provide in some ways a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of a spiritual/contemplative approach to education.

The variation in tone and the range of depth of the literature in the area of spirituality and higher education is similar to what is observed in the literature related to alternative and complementary medicine. This is due to the fact that there is a collision of
paradigms happening, with some people rejecting (or at least maintaining a skeptical attitude towards) the emerging paradigms of spirituality and holistic medicine, some people taking a sympathetic stance but without a depth of knowledge of the paradigms, and some people fully embracing the new paradigms to the point that they view the conventional paradigms as both counter-intuitive and counter-productive.

As the literature on spiritual pedagogy indicates, a number of writers associate the idea of paradox with the idea of integrating spirituality into higher education. This is partly a reflection of the fact that writers and readers who are relatively unfamiliar with the idea of integrating inner and outer development find the language of spirituality difficult to understand and often genuinely paradoxical, and partly because some writers may see this as a more engaging or compelling way to convey the delicate balance required to integrate spiritual knowledge and practices with conventional content information and skills development (Palmer, I believe, falls into this latter category). None of the people I interviewed at Naropa or CIIS, however, referred to paradoxes in relationship to their work, though they certainly recognized the subtle challenges of integrating the teaching of academic content with activities aimed at developing self-awareness and promoting inner growth.

Finally, one of the most interesting points raised by several writers, most notably Palmer, is that an instructor’s efforts to deepen his or her own self-awareness is what may ultimately have the most profoundly transformative effect on the classroom experience of students and their own inner development. This is indicative of the dynamic tension between being and doing, and between process and content—a tension which I believe is found in many human activities. I examine this topic further in the case narratives.
Learner-Centered Epistemology and Pedagogy

As noted in the introduction, and more fully presented in the conceptual framework table presented in that chapter, learner-centered epistemology is the conceptual lens I am using to better understand emerging spiritual/contemplative approaches in higher education. If one accepts the idea that a reasonable goal of higher education—at least for some institutions and certain types of programs—is to foster human development holistically in multiple dimensions of being (cognitive, emotional, relational, physical and soul, to name several), then it makes sense based on the literature reviewed above to consider the role that incorporating spiritual/contemplative teaching and learning approaches might play in achieving deep learning across these various dimensions. In this section of the literature review, I examine in greater detail the learner-centered educational paradigm and indicate ways in which learner-centered pedagogy and spiritually oriented pedagogy may relate. As with the previous sections of the literature review, I focus more narrowly on several representative works that I believe provide a strong basis for working with this concept, rather than attempting an exhaustive review of the literature. My main focus is on the seminal article by Robert Barr and John Tagg, “From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” published in *Change* magazine (1995), and John Tagg’s book, *The Learning Paradigm College* (2003), which elaborates upon and extends some of the ideas in the Barr and Tagg article. The table in Chapter 1 is based on these works and sets forth the concepts that are central to the analysis below of my research material. I also touch briefly on some other recent movements in higher education that may have influenced the development of the learning paradigm and on two contemporaneous movements—integrative education and
transformational (or transformative) education—that have certain similarities to the learning paradigm. As noted earlier, a few writers have conceptually expanded these latter two movements, so to speak, to include a spiritual dimension that was not part of the original movement.

As a starting place, I feel it’s important to note that Barr and Tagg’s observations regarding the limitations of conventional higher education and some of the ways to overcome them are not new, and they cite various writers whose perspectives inform their thinking. Nor is the idea new that a broader, more holistic and experientially based educational approach may offer benefits that cannot be found in education delivered through lectures and books, for example the application of learning to real world problems. This idea is, for example, at the heart of the lengthy debate between John Dewey and Robert Maynard Hutchins on the purpose of undergraduate education (Ehrlich, 2005). However, as noted above, Barr and Tagg’s formulation, elucidation and contrasting of the two competing paradigms—the instruction paradigm and learner-centered paradigm—starkly sets forth key issues regarding student learning with a level of clarity that has, it appears, sharpened the debate over whether and how to move higher education in the direction of greater learner-centeredness.

As I noted earlier, the learner-centered paradigm arose out of the realization that the instruction paradigm is often ineffective in inculcating—in a deep and lasting way—the very knowledge, skills, abilities and values that educators deem important. On a more personal level, the instruction paradigm creates a sense of discomfort or a feeling of inauthenticity for many educators due to the lack of alignment between what they believe and value and what they do in the classroom. As Tagg points out, this discomfort is often
unsatisfactorily dealt with through the mechanism of espoused theories and theories-in-use—a sort of institutionalized hypocrisy that, to some extent, shields individuals from a full awareness of this lack of alignment. In addition to theories-in-use that support the instruction paradigm, there is also a widespread institutional response to inertia to transformational change due to prevalent academic/administrative structures such as the three-credit course, the fixed academic calendar, reliance on final grades and the GPA as the primary evaluation mechanisms, and so on. The very omnipresence of these structures and how we talk about them lends a sense of naturalness and inevitability—and even invisibility—to current educational practices that make them difficult to reform.

The discomfort felt due to the lack of alignment described above—like the existential suffering described in Buddhist philosophy—provides an impetus to change. As Mohandas Gandhi observed, “Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.” The reverse is also true: thoughtful individuals suffer on some level when faced with an inner contradiction, such as the contradiction between a person’s values and actions. When the discomfort is sufficiently acute, some individuals will seek a greater alignment even if it means confronting strongly entrenched beliefs and well-established organizational structures. As Barr and Tagg (1995) note, “In our experience, people will suffer the turbulence and uncertainty of change if it promises a better way to accomplish work they value” (p. 25). One first needs, however, to be clear about one’s values and how one’s current work is out of alignment with them, otherwise a feeling of discomfort or tension may be experienced on some level, but not be sufficiently understood to allow for a purposeful response. By defining two competing paradigms, Barr and Tagg make the source of the lack of alignment clear.
The way that Barr and Tagg in their article, and Tagg in his book, define the competing paradigms is by describing their contrasting qualities, which one might say can be conceptualized as polarities or opposite ends of a continuum. There are two basic polarities at the heart of their work:

- Deep learning versus surface learning; and
- Learner-centered educational approaches and structures (the “learning paradigm”) versus instruction-centered educational approaches and structures (the “instruction paradigm”).

Barr and Tagg assert—and I’m sure that few people would dispute—that deep learning should be the central goal of higher education, though what dimensions of human development are an appropriate focus for higher education would be open to discussion. They argue that implementing learner-centered approaches supported by a variety of institutional structures provides a powerful means by which to achieve the goal of deep learning. This distinction between the goal of deep learning and the means of achieving it is important, since it may also be the case that certain educational approaches or structures that do not fall within the learning paradigm as articulated by Barr and Tagg may also support the goal of deep learning. This is a point that I will return to later in this study.

In order to make these global polarities accessible to educators—to operationalize them, so to speak—Barr and Tagg break down the ideas of deep learning and surface learning and learner-centered and instruction-centered approaches and structures into sets of polarities that educators can use to orient efforts to transform the learning environment. Barr and Tagg’s polarities address the full gamut of a higher education
institution—including mission and purposes, teaching/learning structures, assessment, role of the faculty and staff, and productivity/funding—since they rightly observe that every aspect of an institution can either be conducive to or detract from the goal of deepening student learning. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to attempt to analyze my research data from the perspective of all of the polarities that Barr and Tagg set forth; rather, as presented in Chapter 1, I utilize those polarities pertaining most directly to pedagogy and the role of faculty members.

What the various polarities or contrasting qualities presented by Barr and Tagg show is that higher education is not a static enterprise, but operates dynamically along a multidimensional continuum. Tagg makes clear the benefits that accrue to students and society if teachers, students and institutions move in the direction along these dimensions that promotes deep and meaningful student learning, and he presents various educational practices that have the potential—if used effectively and in combination—to cause this beneficial movement. These contrasting qualities also remind educators that to truly serve the needs of their students requires constant striving and ongoing experimentation on the part of both individual teachers and their institutions, since the end of the continuum can never be finally reached. This idea of constant striving and ongoing experimentation is similar to the process of inner growth that Palmer Parker describes: the idea that teachers must resist the natural tendency we all share towards inertia—towards becoming crystallized in one’s views and professional practices—so that their endeavors and interactions retain a lively, life-affirming creativity capable of bringing out the same in students.
As noted above, Barr and Tagg present a sharp contrast between the two paradigms: either an educator/institution is operating according to the instruction paradigm or the learning paradigm, since they are by definition incompatible. However, they recognize pragmatically that the transition from being a primarily instruction oriented institution to being primarily learner-centered is likely to be gradual and painstaking, and that faculty in one academic department may operate more along the lines of the instruction paradigm while in another department in the same institution they may be utilizing learner-centered approaches. And though the paradigms may be logically incompatible, some of the structures and pedagogies associated with the instruction paradigm can be made to serve the needs of a learner-centered approach; indeed, within instruction oriented institutions educators have developed a number of pedagogies that are well-suited to fostering a learner-centered environment. Among these, as Tagg points out, are collaborative learning, service learning, problem-based learning, and undergraduate research. However, for an institution to truly transition to being learner-centered, it is not enough to simply borrow certain existing pedagogies and educational practices on a piecemeal basis, though that can obviously be beneficial; the use of these pedagogies and practices must be sufficiently intensive, widespread and interconnected as to create a qualitatively different educational environment in the institution and mindset among the students, teachers and administrators.

It is interesting to observe that while the instruction and learner-centered paradigms are defined by their mutually exclusive characteristics situated at either end of a continuum, the spiritually oriented pedagogy described by Palmer, as noted earlier, combines what might be seen as mutually exclusive characteristics (this reflects the
sometimes paradoxical quality of the spirit applied to human activity). These mutually exclusive characteristics include such as things as the learning space should be hospitable and charged, bounded and open, and so on. It seems to me that a central problem that the learner-centered paradigm is meant to address is the widespread passivity and disconnectedness engendered by not only the way that education is structured for most students, but also by other aspects of our culture including extensive media exposure. By its very nature, passivity erodes civic engagement and keeps one mired in habitual, unproductive ways of living and being. Constructive activity, on the other hand, shakes things up internally, and may therefore free life energies for a more purposeful engagement with life; that’s why a person who is feeling depressed can sometimes be helped by taking a long walk in nature. The fact is that certain beneficial intellectual, psychological and soul qualities need activity as well as understanding to develop, just as do athletic or manual skills; that’s why Tagg emphasizes the importance of persistent, interconnected activity. However, intellectual or socially beneficial activities alone do not ensure useful inner development or creative external engagement, and that’s where spirituality enters in, since activity can lapse into habitual forms or lack meaning and coherence for an individual. Somehow the source of activity must remain fresh, creative and meaningful. The qualities of freshness, creativity and meaning are contributed by a healthy spirit, and a healthy spirit requires nurturance through a certain orientation to life, such as Palmer describes, and through various spiritual/contemplative practices. One might say that the spirit contributes the “why” that fundamentally motivates and energizes student learning, while learner-centered education contributes the “how” and provides a different means of motivating students. Thus there is something of an iterative
effect: contemplative/spiritual practices inform action and action serves as a catalyst for spiritual development.

These observations reiterate and further elaborate on why I believe that a spiritually oriented pedagogy might complement and advance the aims of a learner-centered pedagogy, and why these pedagogies might be synergistic. Among other things, the literature covered earlier indicates that a spiritually oriented pedagogy has the power to enhance cognitive development, deepen engagement with knowledge, deepen concentration, clarify personal goals and values, and promote civic engagement and the ability to work effectively in groups. These outcomes are also, to a large extent, aims of a learner-centered pedagogy. Ultimately, both pedagogies aim to encourage a greater dynamism in education—a dynamism that values substance over form, and that promotes a deepening of such personal traits as self-awareness, cognition, and intellectual ability, as well as socially beneficial traits related to an individual’s values and capacity for purposeful action.

It appears that there has been something of a confluence of ideas and movements among educators to address the shortcomings of conventional higher education associated with the prevailing instruction paradigm. As noted above, Barr and Tagg reference ideas from a variety of sources that show that educators have been aware of the serious limitations inherent in this paradigm for some time. One might say that these educators were exploring ways within the instruction paradigm to overcome these limitations, rather than necessarily aiming at a wholesale transformation. While it is beyond the scope of my dissertation to trace the genesis of the learning paradigm and to examine in detail the confluence of Barr and Tagg’s ideas with other innovative ideas over the last 20 years.
or so aimed at revitalizing the college experience, it is useful to note briefly several examples of what seem to be the confluence of certain ideas or movements in higher education in order to provide some further context for the learner-centered paradigm, and to explore how the spiritual/contemplative paradigm and the learner-centered paradigms may be starting to overlap.

One example of a higher education perspective that seems in line with some aspects of Barr and Tagg’s thinking is Chickering and Gamson’s “The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” (1987, pp. 3-7). These principles are:

1. **Good practice encourages student-faculty contact.**

   Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

2. **Good practice encourages cooperation among students.**

   Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one’s own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.

3. **Good practice encourages active learning.**

   Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out
answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

4. **Good practice gives prompt feedback.**

Knowing what you know and don’t know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. In getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

5. **Good practice emphasizes time on task.**

Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one’s time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators, and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. **Good practice communicates high expectations.**

Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well-motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling
prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations of themselves and make extra efforts.

7. **Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.**

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learning in ways that do not come so easily.

The similarities between Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles and the characteristics of a learner-centered pedagogy are evident, including the need for engaging in active learning including frequent performance, the emphasis on feedback/assessment over evaluation, and the utility of team projects. There is also a shared recognition that students possess multiple forms of intelligence. What makes the Seven Principles of Good Practice different from learner-centered pedagogy is that Barr and Tagg went one step further than assembling a compendium of effective educational practices meant to address currently perceived deficiencies: they created a compelling context for an integrated approach to innovation, namely the learning paradigm. The Seven Principles provide a more incremental approach to improving education, rather than a new map to guide transformational change. However, even if they don’t aim at transformational change, the Seven Principles and similar innovations will likely have a beneficial influence on instruction-oriented educational practice and are, I believe, entirely compatible with a contemplative/spiritual pedagogy.
Another place where a confluence of ideas seems evident is in the educational outcomes assessment movement. Like Barr and Tagg, other educators have realized that the quantity and quality of an institution’s educational inputs (highly credentialed faculty, impressive facilities, a sizable library, etc.) do not necessarily translate into high-quality educational outputs or outcomes. Moreover, to some or a great extent, institutions were not even aware of the educational outcomes of their programs, other than through the basic and relatively uninformative assessment mechanisms Tagg describes. Hence, a number of educators have discussed the importance of articulating educational outcomes, developing multifaceted assessment measures to determine whether outcomes are being achieved, exploring qualitative means to assess the development of more intangible personal qualities, and utilizing the information derived through assessment measures to improve educational programs. This movement in higher education, which is reminiscent of the Total Quality Management movement in business, is exemplified by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), as can be seen from the following excerpt from the NSSE website:

Established methods for assuring quality in higher education contain few external incentives for individual colleges and universities to engage in meaningful quality improvement. This is especially true in the all-important area of enhancing undergraduate education. In part, this is because the conversation about “quality” has been centered on the wrong things. Institutional accreditation processes, despite their recent emphasis on assessing student learning and development, deal largely with resource and process measures (retrieved on September 22, 2007,
from www.nsse.iub.edu/html/origins.cfm; this passage is in the section entitled “Our Origins and Potential,” under the heading “Background and Rationale”).

In addition to advocating for greater attention to the actual outcomes of the educational process as a necessary foundation for improving the quality of higher education, NSSE also advocates for a greater use of active and student-centered teaching methods, as indicated by a passage from an article by Kuh (2003) on the NSSE website entitled “The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties” (retrieved on May 6, 2007, from www.nsse.iub.edu). Referencing Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles, Kuh states that:

> Emphasizing good educational practice helps focus faculty, staff, students, and others on the tasks and activities that are associated with higher yields in terms of desired student outcomes. Toward these ends, faculty and administrators would do well to arrange the curriculum and other aspects of the college experience in accord with these good practices, thereby encouraging students to put forth more effort (e.g., write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, use information technology appropriately) which will result in greater gains in such areas as critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship.

Other educational movements that seem to have had a bearing on the development of the student-centered education paradigm include the civic engagement and service learning movements. Service learning is one of the powerful pedagogies that Tagg (2003) discusses in his work as supporting a student-centered approach, and service learning is
often tied into the goal of enhancing the civic engagement of students. As Thomas Ehrlich notes in his article “Civic Engagement” posted on the website of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (retrieved on September 20, 2007, from www.measuringup.highereducation.org/2000/articles/ThomasEhrlich.cfm):

Service learning—academic study closely tied to community service through structured reflection—is a particularly important pedagogy for promoting civic responsibility, especially when used with collaborative learning and problem-based learning, two other modes of active learning. Service learning connects thought and feeling in a deliberate way, creating a context in which students can explore how they feel about what they are thinking and what they think about how they feel; through guided reflection, it offers students opportunities to explore the relationship between their academic learning and their civic values and commitments.

Like Tagg, Erlich describes how certain deeper educational results can be attained through a set of interconnected educational activities that require active pedagogies (including approaches that require students to engage in public performances); however, Erlich stops short of articulating a new paradigm, but rather argues for inclusion of several powerful educational approaches.

The integrative learning movement is, in a number of ways similar to the learning paradigm. The following are some of the key features of integrative learning, as set forth in an article entitled “Integrative Learning: Mapping the Terrain,” by Huber and Hutchings (2004). The article starts by noting that “one of the great challenges in higher education is to foster students’ abilities to integrate their learning across contexts and
over time” (p. 1), an observation reminiscent of the learning paradigm. The authors recognize ways in which integrated, connected learning is now occurring on college campuses, such as “First-year seminars, learning communities, interdisciplinary studies, capstone experiences, portfolios, student self-assessment, and other innovations…” (p. 1); these are active approaches similar to those advocated by Barr and Tagg, and like Barr and Tagg they lament that such educational experiences “often involve small numbers of students or exist in isolation, disconnected from other parts of the curriculum and from other reform efforts. Indeed, the very structures of academic life encourage students to see their courses as isolated requirements to complete” (p. 1).

The integrative approach is intended to foster “intentional learning” on the part of students, which is similar to the ideas of “intrinsic motivation” and “mindfulness.” Intentional learning, like a contemplative educational approach, requires students to develop a type of inner awareness:

Reflection. Metacognition. Learning how to learn. Whatever the language or lineage, the idea of making students more self-aware and purposeful—more intentional—about their studies is a powerful one, and it is key to fostering integrative learning. Assisting students to develop such capacities poses important challenges for campus reforms around teaching and learning. (p. 7)

Just as integrative medicine has proven a useful vehicle for bridging the worlds of conventional medicine and alternative medicine, thereby introducing a mind-body-spirit approach into conventional medicine, Joseph Subbiondo (2006), president of CIIS, sees the integrative education movement as providing a vehicle for exploring ways to integrate spirituality into higher education, and notes that this exploration is already underway.
This is an example of how an active pedagogical approach in higher education that, like learner-centered education, initially lacks a spiritual dimension can be conceptually expanded to include such a dimension.

Similarly, Duerr et al. (2003) see a natural link between transformative learning and a spiritual/contemplative pedagogy, since “transformation is central to all spiritual traditions” (p. 179). They acknowledge, however, that “the academic field of transformative learning did not begin with inclusion of the contemplative or spiritual” (p. 179). Like a learner-centered approach, transformative learning involves a number of interrelated activities, including critical self-reflection, a process of discourse, and external action (see Merriam and Caffarella, 2007, pp. 130-159). This is another example of how the aims of a powerful conventional pedagogy can potentially be furthered by adding a spiritual/contemplative dimension, even though that was not the original intent.

**Concluding Thoughts on the Literature Review**

It is my hope that the literature review has provided a fairly complete introduction to the two distinct paradigms/pedagogies—the learning paradigm and spiritual/contemplative pedagogy—at the heart of my dissertation topic and research questions, and has provided some insight into their potential synergy. It is also my hope that using paradigm theory as a lens through which to understand these two pedagogical movements has provided insight into the challenges that educators face—and the potential benefits they may gain—in adopting and potentially integrating these emerging paradigms to address a variety of educational problems and issues. I believe that my research findings presented in Chapter 4 further support my view that these two paradigms are complementary and synergistic in the sense that utilizing both pedagogies
together is likely to result in deeper, more interconnected learning than either approach used on its own.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the Research Design

As I began delving into the literature on spiritual/contemplative teaching approaches and how they might advance the aims of learner-centered teaching approaches, it became clear that my research questions could be addressed most effectively using a qualitative research method. The primary reason is that I am dealing with an emerging movement in higher education the nature of which is still relatively unclear. As Merriam (1998) states, the goals of a qualitative research investigation are “understanding, description, discovery, meaning, [and] hypothesis generating” (p. 9); these are among my goals for this dissertation. Merriam also states that phenomenology, which involves “depict[ing] the essence or basic structure of a phenomenon” (p. 16), is a “school of philosophical thought that underpins all of qualitative research” (p. 15). Although my dissertation is not a phenomenological study per se, this philosophic stance is appropriate for my research topic in that I am seeking to understand the essence of a spiritual/contemplative approach in higher education—primarily through the lived experiences of individuals involved with this movement in the two higher education institutions that serve as my cases (see also Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58).
I chose case study as the specific qualitative research method to use for my dissertation—in particular, a collective or multiple-case study involving two cases (also referred to as a “cross-case” study). Different writers define case study somewhat differently, though usually with some overlap. Creswell (2007) defines case study research as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Generally, case study involves an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (Merriam, 1998, p. 12). Case studies are characterized by several traits (Merriam, pp. 29-30), including being particularistic, thickly descriptive (i.e., they provide a rich and evocative description of a phenomenon), and heuristic (they help to illuminate a phenomenon). The above descriptions of case study methodology and characteristics generally apply to the case study research I am conducting with a couple of caveats: (i) due to distance and financial constraints, I was able to spend only one week at each research site, which limited the depth of onsite data-gathering possible, and (ii) I concentrated primarily on conducting semi-structured interviews on-site and secondarily on gathering various written documents—rather than on field observation or other approaches to gathering data—because of both time and logistical constraints.
There are several reasons why I believe a case study approach is appropriate to my specific research questions and topic in general:

- Case study is a useful approach when there are “clearly identifiable cases with boundaries” that have the potential to “provide an in depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74); these are, for the reasons described earlier, characteristics of the two cases that I chose for this study.

- Case study is useful for investigating exploratory questions regarding “a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003, p. 9).

- Unique or atypical cases—such as the two higher education institutions I am studying—can help to elucidate a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 33).

- A case study, as noted above, is useful when the “boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13); this is true of my topic, since I’m interested in part in understanding how spiritual/contemplative approaches to education are applied in practice within higher education institutions committed to such an approach.

- Case study is suited to understanding a “process” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33), which in this case is the implementation and potential results of particular teaching methods.

- Case studies are a useful approach when there is an interest in discovering the “multiple realities” of participants (Stake, 1995, p. 64).
Stake (1995, p. 3) differentiates between two types of case studies: “intrinsic,” where the researcher’s interest is primarily in describing a particular case under study, and “instrumental,” where the researcher’s interest is primarily in developing a general understanding from the study of particular cases. My case study takes an instrumental approach, with one of my goals being to identify findings that may prove generalizable to other higher education institutions (I further discuss the issue of generalizability below).

**Selection of Sites and Interviewees**

A key aspect of qualitative research is that “generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of case study research,” and therefore “probabilistic sampling is not necessary or even justifiable”; thus, “a non-probabilistic sampling is the method choice for qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Merriam further notes that “the most common form of [non-probabilistic sampling] is purposive or purposeful” (p. 61). Purposive sampling or selection means simply that the researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Using purposive sampling requires that the researcher “first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). My selection of Naropa University and CIIS was purposive. As noted earlier, these are, by all accounts, two of the leading—if not the leading—institutions in the country in terms of a commitment to integrating spirituality and contemplative practices into academic programs. They also share certain similarities—which were my selection criteria—that make them comparable and also provide them with a certain level of conventional legitimacy in higher education: (i) they are regionally accredited institutions, (ii) they are
multipurpose, offering a variety of state-approved degree programs at the baccalaureate and/or graduate levels, (iii) they are non-denominational and their faculty draw upon a variety of spiritual traditions, (iv) they are well-established institutions, having been in existence for 35 years or more, and (v) from the time they were founded, they have incorporated spiritual/contemplative knowledge and teaching methodology as an essential aspect of their missions along with a commitment to conventional academic rigor.

In addition to taking a purposive approach to site selection, I also took a purposive approach to selecting interviewees, which for this study were faculty members and the institutional/academic leaders (presidents and academic vice presidents). My selection criteria for faculty at each institution included the following:

- To the extent possible, interviewees should be ranked or core full-time faculty members at their respective institutions (i.e., non-adjunct), since presumably these faculty members would have a deeper understanding of institutional mission and academic culture, and a commitment to spiritual/contemplative approaches to teaching and learning;

- At least eight faculty members would be interviewed at each institution, drawn from among a minimum of four different academic disciplines; and

- Faculty members would, ideally, evidence some level of deeper engagement with the spiritual/contemplative approach beyond simply being an instructor at the institution (e.g., engagement with research and writing on spiritual/contemplative teaching approaches or a reputation for being particularly knowledgeable in this area); this criterion was not possible to achieve in the case of every interviewee,
but I did have the opportunity to interview faculty at both institutions who were engaged in scholarship in this area.

In order to identify faculty at each institution who might be suitable interviewees, I utilized a simple “snowball” approach (Merriam, 1998, p. 63): I asked the presidents and academic vice presidents to identify individual faculty members based on the selection criteria noted above as well as any other faculty members they thought might have useful perspectives on my topic; all were willing to provide recommendations. I then contacted every recommended faculty member to request an interview, and nearly all of them were available to be interviewed. The following is summary background information on the faculty members I interviewed at the two institutions:

- At Naropa University, I interviewed a total of 11 faculty members in the following programs (note that in a few cases faculty had dual appointments):

- At CIIS, I interviewed a total of 9 faculty members in the following programs (note that in a few cases faculty had dual appointments): East-West Psychology; Integral Counseling Psychology; Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness; Clinical Psychology; Women’s Spirituality; Integrative Health Studies; Somatic Psychology; and Asian and Comparative Studies.

As noted above, in addition to interviewing a number of faculty members representing to some degree a cross-section of the academic programs offered at each
institution, I interviewed the president and academic vice president at the two institutions. There were several reasons why I thought this would be useful: these individuals would be able to give me an overview and perspective on the missions of their respective institutions that I might not get through faculty interviews alone; both of the presidents and one academic vice president had written general articles on the integration of spirituality into higher education; all four individuals had previously worked in more conventional higher education institutions, and therefore could potentially provide some comparative insight; and I was interested in seeking information on two secondary topics—institutional/academic governance and outcomes assessment—because they were potentially useful for addressing my primary topic.

**Interview Protocol**

As I noted above, I relied on interviews as the primary mechanism for conducting on-site research on my topic. As Stake (1995) states, “Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others…. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p 65).

There are a variety of potential interview formats, ranging from “highly structured/standardized” to “semi-structured” to “unstructured/informal” (Merriam, 1998, p. 73). I chose to use a semi-structured interview format in order to focus the substance of the interview on topics relevant to my dissertation while providing the leeway necessary to allow for an interactive conversation that might generate insights and understanding not possible through a structured interview alone. As Merriam notes, “[A semi-structured
The interview format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74).

I developed interview protocols as a guide for both the faculty interviews and the president/academic vice president interviews. In developing the protocols, I tried to avoid questions generally understood to be unproductive in the context of qualitative research—“multiple questions,” “leading questions” and “yes-or-no questions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 79). I also tried to word the protocol questions in such a way as to increase the likelihood that the respondent would provide information directly pertinent to my research questions. Once I developed a draft interview protocol, I tried it out on a faculty member from a nearby liberal arts college who is interested in the spiritual dimension of higher education and made some adjustments to the protocol based on this trial interview. Included in this dissertation, as Appendix B, is a copy of the faculty and the president/academic vice president interview protocols I developed.

The individual interviews I conducted generally lasted from about 45 minutes to an hour—though a few individuals were willing to be interviewed for more than an hour. Since there was a limited amount of time available with each individual, it was neither practical nor advantageous in the context of a given interview to attempt to cover every question contained in the interview protocol or to seek information relevant to every aspect of my research questions. Therefore, the topics I covered varied somewhat from interview to interview; however, the information I derived cumulatively from the interviews spanned the full range of topics I wished to cover.
Validity and Reliability

By its very nature, qualitative research has a strong subjective element due to the fact that the researcher—a human being—is the primary instrument for conducting research. For the same reason, the results of qualitative research are generally not reproducible by other researchers. More generally, as Merriam (1998) notes, “one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured as in quantitative research” (p. 202). Given these characteristics of qualitative research, works on qualitative research usually address the issue of whether qualitative research findings can be considered valid.

The concept of validity is itself, however, somewhat variable in the context of qualitative research, and definitions of validity range from being fairly technical and involving multiple categories (see, e.g., Lee, 1999, pp. 148-153) to being more commonsensical. For my research purposes, the following more commonsensical conceptualizations of validity are sufficient. Maxwell (2005) refers to validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or some other account” (p. 106). Similarly, Merriam (1998) states that “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is there?” (p. 201) (note that “internal validity” in this context is the same as Maxwell’s “validity”).

Drawing upon qualitative research literature and her own experience, Merriam describes several strategies by which the validity of research can be enhanced:
• “Triangulation—using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p.204);

• “Member checks—taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p.204);

• “Long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon” (p.204);

• “Peer examination—asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge” (p.204);

• “Participatory or collaborative modes of research—involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings” (p.204); and

• “Researcher’s biases—clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (p.204).

Another important strategy to add to this list is “searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 112). This involves “rigorously [examining] both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion…. ” (p. 112).

In the case of my research, I relied on triangulation as the primary strategy for enhancing the validity of my findings. The following are the ways in which I employed triangulation:

• I conducted research at two different higher education institutions;
• I interviewed a number of different faculty members at each institution, drawn from several different academic departments;

• I interviewed the presidents and academic vice presidents at each institution; and

• In addition to conducting interviews, I reviewed written documentation pertaining to each site, including research articles written by faculty and senior administrative staff, archival material, and current publications about the institution and its programs.

In addition to triangulation, I have tried to discipline myself in the analysis phase to recognize and assess discrepant data. I have also tried to clarify my possible biases (see my personal statement in Appendix A). Finally, I sent my research findings to a few people at both campuses for feedback.

As an outsider conducting case study research at two institutions, I took both a sympathetic and a realist approach to my research. Creswell (2007, pp 69-70) describes realism in the context of an ethnography, but I think it applies as well to case study. While my personal interests and values are in line with the spiritual/contemplative higher education movement, I have also tried to present my research findings as objectively as possible through a careful analysis of documents and interview material to identify consistent themes. Due to time constraints, I have not been able to utilize the other strategies listed above to further enhance the validity of my findings, and this admittedly may detract somewhat from the ultimate validity of the findings.

The concept of “reliability,” which is derived from experimental research, is also mentioned in qualitative research literature, though not as frequently, it appears, as its companion concept “validity.” According to Merriam (1998), “Reliability refers to the
extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated will it yield the same results?” (p. 205). Merriam notes that the concept of reliability, applied to qualitative research in education, is of questionable value: “achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible” (p. 206). Rather than focusing on the reproducibility of results by other researchers, Merriam states—referencing a work by Lincoln and Guba—that reliability can be thought of as “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206). The strategies for achieving consistency are triangulation and “describing in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 207). From this perspective, the concept of reliability and the means of enhancing it overlap with the concept of validity. As noted above, I incorporated triangulation in a number of ways into my study design. I have described above how I chose my cases and selected individuals to interview. My approach to deriving categories for analyzing data was to search for consistent themes, whether or not the faculty and staff expressed these themes utilizing identical terminology.

Generalizability

There is some question within qualitative research literature whether—and to what degree—the findings from a single case or a few cases can be generalized beyond the cases themselves and, if so, in what way (see Merriam, 1998, pp. 207-211 for various views on generalizability, also referred to as “external validity”). While some writers take the view that generalizability is not possible in the context of qualitative research, it appears that most seem to accept that generalizability is possible to some degree. In the context of qualitative research, a number of writers refer the concept of “naturalistic
generalization” (see, e.g., Creswell, 2007, p. 163; Merriam, 1998, p. 211). Lee (1999) defines this concept as follows:

With naturalistic generalization, judgment about the generalizability of a qualitative study’s results to another context is based on the researcher’s personal experience. In particular, this judgment derives from the researcher’s tacit knowledge about participants, operations, and activities, and how they affect one another. Almost certainly, most persons would acknowledge that at least some meaningful generalization can occur naturally (p. 158).

Another way of looking at generalization is the idea that qualitative research can lead to development of “working hypotheses”—though this too can be seen as problematic (Merriam, 1998, p. 209).

I understand that there are inherent limitations in making generalizations when utilizing qualitative research methods. In addition to the obvious limitations due to the particularity of the two cases I studied and the subjectivity that qualitative research involves, I also note several other limitations that are specific to my study:

- The types of faculty and students who choose to work and study at the case institutions are obviously self-selecting in the sense that they already share to some or a great extent certain philosophical orientations and spiritual beliefs, so generalizing the findings beyond these institutions poses challenges.

- The two cases are private institutions, and one is largely a graduate institution (its one undergraduate offering is a BA completion program); this may limit the generalizability of the finding to many other types of institutions—especially public colleges and universities.
The academic programs at the two institutions are heavily weighted to the humanities, social sciences and arts—with a particular emphasis on Eastern spirituality and psychology; therefore, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to a number of other disciplines.

Recognizing these limitations, I have nonetheless attempted to articulate naturalistic generalizations through triangulation and careful analysis of data.

**Ethical Issues**

Merriam (1998) notes that with all forms of research there is a “concern that the investigation be conducted in an ethical manner” (p. 212), and that in the case of qualitative research “ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings” (p. 213). To somewhat mitigate potential issues in data collection and dissemination of findings, I presented my research protocol—including an interview script—to the University of Massachusetts (Boston) Institutional Review Board (IRB), which approved the research. The research protocol included a waiver form signed by interviewees that explained the nature of the project and the rights of interviewees to cease participation in the study. The IRB approved the research protocol and I used it with the interviewees, all of whom willingly agreed to participate.

Perhaps the primary ethical issue involved with my study is that I have identified the two cases, rather than keeping them anonymous. I did so for the simple reason that they are unique within the American higher education community and would therefore be readily identifiable regardless. I have, however, kept the names of all of the faculty members I interviewed anonymous as one way of mitigating the ethical concerns
associated with disseminating the data. It is, of course, impossible to keep the names of the presidents and academic vice presidents anonymous should someone wish to discover them; however, in the study I do not refer to these individuals by name in order to provide a small measure of anonymity. The presidents and academic vice presidents were apprised in the waiver form that I could not guarantee their anonymity. Since my intent is to utilize the data I derived from my study only for my dissertation, this will also somewhat mitigate potential concerns regarding the identity of the institutions and interviewees due to the likely limited circulation of the dissertation.
CHAPTER 4
INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, my primary goals for this dissertation are to better understand and define the emerging paradigm of contemplative/spiritually oriented higher education and to explore whether spiritually oriented higher educational practices enhance, and perhaps complement, the effectiveness of learner-centered education in terms of promoting deeper learning. In this chapter, I explore what spiritually oriented education means in the context of my two cases: the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) and Naropa University. In particular, I describe their respective teaching and learning approaches—referred to as “integral education” at CIIS and “contemplative education” at Naropa—from the perspective of the participants (both founding and current), drawing upon written materials I reviewed and the interviews I conducted. I also describe some of the pedagogical practices utilized by faculty members, and what are seen as the effects that this approach to education has on students. Finally I describe how faculty and senior staff view academic governance and assessment as supporting their approaches to education. After presenting the individual case narratives on CIIS and Naropa, I present a cross-case analysis the primary goal of which is to identify common aspects of the two cases. These common aspects can, in a sense, be seen as providing a
basis upon which to articulate a spiritual pedagogy paradigm. In the next chapter, I utilize my conceptual framework—learner-centered pedagogy—to analyze the material presented in this chapter in order to draw conclusions regarding my research questions, with the main focus being on my grand tour question.

In order to elucidate the educational paradigms, I examine them from two perspectives: (i) how the founders and/or early participants of the institutions formulated their educational vision, and (ii) how this vision is currently expressed in published materials, the writings of faculty and administrators, and in the interviews I conducted. In presenting the paradigms, I’m interested in giving the reader a sense of the fundamental philosophic assumptions that underlie the paradigms, the issues or problems that each paradigm is meant to address, and the broad methodologies that characterize each paradigm. This information, in turn, provides the basis for identifying the various pedagogical practices that are currently utilized to achieve the paradigms, as well as the internal and external challenges associated with translating the paradigms into practice. In presenting the educational paradigms, it’s important to note that they both reflect aspects of major spiritual traditions—Hindu and Buddhist—that have an extensive and often complex literature pertaining to educational philosophy and practices that developed over the course of centuries. Therefore, capturing the philosophic essence of these approaches in the context of this chapter will necessarily involve some degree of simplification.

**CIIS Campus Narrative**

*History of the Institute and Chaudhuri’s Vision of Integral Education*

As noted earlier, “the California Institute of Integral Studies was founded in 1968 by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, a philosopher, educator, and humanist from Bengal” who
was eager to implement in a Western educational institution the integral approach to education that he had developed as a student of Sri Aurobindo, the renowned Indian philosopher and yogi. Over the past 30 years, the Institute’s original emphasis on Asian religions and cultures evolved to include comparative and cross-cultural studies in philosophy, religion, psychology, counseling, cultural anthropology, organizational studies, health studies, and the arts (retrieved on December 29, 2008, from www.ciis.edu).

CIIS was originally founded as a graduate institution under the name California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), which itself was an outgrowth of an earlier educational venture, the American Academy of Asian Studies. The idea of the Academy of Asian Studies was conceived by San Francisco businessman, Louis Gainsborough, who brought in a noted Asian studies scholar from Stanford University, Frederic Spiegelberg, to help him realize the vision of a graduate level institution that would provide instruction in a wide range of Asian subjects and arts, including Asian philosophies. Spiegelberg, in turn, recruited Alan Watts and Haridas Chaudhuri, as well as a number of noted Asian studies scholars (see “The American Academy of Asian Studies,” an unpublished manuscript in the CIIS Archives). It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to provide more than this brief description of CIIS’s history, but it’s important to note that in addition to Chaudhuri’s vision for a holistic, spiritually oriented approach to education (“integral education”) as described below, CIIS at the outset focused on graduate education in Asian studies.

In order to understand the integral educational approach, it is first necessary to understand some of the philosophic assumptions upon which it rests and the problems
that it is intended to solve. In presenting this information, I draw primarily upon a work written by CIIS founder, Haridas Chaudhuri, entitled *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* (1977), which contains a section on Chaudhuri’s educational philosophy (see pp. 77-92). I also draw upon an article by Chaudhuri entitled “Education for the Whole Person” (n.d.). Chaudhuri, in turn, drew primarily upon the work of Sri Aurobindo—one of the great yogic philosophers and writers of the 20th century and also a major figure in the early days of the Indian independence movement—and his associate Mirra Richards (also known as the Mother).

There are several fundamental philosophical assumptions—shared by a number of religious traditions—that point to the need for integral education:

- Ultimate truth or reality is characterized by non-dualism or unity: ultimate truth transcends, incorporates and harmonizes all seeming dichotomies or opposites, such as good/bad, right/wrong, logic/intuition, science/faith, and so on. At the heart of diversity is the principle of unity (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 81).

- Despite the ultimate unity of reality, human beings are constituted and conditioned to see the world from many diverse perspectives and they operate in a mental world characterized by duality or plurality. Human beings, however, have the potential “to rise from the level of dualistic consciousness to the level of nondual experience of the universe as a whole,” which reflects the transcendent or divine aspect of human beings (p. 81-82).

- Human beings are “involved in the process of planetary evolution, which is leading humans from their present dualistic level to a nondualistic, unitive level of consciousness”, which in turn can bring about “the ideal human society or global
society”; this evolutionary process reflects “a desire for self-perfection that is in every being” (p. 82).

Chaudhuri notes that the current prevailing dualistic nature of human consciousness leads to a host of human problems, including inner conflict on a psychological level and interpersonal conflict on a social level:

• “The conflicts and contradictions inherent in our present day civilization represent a luxuriant outcrop of our dichotomous thinking and divided living” (Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 51)

• “[S]eparation of the intellectual from the spiritual dimension as well as the separation of the vocational from the humanistic dimension is detrimental to man’s personality growth” (p. 51)

• “We look at the world, and we suffer from the incurable habit of slicing the world into pieces, dividing it into antagonistic camps depending upon whatever the ideological or philosophical or religious background of an individual may be…. When the self is divided in two, the world is divided in two” (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 79, 1977).

• “Looking within yourself, you will find that there is a double personality there. There is an empirical self and there is what is called a transcendental self. There is a phenomenal self and a spiritual self.” While the spiritual self gives us a “glimpse of such values as peace, freedom, justice and love,” “as soon as it comes to our activities, we are plunged into our empirical self” in which “all those beautiful ideas completely vanish” (p. 80).

129
So on the one hand we have within us a “profound potential…to see things from the standpoint of an integral consciousness” that reflects our “latent divinity” or transcendent nature, but on the other hand we habitually operate from the standpoint of “dualistic or pluralistic thinking which is characteristic of the conceptual level of consciousness”—which is why we cause so many problems for ourselves (p. 81).

We cannot emerge from this conditioned dualistic thinking through intellectual understanding alone. As Chaudhuri notes,

Until and unless we have this inner vision, not just an intellectual idea which doesn’t change behavior, but as an inner vision, spiritual experience or emotional experience, of this fundamental unity of existence and inseparable interdependence of all individual human beings and races and peoples of the world, then we are not going to set aside the habit of dualistic thinking. For this, what is necessary is the discipline which brings about an inner growth of consciousness. This is a matter of vital importance….” (p. 81).

For Chaudhuri, education plays a key role in bringing about this transformative experience. Our current educational system, however, is generally useless if not actively counter-productive in addressing the widespread current human limitation of dualistic thinking and thereby ameliorating the personal, interpersonal and societal problems that flow from it. As Chaudhuri notes, “The emphasis [in our educational institutions] normally is gathering information about a lot of things. But accumulation of information … will not bring about that inner cure, will not eliminate the habit of seeing things double, which is an internal thing” (p. 80). He also notes that “Excessive departmentalization of studies, lopsided overspecialization, and rigid separation of
various disciplines of knowledge are indeed some of the most harmful features of our present day educational policy,” a policy which “[drives] wedges into our thought processes” and “splinters into fragments the very foundation of our national and international social existence” (Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 53). “[I]f a person becomes overspecialized, then he loses his human value, his spirit of human value. He becomes very mechanized in his attitude” (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 85).

What is needed is a thoroughly radical new approach to education—a holistic, whole person, integral approach—that is “for the world community [and] aimed at the building of one internationally unified global society” (p. 84). What are the contours of this approach? For one thing, it must in a balanced way support the development of the following “five inseparably interrelated aspects or dimensions of human personality”:

(1) The physical or bodily aspect; (2) The socio-ethical aspect; (3) The instinctual-emotional aspect; (4) The cognitive-pragmatic-vocational aspect; (5) The religious-mystical-humanistic aspect. (Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 51)

According to Chaudhuri,

In the view of integral philosophy, human personality is the indivisible unity of all of the aforesaid dimensions of existence. Exaggerated emphasis upon any one of them considered in isolation from the rest is subversive of the abiding joy and happiness of life—subversive of the happiness and harmony not only of personal life but also of the socio-political and international life. (p. 51)

Drawing upon this spiritual/philosophic understanding of human nature, Chaudhuri articulated the following “most fundamental principles of integral or holistic education”:
1. Promotion of intercultural, interracial, and interreligious understanding.
2. Acceptance of ideological diversity within the global unity of humankind.
3. Affirmation of the intrinsic dignity of all individuals, men and women, everywhere in the world.
4. The essential equality of all races, peoples and nations of the world.
5. Interdisciplinary coordination and synthesis.
6. Education for the whole person in his/her multi-dimensional richness.
7. Comparative studies East and West.
8. Physical fitness and sports.
9. Developmental alternatives to drug use, social disorientation, and counterculture protest.
10. Semantic clarification for effective communication.
12. Teachers’ training in divergent conceptual frameworks for the same universal truth. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 84)

As noted above, Chaudhuri believed that the development of the spiritual and intellectual dimensions could not be separated. While the list above implies—though, interestingly, does not state—that spirituality/religion should have an important place in integral education, elsewhere he deals with this more specifically with this dimension in the context of what he considers to be the “basic principles of integral education.” Understanding that religion also exhibits dichotomies, he describes the “dilemma of religion” as follows:
Man had to banish God and religion for the sake of human values, and yet without God and religion man cannot be fully human. Education had to be secularized in order to root out impulses of holy inquisition and holy crusade, and yet without the deeper inspiration of spirit man is in danger of losing his ability to rise to lofty peaks of courageous self-sacrifice and cosmic love for the good of humanity.

On the one hand religion with its dogmatism, sectarianism, cultism, and bigotry appears to act as a powerful divisive force in human society. On the other hand it is the religious message of the unity of all peoples and nations in the one supreme Being which alone can hold forth the hope of abiding world peace.

(Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 52)

Chaudhuri stated that the answer to this dilemma “lies not in banishing religion from life”—as we have effectively done in most secular higher education institutions—but in working with religious thought and practices as follows:

1. “Understanding religion better and divesting it of sectarianism, cultism, dogmatism and other-worldliness.”

2. “Focusing on the essential truths and values common to all great religions.” These include such things as “experiencing the oneness of all existence; the spirit of universal love and brotherhood; non-dogmatic search for truth; equality of all men in respect to their essential human potential; joyful cooperation with all fellow beings in conquering the common enemies of civilization….”

3. “Dedication to the goal of transforming one’s total being and consciousness by sincere application of spiritual truths in daily living” through various spiritual practices.
4. “Abolition of the walls of separation that exist today between science and religion.”

5. “Abolition of the pernicious habits of dichotomous thinking which lie at the root of our fragmentation of the world into warring camps of God and Satan or angels and demons” (pp. 52-53).

It is worth elaborating on Chaudhuri’s thoughts on how science and religion can be integrated, since the science-spirit split is still so much at the heart of many people’s worldview, and the synthesis of these two realms (critical-analytic-scientific and spiritual-intuitive-creative) is at the core of integral education. Chaudhuri stated that

It is time to realize that both the dogmas of religion and the doctrines of science are relatively valid conceptual models for effective organization of the multitudinous facts of experience. Science is the rational interpretation of the facts of psychosocial experience. Science is dedicated to the great value of gaining mastery over the external environment through increasing knowledge of the laws of nature. Religion is dedicated to the great value of creative participation in mankind’s psychosocial evolution through increasing knowledge of the laws of Spirit. Scientific separation between fact and value is no less illusory than religious separation between nature and spirit. The real living, moving, evolving world of which we are an integral part is the indivisible unity of fact and value, and of nature and spirit. (pp. 52-53)

As can be seen above, Chaudhuri’s vision—the educational paradigm he articulated—is vast, to say the least. The 12 fundamental principles of integral education cover a variety of concepts and practices: teacher training, pedagogical practices, values
that should be inculcated in students, subject matter content, aspects of intellectual and soul development, and so on; also, there is not a neat distinction between the theory of integral education, the means by which to accomplish the theory’s goals, and the intended outcomes. As is often true of a new paradigm, there’s a lack of specificity in regard to how to apply the paradigm—the work involved in applying a paradigm is, in fact, often more painstaking and time-consuming than formulating the paradigm in the first place.

This has been CIIS’s challenge during its 40 years of existence: How does a higher education institution systematically operationalize on a teaching-learning level—on a day-to-day basis, across a variety of disciplines, and in the context of a society where the prevailing model of higher education is very different—this compelling vision of integral education? To answer this question, I first provide some brief information on CIIS’s original programs and educational practices—an impressionistic snapshot (based on the somewhat limited materials I have) of CIIS as it embarked on this experiment. Following that, I jump to the present to see how the current faculty and administrative leadership conceptualize the integral education paradigm and how it is currently being operationalized.

As might be expected and is often true of any pioneering venture, the initial steps CIIS (the then California Institute of Asian Studies) took to realize the founder’s broad vision were modest in comparison to where the institution has arrived at now. At the time of its founding, the Institute’s “educational philosophy” emphasized the need for intercultural/international understanding between the U.S (“the birthplace of the highest technological developments”) and Asia (“the birthplace of the world’s great religions”), and the opportunity for “systematic studies” in “the most fundamental and universal
values of existence” (the quotations immediately above and below are from an undated CIAS catalogue published prior to 1972).

Reflecting its educational philosophy, CIAS started out offering programs in three broad fields of study:

1. “Area Studies,” which covered the Far East, South Asia, and the Middle East, with a focus on the philosophies, religions, psychological disciplines, socio-political systems, and main languages of these areas.

2. “Comparative Studies East and West,” which focused on research in the field of comparative studies of the value systems, religions, philosophies, political and social systems and psychologies of the Asian cultures compared to those of the West.

3. “Studies in Integral Psychology,” which emphasized the concepts of balanced personality growth and integral self-awareness with the goal of presenting a new approach to counselors and psychotherapists including non-drug techniques and psycho-physical training and disciplined exploration of the depth dimensions of personality (undated CIAS catalogue).

The catalogue’s brief references to its instructional approaches seem to indicate that its teaching methods were fairly conventional by today’s standards. The Institute was committed to “the spirit of critical inquiry”—which, among other things, is characterized by the “free exchange of ideas, open dialogue and critical examination of all tacit assumptions of unreflective thinking [that] are of paramount importance in the pursuit of truth.” Instruction was in “seminar-type classes” that would allow for “an atmosphere of freedom and creativity so that through student-teacher collaboration in research and
group discussion, the truth can be pursued with a keen awareness of the fundamental challenges of our present age.” It was promised that “In keeping with the tradition of Asia, the spirit behind the words is given equal emphasis with their academic study and interpretation.” Additionally, the Institute’s faculty included many “authentic representatives” of Asian culture. Though the instructional methods may have been reasonably conventional, the aims of “balanced personality growth” and “integral self-awareness” in line with Chaudhuri’s philosophical writings were probably unique for an American graduate institution at that time. Also, it is reported that Chaudhuri included meditation practices in his classes.

CIIS and Integral Education Today

With the exception of a BA completion program, CIIS is still primarily a graduate institution. As noted in the 2008-2009 Academic catalog (p. 10), CIIS’s academic programs are broadly organized into three schools, with a variety of academic departments within the two schools—the School of Professional Psychology and the School of Consciousness and Transformation—that together comprise all of the graduate-level academic programs offered by the Institute. The outline below shows how CIIS is currently organized in terms of its schools, academic departments and educational programs:

**School of Undergraduate Studies**
- Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Interdisciplinary Studies

**School of Professional Psychology**

Clinical Psychology Department
- Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) in Clinical Psychology
Counseling Psychology Department

- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Community Mental Health
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Drama Therapy
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Integral Counseling Psychology
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Somatic Psychology

School of Consciousness and Transformation

East-West Psychology Department

- Master of Arts (M.A.) in East-West Psychology
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in East-West Psychology
- Certificate in East-West Spiritual Counseling (doctoral level)

Integrative Health Studies Department

- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Integrative Health Studies

Philosophy and Religion Department

Asian and Comparative Studies Program

- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Asian and Comparative Studies
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Asian and Comparative Studies

*Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Program*

• Master of Arts (M.A.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness

*Women’s Spirituality Program*

• Master of Arts (M.A.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Women’s Spirituality
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Women’s Spirituality

*Social and Cultural Anthropology Department*

• Master of Arts (M.A.) in Cultural Anthropology and Social Transformation with an emphasis in Gender, Ecology, and Society
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Social and Cultural Anthropology

*Transformative Inquiry Department*

• Master of Arts (M.A.) in Transformative Leadership
• Master of Arts (M.A.) in Transformative Leadership with a concentration in Partnership Studies
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Transformative Studies
• Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Transformative Studies with a concentration in Integral Studies
Writing, Consciousness, and Creative Inquiry Department

- Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Creative Inquiry/Interdisciplinary Studies
- Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Writing and Consciousness

CIIS is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), one of six regional associations that accredit public and private schools, colleges, and universities in the United States, and CIIS’s Psy.D. program is accredited by American Psychological Association. The MA programs in Counseling Psychology meet the requirements for graduates to become licensed in California and a number of other states as a Marriage and Family Therapist. The Psy.D. and M.A. programs in Counseling Psychology are professional programs that require extensive practicum training in addition to academic coursework, while the other programs are more purely academic.

The integral/holistic educational paradigm articulated by Chaudhuri finds its current, expanded expression in the mission statement and the seven “ideals” of the Institute (see the 2008-2009 Academic catalogue, p. 8):

**MISSION**

California Institute of Integral Studies is an accredited institution of higher education that strives to embody spirit, intellect, and wisdom in service to individuals, communities, and the Earth. The Institute expands the boundaries of traditional degree programs with interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and applied studies in psychology, philosophy, religion, cultural anthropology, transformative learning and leadership, integrative health, and the arts. Offering a personal learning environment and supportive community, CIIS provides an extraordinary education for people committed to transforming themselves and the world.
THE SEVEN IDEALS OF CIIS

The following seven ideals guide CIIS in the manifestation of its mission.

Practice an integral approach to learning and research

The Institute facilitates the integration of body-mind-spirit. It values the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, creative, somatic, and social dimensions of human potentiality. Students are encouraged to take an interdisciplinary approach to learning by complementing their specialized program of study with courses in other departments.

Affirm spirituality

The Institute is committed to the study and practice of multiple spiritual traditions and to their expression and embodiment throughout all areas and activities of the Institute community.

Commit to cultural diversity

Promoting a dialogue of difference, the curriculum reflects a commitment to the diversity of the world’s cultures and spiritual traditions while seeking their holistic integration.

Foster multiple ways of learning and teaching

The Institute honors many learning modalities and ways of knowing: intuition, body knowledge, creative expression, intellect, and spiritual insight.

Advocate feminism and sustainability
The Institute embraces intellectual, cultural, and spiritual traditions that further the effectiveness of emancipatory movements such as feminism, social and political liberation, cultural self-expression, and ecological activism.

**Support community**

Community at the Institute is understood to be founded upon an underlying core of values that affirm shared understandings and differences, scholarly efforts, and humane concerns. Such community is a vital part of the Institute’s effort to provide an effective, visionary, and nurturing environment for study and training.

**Strive for an integral and innovative governance**

The Institute recognizes the importance of a mode of governance that would eliminate, or at least reduce, the polarities and fragmentation that typically plague institutions. Like other ideals, integral governance is difficult both to formulate and to practice. This ideal stands among the seven as a constant challenge and encouragement to try new forms, procedures, criteria, and language as aids to a more shared and collaborative decision-making process.

As can be seen from the information above on CIIS’s current mission, ideals and educational programs, the Institute has expanded its educational philosophy and programs from the time it was founded; among other things, the spiritual/religious traditions now include Western traditions and women’s spirituality, as well as Asian traditions; also, there are programs in the arts, transformative leadership and integrative health that obviously go beyond the founding vision, which focused primarily on Asian studies and integral psychology. However, the goals of balanced personality growth, the development of self-awareness, and of intercultural understanding are still very much
evident. Like Chaudhuri’s fundamental principles of integral education, CIIS’s mission and ideals present a combination of concepts and practices, including teaching methods, subject matter content, the quality of interpersonal relationships, aspects of intellectual and soul development, and so on.

Starting with a faculty retreat in 2003, the CIIS faculty in partnership with the Academic Vice President (AVP), and with input from students, has engaged in an inquiry into the meaning of integral education in the context of CIIS’s current programs and activities. The overarching goal of the inquiry process was to facilitate reflection on, and discussion of, integral learning. As noted in a “Capacity and Preparatory Review” (dated December 2005) prepared for CIIS’s accreditor, WASC,

This inquiry into integral education is intended to serve as a vehicle for making explicit shared ideas about the nature of a CIIS education, as well as a way to increase understanding of practice among faculty in different academic programs. There is a widespread belief here that the Institute offers unique opportunities to students and faculty, as well as a recognition that programs have tended to become relatively isolated from each other. By highlighting integral education as a concept and a practice, CIIS has been able to focus community attention on its “essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher education community, and its relationship to society at large” (WASC Standard 1). The inquiry has been a way to go more deeply into how CIIS actualizes its mission and values in the classroom, in the curriculum, in scholarship, and in the wider community. (pp. 5-6)
The AVP stated that another impetus for this inquiry was the possibility of groups of long-serving faculty retiring in the near future, noting that “we may lose our sense of who we are unless we articulate it.”

The outcomes of these inquiries into the nature of integral education were presented in an “Educational Effectiveness Report” (dated November 2007) that CIIS prepared for WASC. The report noted that “In pursuing this inquiry, the intent has not been to bring everyone to consensus nor to provide a template for all of the academic programs.” Instead, the goals were:

- To encourage dialogue and the sharing of ideas to move programs, and CIIS as a whole, toward a more explicit understanding, and better public communication, of the education we seek to provide.

- To consider the diverse perspectives and models that claim a space under integral education and see if they can be formulated into a working model broad enough to encompass the Institute’s range of practices and perspectives and focused enough to be meaningful.

- To identify dimensions of integral education and see how they inform different academic programs and the pedagogy used by faculty.

- To consider how integral goals impact the learning environments provided to our students.

- To understand how the programs and the institution as a whole enact in practice what is espoused philosophically.
• To better articulate CIIS’s distinct vision and so be better able to assess how it is being achieved. (p. 8)

To give some greater direction to discussions among the faculty, the following four possible dimensions of integral education were identified:

• Subject matter that presents integral theories, research, or themes

• Approaches that emphasize integrative thinking: making connections between disciplines and part of disciplines; connecting the educational experiences of the student; connecting academic and applied work; connecting body, mind, and spirit

• Teaching practices that engage the whole student through: experiential learning; self-reflection; artistic representations; meditation; role playing; simulations

• Interventions that connect the student with real-world communities: internships; community projects; co-curricular activities; service learning. (p. 10)

According to the Educational Effectiveness Report, faculty perceived the “academic programs, with few exceptions, to be inclusive of all four [of these] dimensions” (p. 10).

What emerged from the inquiry into integral education was the understanding that “Integral education at CIIS is like Wittgenstein’s family portrait, where no one feature is emphasized across all programs, but all programs embody a family resemblance to one another,” and a “working assumption was that CIIS programs emphasize to varying
degrees the following elements in their curriculum, co-curriculum, and teaching and learning practices:

- **Congruence**: Program theory generates practices.
- **Synergy**: Program practices support and enhance each other.
- **Personal Growth**: Academic work fosters personal growth.
- **Difference**: Program provides space for difference to live in curriculum and classes.
- **Social Relevance**: Course material is connected meaningfully to social context.
- **Interface**: Bridges academic study and work in the world.
- **Multimodal**: Values diverse ways of knowing and being in the world.
- **Holistic**: Strives to honor the whole person (body, mind, spirit).
- **Interdisciplinary/Transdisciplinary**: Values inquiry that mindfully draws from and transcends disciplinary discourse as necessary. (pp. 11-12)

In a separate survey, 162 students who responded identified the following as elements of an integral education:

- Connecting and integrating mind, body, and spirit
- Multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multicultural
- Experiential
- Multimodal ways of learning and understanding
- Holistic
- East meets West. (p. 15)
As can be readily seen, the elements identified by the students—with the exception of “East meets West”—very much overlap with the elements identified by the faculty, and this last element is implicit in the nature of some of the programs CIIS offers and in the idea of developing spiritual awareness and fostering personal growth through engagement with Eastern wisdom traditions.

In addition to the collective efforts to describe/define the dimensions of integral education, it’s important to note that a number of faculty members, as well as the president and AVP, have written with great insight on the integral education paradigm, and that overall one senses that the CIIS academic community has collectively delved more deeply into what spiritual/holistic education means in the context of Western higher education than the large majority of writers who have tackled this subject. Individuals who wish to find ways to incorporate a holistic dimension into courses and programs offered at more conventional higher education institutions will find a wealth of useful material in the works pertaining to integral education that have come out of CIIS. While it is not practical in the context of my dissertation to do a thorough review of these works, I present here some salient points from a few articles to give the reader some useful additional information on the integral education paradigm, and to illustrate the living quality of this paradigm from the standpoint of participants and to present the connections they see between integral education and other higher education movements.

As noted earlier, CIIS President Joseph Subbiondo (2006) sees the integrative learning model as providing a suitable vehicle for reintegrating religion and spirituality into higher education and he links the integrative education paradigm to the integral education paradigm, noting that “integrative education, including models that connect
religion and spirituality to the curricular and co-curricular programs of the campus, is very much in the consciousness of higher education and in integral education” (p. 9). In this article, Subbiondo draws upon the example of a CIIS course on the history of Auroville (a township in India dedicated to universality and spiritual transformation) taught by CIIS faculty members Mariana Caplan and Jorge Ferrer to articulate the following ten characteristics of integral education; he sees the content and pedagogy of this course as being particularly rich and as exemplifying many of the components of an integral approach:

1. *Draws on a theory of integration.* Professor Caplan cites the integral philosophy of Aurobindo as the inspiration for her teaching. A specific integrative theory (one held in high regard at CIIS) informs the course, but it is by no means the only theory of integration. Whatever theory one chooses or develops, it is critical that a faculty member ground an integrative course in an integrative theory and not merely base it on a pedagogical technique.

2. *Integrates religion and spirituality into its content.* A course taught in India has an excellent chance of including religion and spirituality because both are vital elements in the everyday life of the country. In the course, Prof. Caplan explicitly draws in the religious and spiritual traditions of Pondicherry and Auroville. Without an understanding of these traditions, her students would not have grasped the complexity of Indic history and the culture of this unique region of India.

3. *Connects cultural traditions.* Reflecting the history of CIIS, the course provides a lively interplay between traditions characteristic of the East and West. It is necessary to teach students how to make connections between and among cultures
so that they will have a realistic view of the world. As the diversity movement in America has demonstrated, a single cultural lens is not enough to understand difference—it is too limiting and misleading. Understanding multicultural issues is a prerequisite for world peace.

4. *Explores the inner and the outer dimensions of life.* A course should prepare students to become familiar with the learning that takes place at the intersections of mind, body, and spirit. Because much of contemporary education is focused on an analysis of the outer world, albeit an important aspect of education, it is often devoid of the truth and beauty found only in the interior of human experience.

5. *Includes contemplative practice.* Meditation, especially guided meditation, is an effective pedagogical strategy for any course. In this course, meditation was used to teach students to quiet their minds, ground them into their location, and enable them to discover their inner voices.

6. *Promotes inter-faith dialogue.* The course allows students to understand religious and spiritual perspectives that are not their own. As mentioned previously in this essay, this dialogue is necessary to prepare students to act with respect of the other and to advance global dignity.

7. *Relies on multiple ways of knowing.* As students journey throughout the physical and spiritual landscape of Auroville as well as southern India, the interaction of the students with the various communities and the embodied educational experiences, manifest ways of knowing that are not exclusively limited to traditional mental and rational education.
8. *Acknowledges the individual as a part of the collective.* Much of integral education empowers students to benefit from transpersonal experiences and to realize that each student is a part of a whole. This recognition can have profound influence on students and their views of education. In this course, students learn much from each other both as individuals and as a group.

9. *Supports transdisciplinary knowledge.* The course draws on several disciplines—religion, history, politics, literature, and psychology—to demonstrate that learning cannot be confined to one narrow disciplinary view.

10. *Advances experiential learning.* In this course, Prof. Caplan recognizes that experience is a powerful tool for learning, and she validates the non-mental aspects of education. (pp.16-17)

Subbiondo sees these ten characteristics—which are reminiscent of Chaudhuri’s 12 fundamental principles of integral education listed above—as “a set of principles that could be incorporated into any course and would add to academic rigor and integrity of the course.” He recognizes that it would be rare for a course to reflect all ten characteristics or probably even most of them; however, he states that “including even one or two of these principles would significantly enhance the quality of a course and move it from an ordinary to an extraordinary educational experience for both teacher and student” (p. 17).

CIIS’s AVP has also written on the contemporary characteristics of integral education, its relationship to integrative learning, the various deep learning and active pedagogies that work in the context of integral education, and on the risks and challenges of associated with the integral approach in the context of conventional higher education.
paradigms and practices. Wexler (2005) makes the point that deep learning is central the very idea of integral education. Referencing Chaudhuri’s observation that integral education aims to make learning “a vital force in our course of living,” rather than mere words or concepts empty of experience, Wexler states that “‘deep learning’ is foregrounded as an explicit outcome of any integral education” and that “it engages the deepest aspects of the learner’s psyche and the search for a meaningful and ethical life in the context of scholarly and professional preparation” (p. 31). Deep learning is, in part, furthered through purposeful, active work in the world outside of the classroom. Wexler notes that “Since the nondualistic view did not separate the Divine from the material world, there was also an emphasis on action in this world as an expression of our inherent spiritual nature” (p. 31), and that “the integral approach that has evolved over time builds on transformational and intellectual goals with an emphasis on wholeness, reflection, and action in the world” (p. 31). Wexler observes that experiential pedagogies are supportive of the aims of integral education: “One way to approach engaging the whole student is to make the teaching heavily experiential, with the students being asked to reflect on their own experiences and beliefs as they learn new material…” (p. 31). Elsewhere in the article, she describes other teaching methods at CIIS that support the integral/integrative approach, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies, the use of portfolios as a means to integrate and reflect upon one’s learning (i.e., encourage metacognition), problem-based learning, practica, community service, and so on; these varied pedagogical methods further indicate how integral education is congruent with integrative, active and deep learning approaches that are also found in more conventional higher education institutions. Wexler also notes that the interplay or subjective and
objective approaches to knowledge supports the individual learning styles of students and their ability to construct knowledge (p. 32).

While Wexler describes a wide range of potential benefits that students may derive through integral education, she also identifies two risks associated with the approach:

One risk is that personal work, especially when it is pressing and emotional, can swamp the intellectual content if the intellectual goals are not made clear and the professor is not alert to the possibility. Another risk is that the emphasis on the personal may create the illusion that everything is personal and individual, with little recognition given to the impact of society, social roles, or power dynamics. The wholeness that is core to an integral education is not only about personal wholeness, however, it is about the wholeness of knowledge. (p. 32)

As one can see, fully realizing integral education on its own terms, so to speak, is a challenge given the need to find the right balance between an inner and outer development, content and process, disciplinary and interdisciplinary focus, and so on; an additional challenge is that CIIS graduates must also be able to function capably in more conventional school and work settings. As Wexler states

Our alumnae still have to go out into a world that understands teaching and learning organized around disciplines…. It is not sufficient to provide an excellent education; it is also essential to be able to place that education into the context created by the traditional and familiar. For any educational reform to work it must enable graduates to situate themselves within the society. (p. 34)
This challenge is similar to the challenge faced by alternative medical practitioners whose credibility and success with patients often depends not only on their expertise within their own medical field, but also upon their ability to explain their approaches to patients and conventional physicians using the language of conventional medicine and to utilize information derived from conventional medicine to inform their practice.

Ferrer, Romero (a visiting faculty member at CIIS) and Albareda (the founder of the Estel School of Integral Studies in Barcelona, Spain), in their article “Integral Transformative Education: A Participatory Proposal” (2005), explore what seem to be some of the frontiers of integral education, or what they refer to as “integral transformative education”—a term which points to the essential goal of personal transformation. Ferrer et al. present from a theoretical perspective what they call a “participatory approach” to integral transformative education in which “all human dimensions—body, vital, heart, mind, and consciousness—are invited to cocreatively participate in the unfolding of learning and inquiry” (p. 1). To understand the participatory approach, it’s important to define the two more common integral approaches: the “mind-centered/intellectualist approach” and the “bricolage/eclectic approach.” Ferrer et al. state that the mind-centered/intellectualist approach is based on the intellectual study and/or elaboration of integral visions or understandings. It uses the intellectual tools of mainstream education (e.g., logical analysis, rational argumentation, synthesis of the literature) to reach a more integrated understanding of the topic of study and can include fundamental questions such as the nature of the human being, life, reality, or the cosmos. It is usually—although by no means always—offered in the context of a traditional
pedagogical methodology (i.e., magisterial lectures, textual research, teachers’ assessment of learning through written essays, etc.). In other words, the mind-centered approach to education is “integral” in its object of study but not in its pedagogy, methodology, or inquiry process. (p. 6)

The bricolage/eclectic approach—which Ferrer et al. see as “the most widespread in ‘alternative’ educational institutions”—is characterized by the incorporation of experiential moments or practices (e.g., movement, meditation, ritual) into an essentially mind-centered education or the eclectic curricular offering of courses that engage the other human attributes (e.g., tai chi for the vital/prana, somatic techniques or hatha yoga for the body, meditation for spiritual consciousness)…. [A]lthough some classes may engage, and to some extent develop, the nonmental dimensions, these dimensions rarely if ever are part of the substance of the educational process (e.g., inquiry tools into subject matters, evaluators of inquiry outcomes), which is mainly planned, conducted, and assessed from the perspective of the mind. The bricolage approach can take place in the context of both traditional education (not aiming at integral understandings) and mind-centered integral education (which studies or attempts to develop integral visions). (p. 7)

Ferrer et al. see this approach as ultimately unsatisfactory, in that it engages the horizontal and vertical dimensions of integral education in an unintegrated and ultimately deceptive way. It is unintegrated because the intellect is not working in collaboration with the other ways of knowing in the context of a creative cycle of integral learning and inquiry…. And it is deceptive because it
can create the false impression that one is actually engaged in integral learning simply because of the relative attention paid to other dimensions of the person—especially in contrast to traditional mind-centered education. (p. 7)

They further observe that

Although the bricolage approach constitutes an important advance in relation to mainstream education, it is important to distinguish between genuine integral growth and a process of integral training regulated by mental parameters…. Most important in the present context, it is crucial to distinguish between the eclectic engagement of the nonmental human attributes as supplements of learning and their integrated creative participation at the various stages of the inquiry and learning process. (p. 7)

Ferrar et al. describe what they call the “participatory approach” as follows:

The participatory approach seeks to facilitate the cocreative participation of all human dimensions at all stages of the inquiry and learning processes. Body, vital, heart, mind, and consciousness are considered equal partners in the exploration and elaboration of knowledge. In other words, this approach invites the engagement of the whole person, ideally at all stages of the educational process, including the construction of the curriculum, the selection of research topics, the inquiry process, and the assessment of inquiry outcomes. The novelty of the participatory proposal is essentially methodological. It stresses the need to explore practical approaches that combine the power of the mind and the cultivation of consciousness with the epistemic potential of human somatic, vital, and emotional worlds. In terms of the conceptual distinctions offered above, we could say that
the participatory approach aims at the synergic integration of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of integral education as well as at the coherent alignment of the verbal and multidimensional inquiry modalities. (pp. 7-8)

They note further that they “do not consider the participatory approach merely one more alternate perspective. On the contrary … if skillfully implemented, it constitutes a richer, more natural, and more transformative integral educational praxis” (p. 8). In essence, what the authors advocate is dethroning the mind in the educational venture—an approach that would not only be radically foreign to conventional higher education practitioners, but would lead many integral education practitioners into uncharted territory. My sense from reading this article is that to realize the participatory approach to integral education would require as radical reordering of the structures of higher education as Barr and Tagg propose in creating a truly learner-centered education—probably more so. Ferrer et al. use the organic metaphor of the four seasons to give an impressionistic sense of what these transformed structures might look like. What this article shows, ultimately, is that even at a place like CIIS where a holistic, spiritually oriented pedagogy has been practiced for four decades, it is possible to imagine radically innovative ways to further develop this approach to education.

What I’ve attempted to do so far in this case narrative is give the reader an introduction to the history and theory of integral education, to provide some understanding of the principles and contours of this pedagogy from the standpoint of works written by participants, and to demonstrate that integral education is a living tradition that includes ongoing reformulation of the paradigm, the accommodation of other educational paradigms, and the development and application of new teaching-
learning methods. With this introduction in mind, I now explore how the CIIS faculty and the college’s leadership (president, AVP) view integral education as carried out in practice. I note that the information and observations I present are inherently limited given the number of faculty I interviewed and the time available, which means that I was able to only cover so many different topics within each interview and across interviews. Nonetheless, I encountered a number of consistent themes that I feel corroborate and augment the written information I reviewed, as well as provide contrasting perspectives.

*Role of Spirituality at CIIS*

All interviewees—faculty and staff alike—acknowledged the importance of the spiritual dimension in courses and programs throughout the institution. As one faculty member noted,

> Spirituality is one of the great human technologies…. How is it that human beings have coped with the vicissitudes of life? We should just have given up. One of the reasons we don’t is that we are the only animal that truly makes meaning out of their suffering. Every culture we know of has elaborated a spiritual belief system…. Spirituality should be seen, studied in higher education—there should be a place where the study of spirituality is respected.

It appears that all forms of traditional spirituality/religion are welcome at CIIS, and the school’s spiritual orientation seems to draw people. As one faculty member stated, “There is a fairly high level of religious tolerance and acceptance of diverse faiths.” Another faculty member stated that “We’re not about one true path,” a sentiment echoed by another faculty member who stated “We’re against all orthodoxies—orthodox Islam, Christianity, etc. Almost everybody here hates orthodoxy—that is our only
orthodoxy, to be anti-orthodox.” As the AVP stated, “Virtually all the faculty have an aspiration towards spiritual growth—have a spiritual practice, and sees that as being important,” and it is generally thought that a primary reason students choose CIIS is for its spiritual orientation. As the president stated, “I kid with students and no one disagrees—I feel that they are driven to us. People go online, plug in certain words, we pop up, and that’s it; there isn’t a whole lot of choice.”

This is not to say that there aren’t occasional problems that grow out of the religious pluralism of CIIS. One faculty member mentioned that Christian and Jewish students have on occasion felt marginalized by what they felt was too strong an emphasis on Eastern traditions and that in reference to the celebration of holidays at CIIS a pagan group felt marginalized by more mainstream religions. Another faculty member mentioned that in one class some students objected to spiritual practices being brought into the classroom because they felt that an enthusiastic faculty member was trying to proselytize them, although the faculty member telling the story did not think that was the case. The faculty members who shared these anecdotes also stated that these sorts of issues seem to be very much the exception. From conversations with faculty members, I sensed that that the faculty are very sensitive to religious differences among students, and are careful to tailor spiritual/religious practices in the classroom to the level of students’ interest in and openness to such practices.

Although the CIIS community is very open in general to a great variety of spiritual and religious expression, the president noted that “We vigorously say we are not New Age,” by which he meant beliefs and practices neither somehow grounded in established traditions nor compatible with intellectual work. And there is a strong sense
among faculty and the administrative leadership that the subjective, introspective aspects of spirituality should not be explored at the expense of developing more conventional academic skills. As the AVP observed, “Sometimes people come to CIIS because they have a particular commitment to something that’s not conventional and so having them see why it’s important to also understand the conventional can be hard.”

The way in which faculty members integrate spirituality into their teaching varies from course to course and program to program, and each faculty member has a different slant on the way and degree to which their spiritual understanding and practices should be brought into the classroom. As one faculty member remarked, “Between the two programs I teach in, there is a very different way that spirituality is integrated, and every member of the faculty would have a different way.” While some faculty members may emphasize a single tradition such as Buddhism, others draw upon a wide array of traditions; as one faculty member remarked, “For me integralism speaks to the integration of mind, body heart and spirit and an awareness and respect for the diversity of cultures. We all have our own definitions. When I’m teaching my introductory class, I draw from African, Native American, feminist spirituality, Buddhism, and Judaism.”

While there are no religious or spiritual practices that are universal to teaching and learning at CIIS, the practice of beginning classes with meditation seems to be widespread, with one faculty member estimating that 80% of classes start with some sort of meditation practice. As one faculty member stated, “I begin my classes with movement and/or meditation; we stretch, do yoga, and breath work.” Another faculty member stated that “Every class I teach begins with meditation—consciousness of one’s breathing. I also often quote Dr. Chaudhuri, who said that the easiest way to begin the
practice of integral yoga is to begin everything with an active dedication. So I consciously begin every class with a meditation and dedication.” There are various reasons why meditation is so central; one faculty member stated that “The head is already so full of words—I don’t want [students] to come [to class] with a head full of words. The situation should be tranquil. If they are busy with the last class, they don’t hear what I am doing.” This idea that meditation serves the learning process by helping students to calm down and focus with intentionality on the subject at hand was expressed by other faculty members as well.

Another way that spirituality finds a place in classrooms—apart from the study of religious/spiritual traditions and practices, which I’ll turn to in a moment—is through the use of ritual. Rituals may include such things as building an alter, conducting a Jewish Seder, or celebrating the Indian festival of Diwali. As one faculty member explained, “Ritual is another way of knowing, and a participatory approach to knowing. In many traditional cultures, you participated in things instead of getting a lecture on it—and down the road you realized that you had gained an understanding…. But the starting point is participation.”

It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to review the many specific ways in which religious/spiritual content and practices are integrated into individual courses and programs at CIIS. What is clear is that there is a wide variation, with some programs—such as those found in School of Consciousness and Transformation—providing a much greater focus on religion and spirituality, while other programs—such as those found in the School of Professional Psychology—providing a lesser focus. Part of the reason for the lesser focus in the programs offered by the School of Professional Psychology is that
content of these programs must meet the requirements of external accreditation (in the case of the PsyD program) and state licensure requirements (in the case of the counseling programs), which means much of the content of the programs is predetermined. One faculty member faced with the limitations due to accreditation of the PsyD program stated that “APA is a constraint, but it can also be an opportunity to do the work in the trenches instead of preaching to the choir,” and she noted that conventional subject matter can sometimes be used to illustrate spiritual practices and understanding: “Freud uses the phrase ‘Hold an evenly hovering attention,’ meaning suspended attention … to prevent bias. This is like [the Buddhist concept of] spacious awareness. Freud had stumbled onto this concept.” Despite the constraints on psychology and counseling courses due to external requirements, these professional fields seem particularly suited to including a spiritual component. As one faculty member remarked, “Every religion is a form of psychology.”

Regardless of the extent to which spiritual/religious content and practices are integrated into courses and programs, the faculty have also developed ways of being and conducting their classes that model and convey spiritual understanding, and that at the same time help students to deepen their intellectual skills. One faculty member stated “I like to make myself vulnerable [in the classroom], which means there are times that are very uncomfortable.” Another faculty member sometimes says to her students: “Can you stay with this without having an answer? I don’t have an answer either.” As she explained, “Inquiry is like an attitude or orientation—an attentiveness—it’s very different to desperately want an answer to a question. Whenever you are looking for an answer,
you’re not really open to what is going on.” Another faculty member, reflecting on the importance of a teacher’s inner being, stated

Parker Palmer asked students: Who were there great teachers? It is not the technique that makes a great teacher, but their quality of presence that touches the self of the student—there is communication between the teacher and student, and it can come through any form; lecturing is fine. Some people here say that to be integral you have to do 10,000 exercises; I don’t buy that. I think Palmer is closer to the truth. What is really being communicated is the teacher him or herself— their heart is being communicated, their spirit is being communicated.

Another faculty member expressed the same idea in this way:

Nowadays education is so imbued with technology and has become more and more impersonal. The actual relationship between the students and the teacher is so important. It is up to a point modeling, apprenticeship, and direct experience— How does it feel to do things [in the teacher’s] way? It is more like a transmission that happens in the space between us if there is openness.

Another faculty member said simply: “The energy that you bring into the room makes all the difference—it’s not just what you say.” What CIIS faculty members seem to believe, expressed in a variety of ways, is that their state of being—including their psychological and spiritual limitations—plays a big role in their effectiveness as teachers. As a faculty member stated, “The concept of emotional intelligence is important here. The students will synchronize to me—they can only go so far as I can handle. This is a relationship of modeling.”
A big part of the spirit of CIIS (apart from spirituality) comes from the commitment of faculty and staff to the school’s mission and its unusual if not unique place in higher education. As one faculty member stated, “People teach the ideas that they really love, that they believe are really true and important. There is a missionary quality. These are ideas that are alive and there is a passion behind them.” As the president stated,

This is not only a job. It’s almost a calling. The people who succeed here are the ones who come here—are almost driven here—because of its mission…. It would be impossible to be here without a strong belief in the spiritual, intellectual and physical dimensions of what we’re talking about…. Even though everyone won’t agree on what [integral education] is … in order to succeed here, you have to have a passion about integral education—just as you would need to have a passion about liberal arts education to succeed at Amherst, Pomona or another liberal arts college. It has to really mean something to you.

Teaching-Learning Structures and Approaches at CIIS

Although one faculty member stated that “Our content is more progressive than our pedagogy,” and another that “The lecture [format] is alive and well at CIIS”—and several people stated that the school was at a point where a more explicit focus on innovative pedagogy was needed—nonetheless I found that the faculty members with whom I spoke were thoughtful educators who creatively integrated various forms of active pedagogy into their courses. The primary motivation for this creative pedagogy, it seems, did not come from the study of learning theory; rather, it reflected the fact that faculty at CIIS take seriously the idea that truly deep education must engage the mind,
body, emotions and spirit, which means that it must include some element of experiential work. As one faculty member stated,

I had an intuition as teacher that I needed to embody and make real what this material is—it’s not enough that we have 15 weeks of lecture and discussion.

With this kind of material you cannot learn this without doing the practice. You cannot learn meditation by reading a book. I needed to find a way for students to actually have this experience. I found that giving students a lot of room is very important so that they can come up with their own particular way of [learning].

Another faculty member (who stated “I am not self-conscious of applying any sort of pedagogy”) talked about the need for direct experience in the following way:

On one hand I encourage my students to get into the immediate phenomenology of what it is we are talking about, so it is not just the thought we are discussing, so that they can see and feel. Experiential inquiry … penetrates to the basic assumptions; [students need to understand] “experiential deconstruction” vs. “intellectual deconstruction,” [which is] the prevalent mode. I try to move people from the rational realm to a direct seeing or knowing that is in the body and mind, that is not just a mental reflection on a subject. This gets out of the basic mental structure of the rational mode (subject-object structure); exercises give students moments where the subject-object quality of mind disappears.

A third faculty member observed that “Theory and practice should go side by side: an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory.”
Expressions like “embodying knowledge” and “somatic awareness” are widely used at CIIS, and seem to point to something more than engaging students in experiential or practical learning. As one faculty member stated,

The embodiment issue is a much bigger issue than experiential knowledge. One of the important elements of yoga is harmonization of aspects being, which includes mind, body, emotions, soul perhaps, spiritual dimensions, other dimensions. Essentially yoga or any mind-body discipline, such as taiji or qigong, engages us in the physical dimension—not just for pleasure or joy, as in athletics or competition, but as a way of expanding our consciousness, becoming more sensitized to sensory information in the body, to actual presence of the body, even the interior of the body. So one becomes more aware of having a body, living in the body.

Another faculty member offered the following observation regarding this dimension of education:

The feeling body, body sensation, is a gateway to the unconscious. There is a way of developing self-awareness so that one’s presuppositions, belief systems, and so on, come more to [conscious] awareness. This is important for learning to be present.

Another faculty member described embodied knowing in this way:

There is a distinction between embodied knowing and propositional knowing. In expressive therapies, we try to stay in the somatic experience as long as possible before getting to propositional knowing. We have pre-linguistic experiences that can only be accessed through the arts, through other parts of the brain.
Another faculty member described the shortcomings of conventional education in relation to integral education in this way:

The current educational system is based on a mental experience of the world—writing, Internet, etc. Integral education is about allowing for lived experience of knowledge, not just a mental experience. The whole of the Internet is a mental world…. So an important aspect of integral education is to transform [knowledge] into a lived experience, or a lived and embodied experience that is really meaningful and in line with the goals we aspire to.

Embodiment, lived experience or somatic awareness—whatever term is used—is seen as one essential component of what might be called a comprehensive or whole person awareness. As one faculty member stated, “Buddhism aims at being conscious all of the time—most of the time we want to be mindful, aware of things. That’s what I want to teach the students.” Ultimately, embodied education, along with other non-cognitive aspects of integral education, aims at achieving a transformative effect on students on every level of being. As Ferrer et al. (2005) note,

Modern Western education focuses almost exclusively on the development of the rational mind and its intellectual powers, with little attention given to the maturation of other dimensions of the person…. As a result, most individuals in our culture reach their adulthood with a somewhat mature mental functioning but with poorly or irregularly developed somatic, vital, emotional, aesthetic, intuitive, and spiritual intelligences. (p. 16)

An important understanding that CIIS faculty seem to share is that effective pedagogy is not only about finding effective ways to convey information, skills, etc., so
that they are learned in a deep way on multiple levels of being, but effective pedagogy is also about removing what might be called the psychological blocks to learning—the conditioned behaviors and attitudes that work at cross-purposes to deep learning. Some of these conditioned behaviors and attitudes are described by Barr and Tagg, as noted earlier in this paper. One impediment identified by CIIS faculty is the restlessness of the mind, a phenomenon that is recognized in a number of spiritual traditions. As one faculty member stated, “You cannot get deep knowledge until you do some kind of practice, such as meditation. This mindfulness practice helps the student to quiet down—that is the only way.” Another impediment may be anxiety. Reflecting on the importance of creating a sense of safety in the classroom, a faculty member stated that “There needs to be freedom from anxiety…. You can’t learn anything when there is anxiety. However, [to learn] you need to push into the place of the unknown. You can’t be in unknown if there is anxiety.”

A third impediment may be the sorts of emotional or psychological blocks and difficulties that all human beings experience; such blocks, which can divert students from being effective in school and later on in their careers, can be addressed, to some degree, through group activities in the classroom. As one faculty member stated, “Many of the counseling psychology programs include cathartic experiences, dance, movements of all kinds…,” and also noted that “in counseling psychology and similar courses, there are many exercises in small groups geared towards learning counseling techniques; however, sometimes [groups] may be just sharing something frankly, getting in touch with feelings.” While one’s personal healing is generally recognized as an important component of being a successful therapist and as supportive of developing a balanced personality, a number of the faculty members with whom I spoke made the point that
faculty members on the whole maintain a careful distinction between teaching and therapy, and that CIIS is not intended to be a therapeutic community for its students. Creating an education environment that offers individuals the opportunity for psychological/spiritual healing and growth within the context of educational activities without developing a therapeutic orientation is obviously a challenging endeavor, but one that CIIS seems to be handling successfully. When on occasion difficult personal psychological issues arise for a student due to spiritual practice (a phenomenon referred to at CIIS as “spiritual emergence”), there are a number of faculty who are well trained to deal with that.

When asked about the sorts of active or experiential pedagogies that faculty use, I received a variety of responses, among which the following are a representative sample:

- “In my classes, there is always a written assignment—and sometimes two—and some sort of embodied presentation related to class.”
- “In my course on women’s spirituality, I require 60 hours of community service.”
- “In the Jung and contemplative psychology class, students have the option of doing an academic paper or an expressive project. I have an all-day retreat where they can display or perform their projects. Every class has this element where they are asked to produce something they can share. It can be very embodied, it can be group projects where everyone is working together.”
- “[My course] starts with uncovering a question of interest to a group…. Groups figure out how to approach the question, gather data, etc.; they then report in different ways—they might present poem, do artwork, journaling, interviewing...
people…. It’s a very active engagement…. The program works on a relational level.”

• “In one course, a kind of lecture course, I have [the students] do presentations so they get practice in speaking in front of an audience; I tell them what I am looking for. They do write papers too, they do a personal reflection toward the end. I ask them to ponder on the content of the course—what they really got out of it, what was something that was disagreeable, unpalatable.”

• “All the classes I teach—and every class I know about—has an element of experiential work. No one relies solely on 3-hour lectures.’

To some degree, the amount of active, experiential, learner-centered work in the classroom is related to the nature of the particular academic program, as it would be at any type of higher education institution. The professional programs in psychology and counseling all involve skills training and clinical practica; among the academic programs, there seems to be a range in terms of the relative emphasis on conventional and more active pedagogies. Some of the programs at their very core are interdisciplinary, while others are very much discipline-based; and a number require capstone projects that demonstrate integration of learning. Several faculty members mentioned that they make a point of encouraging students to work in groups, and the AVP stated that students working together in dyads and small groups is widespread. As will be discussed at greater length later in this paper, overall it appears that integral education creates an environment that is reasonably conducive to student-centered, active and collaborative, and deep learning. Reflecting on this aspect of integral education, the AVP stated
When I look at the literature on what’s involved in deep learning, it seems to fit very well with what we do here out of a belief in the importance of spirituality. So that when our faculty are having the students go more deeply into themselves, they are not doing it per se because the students will learn this theory better, but the reality is that it does help them learn the theory better. And it leads them to almost automatically be looking at the application of the theories and constructs and ideas of what they are working with.

It is interesting to note that none of the faculty I spoke with complained about the constraints of working within a conventional academic semester system with a conventional course schedule and so on. The one informal adaption to the conventional course schedule that a number of faculty members mentioned is the use of retreats, which allow for more extended opportunities for group work, group presentations, community building, meditation practice, and so on. While integral education could perhaps be made more effective by a reformulation of the academic calendar and the rhythm of educational activities—as discussed in the article by Ferrer et al. (2005) that I touched upon earlier—the conventional structure appears to be serviceable given current approaches to integral education.

_The Effect of Integral Education on Students_

The faculty with whom I spoke were, in general, enthusiastic about the quality and commitment of the students. And, in general, they felt that CIIS’s integral education approach has a transformative effect on students; the following are some of the observations offered by faculty in this regard:
• “The students are more whole. In a way that’s what we’re aiming for: we want them to have good minds, we want them to be aware of their feelings, spiritual nature, their bodies. I think there is a kind of wholeness in the way they are.”

• “I help young women give birth to themselves…. They might say something they haven’t said before, they find their voice.”

• “This program’s most reliable effect [on students is that] they learn a kind of humility and confidence as they move from a performing mode to a receptivity mode…. The humility comes from the sense that I didn’t do anything; confidence from knowing that this process can be counted on.”

• “The ideal of personal transformation is taken very seriously. People come [to CIIS] to go through a transformative experience, and quite a few students say that they really change.”

• “Another big change is in worldview. In my program, people start thinking cosmically. They feel connected to the universe and the earth, and this is a fundamentally different orientation in the world. They don’t just see the world differently, but they are in the world differently.”

• I have seen people do massive shifts within two-year period—even a one-year period. I’ve seen a sense of purposefulness and connectedness. A strong sense of what they want to be doing—intention and self confidence. Greater ability to take risks. Speaking up more—we have mostly women students—a greater sense of their own voice.”

*Academic Governance*
When I began my research into the topic of spiritually oriented higher education, I naively thought that teaching-learning approaches that are radically different from those found in conventional higher education institutions would likely require a radically different—or at least innovative—form of academic governance to support them. As it turns out, quite the opposite is true: solidly established, conventional governance structures can be very supportive of unconventional approaches to education. Both the current president and AVP are experienced administrators who come from conventional higher education institutions, and both were hired, in part, precisely because they could apply their higher education administrative expertise to achieving CIIS’s unconventional mission.

As noted above, one of CIIS’s seven institutional “ideals” is “Strive for an integral and innovative governance.” Reflecting on the meaning of this ideal, the president stated

All good governance systems in higher education, if they are shared governance, are ‘integral’ by their very nature, because they include input from the entire institution and they maintain that everyone owns the institution and that we all have a responsibility to contribute…. And that is where we are putting our focus. I think what we needed to do was to spend some time on governance… and I think that when the word ‘integral’ got included there, I would like to argue that’s it’s a redundancy. I would have just said ‘effective governance,’ but I like having ‘integral governance’ in there because it reminds us that we are all participating in this.

Similarly, the AVP offered the following reflections on academic governance structures:
I think CIIS created a lot of its own structure and organization to start with. What we’ve tried to do is adopt policies and procedures that make sense, and in that sense our structure and a lot of our policies and procedures have become very conventional. And we’re trying to adopt best practices. We use the structure as a framing for intellectual work that is not very conventional. There are still things we could do to reorganize departments and other things that still don’t make a lot of sense, but I think that as we’ve adopted more conventional practices it has made things easier and the faculty do not have to spend so much time figuring out how to make things happen.

The faculty in general had positive things to say about CIIS’s current approach to academic governance, and no one complained about the faculty lacking an appropriate voice in the institution. As one faculty member observed, “There is now a group of competent administrators; previously people learned on the job. We still need hierarchy because it’s efficient.” As noted in the section in Chapter 1 where I describe my conceptual framework, shared governance and teamwork are indicators that an institution is oriented toward being learner-centered. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

Assessment

Like conventional academic governance structures, the prevailing assessment movement is not seen as antithetical to CIIS’s mission and the integral approach to education. While a number of faculty stated that they were still learning how to do assessment more effectively, no one stated that assessment was a barrier to integral education; and it seems that the CIIS community is interested in finding assessment methods that reflect the values of integral education. As the AVP stated
Because WASC gives us a lot of leeway in how we do assessment, we have been able to do that successfully within this region…. Our head of assessment likes to talk about assessment as ‘mindfulness,’ which works much better here—but it’s actually a better concept…. What I like about the idea of mindfulness is that we really do want people to be mindful of what’s working and what’s not, and about what they’re trying to do. So what we’ve asked our faculty to do this year is re-look at our learning outcomes.”

The AVP noted that APA, the accreditor for the PsyD program, “is more prescriptive, and that’s been more of a challenge”; this observation was echoed by a couple of faculty members, one of whom stated that “[APA] wants us to be ‘evidence-based’: What do we mean by spirituality?” It appears that if an accrediting agency is willing to recognize the validity of an educational paradigm that includes a spiritual orientation, as WASC does, there are assessment methods—such as certain qualitative approaches—that can be adapted to the institution’s programs. If an accreditor subscribes to a different paradigm, then conflicts can arise.

An institution’s commitment to articulating student outcomes and engaging in meaningful assessment of student learning provides an important support for learner-centered education, since assessment is ultimately how a learner-centered institution can know how well it is succeeding in its educational mission. In the next chapter, I return to this point.

**Naropa Campus Narrative**

*History of the University and Trungpa’s Vision of Contemplative Education*
As noted earlier, Naropa University—originally Naropa Institute—was founded in 1974 by the Tibetan Buddhist Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. Trungpa was assisted in this venture by several of his students with higher education backgrounds, one of whom—Marvin Casper—drew up the original plan for the school (Luna, n.d., p. 6; Bye, 2005, p. 144). Similar to the vision that Chaudhuri had for CIIS, Trungpa’s broad vision was to bring together Eastern and Western wisdom and intellectual traditions in the context of a Western higher education institution. And just as Chaudhuri was a student of Aurobindo’s “integral yoga”—an approach that seeks to synthesize the diverse paths of yoga into a unified path—Trungpa was educated within the nonsectarian Ri-me movement of Tibetan Buddhism (“ri-me” literally means “without bias”), a movement which “advocated that all traditions of meditation practice be appreciated and valued, regardless of the lineages or schools from which they have come” (Simmer Brown, 2005, p. 71). Although thoroughly steeped in Buddhist philosophy and practice, Trungpa was seen by his followers as open-minded and inclusive in his approach as a teacher. As Reggie Ray, an early student of Trungpa and one of the original teachers at Naropa observed,

When [Trungpa] came to the West, he was about the least dogmatic Buddhist I ever met in my life. In fact, the first couple of years he hardly even mentioned Buddhism. He simply talked about suffering and the nature of the world we live in. Rinpoche’s idea was that right at the heart of Buddhism is this Ri-me idea, that genuine authentic spirituality is the point, not what the label is. (Luna, n.d., p. 3)

The Ri-me movement is characterized by a number of principles that influenced Trungpa’s worldview, including:
• An emphasis on “the openness and purity of realization, the centrality of meditation, and the importance of scholastic study in service of practice instead of the other way around” (Simmer-Brown, 2005, p. 70);
• “an abiding interest … in meditation and contemplative practice as the ground of spiritual life” and the “preservation of a contemplative tradition” (p. 71);
• “fostering communities of practice, encouraging extensive solitary meditation retreats, preserving the texts and oral traditions of authentic practice lineages, and respecting the uniqueness of each lineage” (p. 71);
• The view that “intelligent investigation and inquiry [are] crucial concomitants of mature meditation practice” (pp. 71-72).

These various principles were at the heart of Trungpa’s vision for Naropa. As Simmer-Brown (2005) states

Rinpoche’s dream was that Naropa University would become a place where the authentic contemplative traditions of North America would be nurtured, studied and practiced in an environment of nonsectarian appreciation and conversation. What was necessary for such a project to be successful, however, was that its participants have a dedicated individual practice and genuine connection with the teaching lineage that has given rise to their practice. He warmly invited into the Naropa community practitioners of all traditions who were willing to make this kind of commitment, and he fostered dialogue and joint practice, whether from a variety of Buddhist traditions, or from Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or indigenous traditions like the Native American. (p. 79)
In addition to the Ri-me tradition as a source of inspiration for Naropa University, another source of inspiration for Trungpa—and something of a model for the venture—was Nalanda University, a Buddhist monastic university that operated in India during the 5th to 11th centuries. As Luna (n.d.) describes, Nalanda was a cosmopolitan institution that welcomed scholars, artists and craftsmen of all faiths from places such as Greece, Persia, China, Thailand and Java. At its peak, it was a huge walled complex of buildings housing more than 10,000 monks and lay students. Buddhist study and practice was the core, but students also explored history, medicine, astrology, philosophy, and the arts such as painting, calligraphy, poetry and sculpture. It was a place of serious study, but also a place of playful dialogue and debate. (p. 2)

Finally, Trungpa also drew upon his own Buddhist educational experience for inspiration. Bye (2005) offers the following observation about Buddhist education:

In the Buddhist educational tradition, an important ingredient of wisdom is the critical intelligence that can discriminate particular qualities of phenomena accurately. Such intelligence is spoken of as a double-edged sword that cuts through both obscurations in the object of investigation and in the one who is investigating. (p. 148)

Bye goes on to quote Trungpa who described this educational approach as follows:

When you follow [the Buddhist] principles of education, you begin to use your logical or critical intelligence to examine what is presented to you. This critical intelligence is also critical intelligence about yourself. The critical intelligence is applied in two ways: towards what is presented to you, the educational material,
as well as towards who is going to be educated. So you work with yourself as well. The two blades work simultaneously. Then you find yourself examining things constantly. The process of education becomes very precise and clear and absolutely accurate. (p. 148)

Further explaining the Buddhist educational perspective, Bye states that the type of critical intelligence described above is said to be awakened and nurtured by three activities: hearing, contemplation, and meditation. Hearing refers to listening and study with an attitude free of conceptual prejudice. What is being studied is received with as open a mind as possible. Contemplation involves reflection upon what one is studying beyond the informational grasp and examining it in light of lived experience. Meditation is practice in opening to nowness, relating with the immediate present mindfulness of life. Meditation develops mindfulness beyond preoccupation with internal thinking and reaction. Practiced together, these three [activities] complement each other by sharpening intellectual understanding along with intuitive self-understanding in the educational process. (pp. 148-149)

Out of these various experiences and influences, Trungpa developed a number of foundational principles that guided the creation of Naropa University. Among these were the following (Midal, 2004, pp. 253-256):

- Naropa would present “an education based on a nontheistic spiritual model that would train men and women in a totally new way”;

178
• Naropa would not be “a sectarian organization, nor even a Buddhist university, in the sense that there are Christian universities that teach theology in order to train clergy”;

• “Naropa would be a place where many traditions could present their own wisdom,” and a lively dialogue—a dialectic—among them would be encouraged;

• “the most varied disciplines would be taught: art, poetry, dance, psychology, and studies of Buddhism and other great spiritual traditions”;

• Naropa would “give a central role to meditation”; meditation “would be taught without reliance on Buddhist jargon,” and instructors would seek to “transmit their own personal understanding of it directly”

• “Unlearning would be as important as learning. Education [would] be based on each person’s inherent wisdom and thus must begin by pruning away … habitual patterns of thought”;

• The education would be “contemplative,” and there would be “a strong link between theory and contemplative practice”: in addition to “intellectual comprehension of a phenomenon,” the goal would be to access or experience the phenomenon’s “authentic spiritual reality.”

Bye (2005) sums up Naropa’s purpose in the following way:

The founding inspiration of Naropa University as an educational institution … involved the weaving of academic study and the practices of mindfulness and awareness. This was to be a school where scholarly disciplines would be pursued along with contemplative practices that uncover the direct experience of nowness.
In this way, the wisdom within cultural traditions and academic disciplines could be received and extended into the world with fresh life (p. 146).

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore Trungpa’s teachings on Buddhist philosophy and practice as presented in his many works, it’s important to say a little about how Trungpa viewed meditation given the centrality of meditation to Naropa’s contemplative educational approach. First, it should be noted that “meditation is not a religious exercise but a way of learning how to work with our minds and emotions” (Midal, 2004, p. 254)—a powerful technique for developing mastery over one’s being. While Trungpa instructed his students in a range of Buddhist meditation techniques, he viewed meditation as a fundamentally straightforward process, accessible to any person:

By meditation … we mean something very basic and simple that is not tied to any one culture. We are talking about a very basic act: sitting on the ground, assuming a good posture, and developing a sense of our spot, our place on this earth.

(Midal, 2004, p. 64, quoting Trungpa)

This basic approach to meditation practice consists of three components:

• “Making a relationship with your body” by sitting on a meditation cushion, “keeping your spine as straight as possible,” and keeping the eyes open and “directed slightly downward, without staring at anything in particular.” Sitting up, but “without being rigid or unnatural,” encourages an “attitude of openness and attention to each moment” (p. 67).

• “Attending to your breathing” and in particular the “out-breath.” Attending in this context means maintaining a gentle awareness of one’s breath. As Trungpa explained, “There is a constant going out with the out-breath. As you breathe out,
you dissolve, you diffuse.” In this context, the “you” that is referred to is the “ego” (p. 68).

- Paying “attention to the way your mind works,” which means being observant or aware of the content of your mind—the thoughts, feelings, mental chatter, and the awkward or anxious feelings that may arise when the mind falls silent. “In meditation, when ‘thoughts’ (daydreams, reflections, emotions) appear, [one should] simply observe them. The idea is not to try to get rid of them, but to just recognize their transitory and ‘translucent’ nature” (p. 69).

Trungpa described the “ego”—the Buddhist concept of the illusory sense of self—as “a sort of central government” where

the emotions are the highlights of the ego, the generals of the ego’s army;
subconscious thought, daydreams, and other thoughts connect one highlight to another. So thoughts form the ego’s army and are constantly in motion, constantly busy (p. 69).

The goal of meditation is not to analyze the thoughts that arise in the mind—or control, act upon or get rid of them—but rather to cultivate “a feeling of welcome or acceptance toward whatever occurs.” This acceptance of the contents of one’s mind ultimately leads to less reactivity, a greater sense of spaciousness and well being, sharpened perceptivity, a greater awareness of intuition, and a number of other useful internal developments (p. 70).

Because of the mental and emotional qualities that can be developed through a meditation practice, meditation can provide an important additional dimension to the act of study. As Trungpa states,
Where study is combined with meditation practice, it has a different flavor. Where direct experience is lacking, studying tends to be mainly memorizing terms and definitions and trying to convince oneself of their validity. When balanced with meditative discipline, study takes on much more life and reality. It develops clarity about how the mind works and how that knowledge can be expressed. In this way, study and practice help one another enormously, and each becomes more real and satisfying. It is like eating a sandwich—because of the bread, you appreciate the meat much more. (Midal, 2004, p. 255)

Like CIIS, Naropa at its outset had the challenge of translating the big vision described above—the contemplative education paradigm—into concrete practices, and this has been an ongoing challenge during its 35 years of existence. Before turning to an examination of what Naropa’s contemplative approach to education looks like today, I provide a brief description of Naropa in its early years in order to orient the reader.

Luna (n.d., pp. 6-40) provides the following information regarding the inception of Naropa Institute. Throughout his adult life, Trungpa exhibited an interest in education, and apparently he had an idea of starting a college in the U.S. as early as 1970. Also, Trungpa and his students had been interested for some time in incorporating more spirituality into the American educational system. The initial inspiration for Naropa—a nonsectarian Buddhist-inspired institution—appears to have grown out of dialogue that Trungpa had with the poet and activist Allen Ginsberg and other poets starting in 1973. One of the leaders of this dialogue, Marvin Casper, sketched out a plan for a summer institute, and approached Trungpa and another leader in the dialogue, John Baker. As Casper stated, “The basic idea was an institute that would create an interface, a dialogue
between Buddhism and the highest intellectual culture of the West, as well as with other spiritual traditions” (p. 6). While there was no master plan for how the Institute might evolve over time, there was talk of also establishing a year-round higher institution of some sort. Based on the sketchy plan and their conversations, Trungpa gave the go-ahead on the project.

By August of 1973, a group of Trungpa’s students started contacting a wide range of individuals to invite them to teach courses and workshops during the summer of 1974—the inaugural summer session of what was called the Naropa Institute in honor of a great Buddhist monk and mystic of that name who, as the story goes, was a great scholar at Nalanda University, but left to pursue the deeper truths behind the words of the Buddhist scriptures. Among the individuals contacted were students of Trungpa whose academic or artistic qualifications and backgrounds seemed suitable to offering courses, as well as a number of well-respected people who were thought to have an interest in what Trungpa was doing—the most prominent among them being Alan Watts (who also played a prominent role at CIIS in its early days) and Ram Dass, the well known spiritual seeker and author of the iconic Be Here Now and other works. Both accepted the invitation to teach, though Watts died before the summer session of 1974 took place. In the end, around 100 courses and workshops were offered, attended by over 2,000 people—with the highlights of the summer being the courses offered by Ram Dass and Trungpa and the dialogue between them. The Introduction section of Naropa Institute 1974 summer catalog describes the Institute in the following way:

The purpose of the Naropa Institute is to provide an environment in which the Eastern and Western intellectual traditions can interact and in which these
disciplines can be grounded in the personal experience and practice of staff and students. All of the staff members are involved in the practice of some discipline related to psychological and spiritual growth. It is this direct experience which can form the sound basis for integrating the complementary intellectual and sensory-intuitive approaches to living in the world. In turn, scholarship provides clarification and confirmation of individual experience.

Too often systems of thought may become mere abstractions, irrelevant to the life and humanity they are attempting to describe and explain. And yet, throughout man’s history it has been precisely the unification of word and meaning with action that has been taken to be the ground of wisdom, gnosis, and vision. To this end the courses offered by the Institute include not only the more intellectual disciplines—the humanities and the social and physical sciences—but also meditation, sensory awareness, dance, t’ai ch’i chuan, theater, art and music.

(n.p)

Following Naropa’s inaugural summer program, the Institute began offering informal courses and ran a summer session in 1975 and in subsequent years. In 1976, it began offering a B.A. and M.A. in Buddhist studies, as well as B.A. and M.F.A. programs in Thangka painting (a Tibetan Buddhist art form); additionally, certificate program were offered in dance, poetry and theater. By 1980, there were five B.A. programs—Buddhist studies, Buddhist and Western psychology, dance, theater and poetry—and M.A. programs in Buddhist studies and psychology. Obtaining regional accreditation was a goal early on: by 1978, Naropa obtained candidacy status with North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (now the Higher Learning Commission),
and achieved accreditation in 1985 (Midal, 2004, pp. 257-258). In 1999, the Naropa Institute changed its name to Naropa University to reflect the expansion of its academic programs.

*Naropa and Contemplative Education Today*

As in its early days, the University continues to offer bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and a variety of credit and non-credit courses, and it continues to be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. The outline below (retrieved on January, 16, 2009, from www.naropa.edu/academics/index.cfm) shows how Naropa is currently organized in terms of its schools, academic departments and educational programs:

**UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS** (B.A. degrees)

- Contemplative Psychology
- Early Childhood Education
- Environmental Studies
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Music
- Peace Studies
- Performance
- Religious Studies
- Traditional Eastern Arts
- Visual Arts

**Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Department of Writing & Poetics**

- Writing & Literature

185
GRADUATE FIELDS OF STUDY

• Contemplative Education (M.A., low-residency)
• Environmental Leadership (M.A.)
• Theater: Contemporary Performance (M.F.A.)
• Theater: Lecoq Based Actor Created Theater (M.F.A., to be discontinued)

Graduate School of Psychology (M.A. degrees)

• Art Therapy (a concentration w/in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology or TCP)
• Body Psychotherapy (a concentration within Somatic Counseling Psychology)
• Counseling Psychology (a concentration within TCP)
• Dance/Movement Therapy (a concentration within Somatic Counseling Psychology)
• Ecopsychology (a sub-concentration within the TCP low-residency concentration)
• Contemplative Psychotherapy (M.A.)
• Somatic Counseling Psychology (M.A.)
• Transpersonal Counseling Psychology (M.A.)
• Transpersonal Psychology (low residency, non-counseling concentration w/in TCP)
• Wilderness Therapy (a non-counseling concentration within TCP)

Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Department of Writing & Poetics

• Creative Writing (M.F.A., low-residency)
• Writing and Poetics (M.F.A.)

Religious Studies Department

• Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (M.A.)
• Indo-Tibetan Buddhism with Language (M.A.)
• Master of Divinity
• Religious Studies (M.A.)
• Religious Studies with Language (M.A.)

Naropa’s current mission statement is as follows (retrieved on January 16, 2009, from www.naropa.edu/about/mission.cfm):

MISSION STATEMENT

Inspired by the rich intellectual and experiential traditions of East and West, Naropa University is North America’s leading institution of contemplative education.

Naropa recognizes the inherent goodness and wisdom of each human being. It educates the whole person, cultivating academic excellence and contemplative insight in order to infuse knowledge with wisdom. The University nurtures in its students a lifelong joy in learning, a critical intellect, the sense of purpose that accompanies compassionate service to the world, and the openness and equanimity that arise from authentic insight and self-understanding. Ultimately, Naropa students explore the inner resources needed to engage courageously with a complex and challenging world, to help transform that world through skill and compassion, and to attain deeper levels of happiness and meaning in their lives.

Drawing on the vital insights of the world’s wisdom traditions, the University is simultaneously Buddhist-inspired, ecumenical and nonsectarian. Naropa values ethnic and cultural differences for their essential role in education.
It embraces the richness of human diversity with the aim of fostering a more just and equitable society and an expanded awareness of our common humanity.

A Naropa education—reflecting the interplay of discipline and delight—prepares its graduates both to meet the world as it is and to change it for the better.

The Naropa website also provides the following information on what is meant by “contemplative education” (retrieved on January 16, 2009, from www.naropa.edu/about/conted.cfm):

The first step to understanding contemplative education is to grasp that it doesn’t mean solely self reflection, and it is not the act of contemplation alone that makes it unique. Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others, honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Contemplative practice unlocks the power of deep inward observation, enabling the learner to tap into a wellspring of knowledge about the nature of mind, self and other that has been largely overlooked by traditional, Western-oriented liberal education.

The meaning of contemplative education is further elaborated on the Naropa website as follows (retrieved on January 16, 2009, from www.naropa.edu/about/conted_primer.cfm):

[C]ontemplative education at Naropa experiments with another way of knowing through its joining of rigorous liberal arts training and the disciplined training of
the heart. Transcending the belief that knowledge arises in the thinking mind only, this educational philosophy invites students to embrace the immediacy of their interior lives as a means for fully integrating what they learn.

Contemplative education is not solely traditional education with a course in meditation thrown in; it is an approach that offers an entirely new way of understanding what it means to be educated in the modern Western liberal arts tradition. At Naropa University, students wholeheartedly engage in mindfulness awareness practices in order to cultivate being present in the moment and to deepen their academic study.

Woven into the fabric of the curriculum are practices that include sitting meditation, t’ai-chi ch’uan, aikido, yoga, Chinese brushstroke and ikebana. The depth of insight and concentration reached through students’ disciplined engagement with contemplative practices alters the very landscape of learning and teaching at Naropa.

Through such a focused self-exploration, students and faculty acquire the ability to be present in the classroom and in their lives; to engage in active listening with an open mind; to analyze a subject; and to integrate what has been learned with personal experience.

Other resulting qualities include the development of openness, self-awareness and insight; enhanced speaking and listening skills; the sharpening of insight; and an appreciation of the world’s diversity and richness. From this self-understanding comes an ability to appreciate the value of another’s experience.
The goal of a Naropa University education is not to nurture the solitary contemplative only; it is also to cultivate those at the other end of the spectrum whose interior work acts as preparation for compassionate and transformative work in the world. More specifically, the value of contemplative education is measured in Naropa students’ ability to put their wisdom and insight into practice through creative, helpful and effective action.

As can be seen from Naropa’s current mission and description of contemplative education above, the mission very much reflects the initial vision of the Naropa Institute and the Buddhist understandings and practices that inspired its creation—with further elaboration on some of the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal qualities and benefits that can be derived from this educational approach. In the institutional materials noted above, Naropa avoids the use of the words “spirituality” and “spirit”—which CIIS uses freely—and instead uses variations on “wisdom tradition” and terms that refer to the inner self such as “mind” and “heart.” This primarily reflects, I believe, Buddhism’s nontheistic approach to spirituality. Both schools avoid the word “religion” except when referring to their religious studies programs, which probably reflects the fact that formal religion is an emotionally charged subject for some prospective students and also that CIIS and Naropa emphasize the experiential aspects of religion/spirituality over the faith or belief aspects. Among CIIS and Naropa faculty members, however, all of these words are used freely. Both CIIS and Naropa emphasize education of the whole person and there’s clearly a lot of overlap in how they present their educational approaches; at the same time, there are some differences in emphasis.
Like CIIS, Naropa has for the last half-dozen years or so been engaged in a process to better define what is meant by contemplative education. There seem to be a few reasons for this effort. As noted earlier in the context of the discussion on paradigm theory, Kuhn describes what he calls “normal science” as the efforts of scientists and researchers to further elaborate upon, clarify, prove or disprove, and so on, various aspects of a paradigm. If this type of activity is also associated with social science paradigms—as seems evident—then one would expect some faculty members who subscribe to the contemplative educational approach to begin systematically exploring its contours. One can imagine many questions worthy of research, such as: Does contemplative approach to education promote a greater commitment to civic engagement? This type of research is happening at Naropa. As one example, there is a Consciousness Laboratory that, among other things, conducts “meditation research [that] explores this broad range of styles in order to identify psychological transformations that arise with meditation” (retrieved on January 17, 2009, from www.naropa.edu /consciousness/meditation.cfm). Another example is the work of the Contemplative Practices Committee, which has developed a document defining the following aspects of contemplative education: “The Guiding Principles (View),” “The Method of Training (Practice),” “The Way of Learning (Action),” and “The Fruits of the Journey (Fruition) (see “Statement on the Role of Contemplative Practices in Education,” developed by the Contemplative Practices Committee, 2002, n.p.).

Another reason for these efforts to better define contemplative education is a desire for a stronger and clearer institutional identity for the purposes of both student recruitment and fundraising. As the president explained,
When I first got here I asked the faculty “What do you mean by ‘contemplative education’?” and the answer I got was “It means different things to different people.” And it means different things to different people because it can’t be easily generalized from one person’s experience to another. My response was “Well and good, I respect that personal dimension of contemplative education; however, it can’t be that the boundaries are infinite, because if we can’t say with some measure of specificity what it means, then it doesn’t mean anything.” The solutions that I’ve adopted over the years I’ve been here have been fueled by the need to speak to perspective students and their families. Contemplative education is like a complex 3-D sculpture and no one photograph will do justice to that, but if you walk around and take a picture from various angles, you begin to get a sense of its dynamism and vitality. So my proximate solution has been to identify a finite number of things one might say about contemplative education without essentializing the results.

A recently adopted strategic plan (Naropa University Strategic Plan, dated September 19, 2008) demonstrates the institutional commitment to developing greater specificity around Naropa’s unique educational approach. The plan articulates the following as one of its “fundamental principles”: “[To] be able to grow and gain a higher net revenue from donors and students, Naropa needs to develop and deliver a clearer story of distinctiveness” (p. 2) and elaborates further that Naropa needs to “clearly define Naropa’s distinctiveness and what it delivers” (p. 3) and to “clarify and enhance Naropa’s approach to contemplative education” (p. 4).
I also imagine that just as educators regularly discuss what constitutes “liberal education” and other broad concepts, discussions on what constitutes “contemplative education” are also likely to be a regular, ongoing feature at Naropa and elsewhere where this approach is being incorporated. In fact, these two discussions come together at Naropa. As the Naropa president states in an article,

[W]hen the Enlightenment set out to understand the external world in objective terms, apart from the inner life of the knower, it took a tack away from the holistic education that had previously characterized the Western academy and the classical traditions of learning throughout the Middle East and Asia, an education that aspired to nurture both the inner and the outer person. The challenge of incorporating spirituality into liberal education today is therefore an effort to recapture a balance of inner and outer in our vision of education. (Coburn, 2005, p. 58)

These efforts to better define what is meant by a contemplative education have resulted, it seems, in a measure of greater clarity and specificity, though it appears that each academic program at Naropa takes a slightly different slant on the concept. This is exemplified in various statements throughout the Naropa website found under descriptions of individual programs that are labeled as “departmental vision,” “mission,” “philosophy,” “foundations,” and so on. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to review and contrast these various departmental statements, it appears that while there is broad, general agreement on the principles and practices of contemplative education throughout the institution, on an operational level, so to speak, the description and details
of this approach vary somewhat from program to program and from department to department.

So how has Naropa more clearly articulated its contemplative education model? The “Statement on the Role of Contemplative Practices in Education” noted above offers the following under “The Guiding View”:

In every human being, there is innate awareness that is clear, knowing, and compassionate. This awareness can become clouded by unexamined assumptions and conflicting emotions, but it is never entirely eclipsed by them. These conditioned habits of learning and responding to the world are only temporary obstacles to the full experience of our wholesome, basic nature, and they can be unlearned. (p. 1)

Under “The Method of Training,” the principle training method is identified as follows:

[T]he practice of mindfulness-awareness is the principal method taught for cultivating the full experience of this innate nature, and for dispelling the obstacles to [the] experience [of our basic nature].

Mindfulness is the ability to bring the confused and distracted mind back to a precise and relaxed attention to the present moment. With mindfulness as foundation, practice naturally evolves further into training in awareness, the experience of panoramic openness of mind in which clear observation and deep insight can occur. (p. 1)

In the Statement, the pedagogical practices/disciplines that support mindfulness-awareness practice are identified as: “sitting meditation, and contemplative arts such as t’ai-chi, aikido, yoga, dance and movement, calligraphy, and ikebana” that “employ
mind, body or objects to strengthen and refine mindfulness and awareness,” and that “[synchronize] mind and body, cultivate precision, openness, and presence” and “engage their practitioners in an experiential, non-judgmental exploration of the present moment” (p. 1).

As in other documents including several of those noted above, the Statement offers in the section entitled “The Way of Learning (Action)” another description of contemplative education:

Contemplative education is a profound integration of theoretical study, experiential learning, and mindfulness-awareness practice. When there is no artificial separation between the student’s personal journey and the academic discipline being studied, both the content and the process of learning are transformed.

Contemplative education transforms the content of learning by fully integrating personal experience with pre-existing traditions of knowledge and skill. In this way, knowledge and skill are not objectified as artifacts separate from the learner’s life, but remain continuously fresh, relevant, and vital.

It transforms the process of learning by mixing mindfulness-awareness practice directly with everyday academic work. Students can be mindful and aware as they listen to lectures, engage in discussion, type their papers, recite, read, dance, etc. This continuous experience of attentive presence synchronizes the student more deeply with every aspect of learning. (p. 2)

The final section of the Statement, “The Fruits of the Journey (Fruition),” outlines benefits that students derive from the contemplative teaching method:
• confidence based on inner understanding and realization;

• an open and flexible mind [that] can perceive the deeper meaning beneath actions, words and concepts;

• compassion toward oneself and others comes … [that] often expresses itself as a strong aspiration to be of service;

• mastery in personal discipline—whether in writing, visual arts, movement or dramatic arts, music, counseling, leadership, scholarly work, or any other academic pursuit….;

• [a] journey of transformation [that] is at once individual and communal; and

• effective action [in the world] joined with personal meaning and transformation. (p. 2)

For the most part, the Statement concisely pulls together a number of themes that have appeared in Naropa’s materials from early on. More recently, based on interviews with focus groups and individual faculty, a “Taxonomy of Approaches to Contemplative Education at Naropa University” (dated September 2008) was developed. The Taxonomy’s purpose is “to organize definitions of and approaches to contemplative education among Naropa faculty without diminishing the completeness or preeminence of any particular model or approach” (p. 1). The following three categories were drawn from interviews and focus groups of Naropa faculty:

• “View / Inspiration – contemplative insight”; this section includes, for example, “direct experience, non-conceptual knowing, non-conceptual inquiry, aware of
differences among emotion, thought and experience itself (this is different from ‘experiential education’)

• “Embodiment: Teacher Embodying Contemplative Practice”; this section includes for example, “the teacher's own contemplative practice is important (an educational environment where contemplative practice is part of everything)”

• “Approaches/Methods – four areas:”
  o “Perceptual / Embodied” (which includes, for example, “synchronizing mind and body, kinesthetic awareness, breath connecting with earth, heaven and the four directions, silence, stillness”)
  o “Self: Emotional / Personal / Identity → Commitment” (which includes, for example, “self inquiry, learning about oneself, self-observation”)
  o “Social/Relating to Others” (which includes, for example, “non-adversarial collaboration that does not exclude conflict”)
  o “Cognitive / Intellectual” (which includes, for example, “overcoming the hyper-objectivity of many academic fields by uncovering one’s own subjectivity”) (pp. 1-2).

The Taxonomy is a detailed and rich document that summarizes and expands upon the various themes, teaching methods and outcomes of contemplative education described in other materials. Phrases within the Taxonomy range from being more general and even somewhat mystical—“the union of precision and vastness” and “synchronizing mind and body”—to more specific, such as “deep listening” and “understanding interdependence.” What is clear is that contemplative education, like integral education, is a tall order to achieve on every level, and that a deep understanding
of the contemplative approach cannot be intellectually gleaned from the outside, so to speak, but requires a lived experience—just as an full understanding of Buddhism does. In trying to describe this lived experience, one constantly comes up against the inherent limitations of language. As an article by two Naropa faculty members (Grossenbacher and Parkin, 2006) states,

For any concept that we use to trace actual lived experience, it would be a mistake to think that the referential concept is the same thing as the experience itself. That would be analogous to thinking that when somebody uses her finger to point something out to us, all we need do is look at her finger to find out what we need to know. An ancient Buddhist teaching makes this point in terms of a finger pointing to the moon, and Western culture has offered this same insight in the slogan “The map is not the territory.” (p. 2)

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to review in detail the various articles and materials authored by Naropa faculty and staff that offer perspectives on contemplative education. It should be noted, however, that even though modern-day contemplative education comes out of Buddhist teachings and practices developed over the course of centuries, it is—like integral education—very much a living approach that is being refined over time and integrated with other philosophies of education such as liberal arts education. Before moving on to the next section, I look at two more contemporary perspectives on contemplative education that were helpful to me in understanding it.

The Grossenbacher and Parkin (2006) article referenced above presents the following four-phase model of contemplative education:
• Study is the first phase of contemplative learning. It consists of exposure to and ingestion of something not already known. By receiving information, the student is given the raw material needed for assembling, or reconstructing, a conceptual framework in which to think about the topic….

• The second phase of contemplative learning, contemplation, involves deeply mulling over the subject at hand. This contemplation takes a variety of forms. One natural way to deepen one’s engagement with a topic is to make it personal….

• [T]he third phase in this learning model … [is] meditation …. With extended meditation practice, a person’s unthinking tendency always to be thinking and imagining becomes transformed into a more purposeful alternation between intentionally thinking, and taking a relaxing break from thinking. Several outcomes of contemplative learning depend on this third phase. First, by sequentially combining intellectual study and contemplation with selfless awareness, contemplative learning trains the student to access open awareness in ways that are compatible with thoughtful concerns. Ironically, it is by de-emphasizing the perspective of one’s own self concept, and by letting go of the need to control so stringently one’s mental life, that this selfless approach makes room for all of the student’s capacities to come into play. This deep mixing with open awareness leads to insight and realization. In this deepest phase of contemplative learning, the student transforms….

• The fourth phase of learning, community-based action (akin to service learning), brings students into real contact with a community outside the
college setting…. The utility of activity for furthering one’s learning may be
widely recognized. From the scientific perspective of neurobiology, this can
be understood as yet one more instance of the general rule that the more ways
that a learner works with material, the more facets become known, and the
more interconnections are made. In short, actively doing and pushing past
one’s limits makes for more complete learning. From the perspective of
holistic education, it is of further importance that action contributes to
compassionate service and developing community…. (pp. 3-4)

What this article offers is a model that a teacher interested in contemplative
methods could use in order to move systematically and in an integrated way between the
different facets of contemplative education, though it should be noted that not all courses
at Naropa would follow this particular model or sequence of activities.

Naropa’s president, in the article referenced earlier (Coburn, 2005), offers the
following simple but illuminating model for contemplative education in the context of
liberal education:

I believe that … a new model is at hand, and that the heat generated in the culture
wars over “decentering” the curriculum points us in a constructive direction. The
assumption in those wars, of course, was that there was, or should be, a single
center to the curriculum. But suppose there has never been a single center to
liberal education. Suppose we recognize the dual heritage of liberal education
over the past many centuries and seek a model that does justice to the dialectic
between its two strands. Suppose it is not the circle but the ellipse that should
guide our thinking about liberal education, past and present, secular and spiritual….

The difference between a circle and an ellipse is simple…. A circle is the pattern that a point traces when it revolves around one other point—the circle’s center—so that it is always equidistant from that point. An ellipse is the pattern that one point traces when it revolves around two other points—the ellipse’s foci—so that the sum of the distances from those two points remains constant….

The two foci are critical to the definition of the overall elliptical shape, and there is a dynamic tension between them…. [T]hinking of secularism and spirituality as the two foci of the elliptical life of liberal learning can ease us into an exciting new chapter of our dynamic history. (p. 60)

This model presents a useful metaphor to illustrate the balancing act required to present material that cultivates contrasting aspects of human beings, such as intellect and intuition, wisdom and knowledge, material nature and spiritual nature, theory and practice, and so on. Inherent in the contemplative approach, as Coburn points out, is a “dynamic tension” that points to the idea that too reductionistic an approach to education will diminish its effectiveness. As Einstein is quoted as saying, “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Role of Spirituality at Naropa

As noted earlier, Trungpa envisioned Naropa as a Buddhist-inspired institution, and the Buddhist inspiration is certainly evident throughout the institution in it published materials and website, displays of artwork, the name of the university itself and the names of its satellite campuses, some of the rituals, symbols and customs of the campus,
and so. Faculty and staff with whom I spoke echoed this view of Naropa as Buddhist-inspired, but no one implied that the Buddhist influence was in any way dogmatic or overreaching. Interestingly, neither the current president nor the current VPAA are Buddhists, which is a new development for the institution—and it appears that the Board of Trustees deliberately chose a non-Buddhist to lead the school in order to emphasize Naropa’s non-sectarian, ecumenical identity. By all accounts, both the president and VPAA have been well received on campus by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

As also noted earlier, Trungpa envisioned Naropa as a place that would welcome practitioners of all authentic lineages and religions. Trungpa’s openness was confirmed by Naropa faculty members I spoke with who had been at Naropa since its early days, one of whom stated:

Rinpoche wanted to make sure that faculty came from authentic spiritual lineages. He talked to us a lot about this. Did the faculty make up the teachings, or did they receive them from an unbroken lineage that goes back for some time? Are they recognized as teachers? Is this some kind of new age thing, or can it be traced back? Are they practitioners or thinkers? He wasn’t that interested in the thinkers. He wanted people who practiced their traditions. There’s a place for theory; however, people who lead with their rationality come from a very different place than people who are leading with their practice.

This institutional acceptance of diverse spiritual/religious traditions and the emphasis on spiritual practice was evident in the people I interviewed, among whom were Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, and all of whom referred directly or indirectly to their own spiritual practices. Several faculty members stated, in one way or another,
that Naropa was a place where they could be “authentic” or “honest” about their spiritual beliefs and practices, which for them was a refreshing and liberating change from other institutions at which they had taught. As one faculty member noted, “At other institutions there were times when I felt like the odd person out because even to mention the word ‘spirituality’ in a conventional university would be fraught with danger. Here one doesn’t have to seek permission, it’s fundamentally what we’re about.”

All of the faculty members I spoke with described spiritual/contemplative practices they used in the classroom to create an environment conducive to learning and respectful dialogue (as one faculty member stated, “I regard the classroom as sacred space”). It appears from my interviews that the ritual of beginning and ending class with a bow, and beginning with a short meditation or other contemplative activity such as listening to sacred music, are nearly universal practices in the classroom. The degree to which meditation instruction and other spiritual practices are integrated into courses and academic programs varies from program to program and teacher to teacher, and faculty wrestle at times with the question of what spiritual practices are appropriate to their classes, since some groups of students are more open to spiritual practices than other groups. This issue is not new, and in fact has been raised since Naropa was founded. As one faculty member reflecting on the early days of the school stated, “We had to deal with the question: What is appropriate to an academic setting as distinct from a meditation setting?—especially since people came from a variety of different spiritual backgrounds.”

Several faculty members referred to teaching as an aspect of their own spiritual or contemplative practice. As one faculty member stated:
Having to face Naropa students everyday that I teach very much puts me on the spot in being genuine in regard to my own being in order to meet the reality of who’s in the ring. This is the first place I’ve ever worked where [complete authenticity] is the case…. I think that being on the spot … keeps me as an educator in a position of not knowing how I’m going to teach a class next year and even, to a degree, not knowing what is going to transpire in the class that I teach today. So of course I do come in with something of an agenda, a lesson plan, a preparation, but that mixes with what arises in the moment with the students, and so this is what I think is an inherently contemplative approach to pedagogy that is inviting new things and experiences that cannot be fully predicted.

Another faculty member stated:

I feel like I’m not just learning from my students, but I’m actually practicing when I’m with my students so that I notice where my fears are and try to stay present with those fears, rather than trying to manipulate them in some way. So the exchange that happens during the class period actually opens me up, deepens me at the best of times.

A third faculty member stated “[B]eing present in body, speech and mind is an essential piece of teaching as well as learning.”

Beyond the fact that Naropa’s faculty appear to all have strong spiritual-religious practices, a teacher’s inner development and spiritual awareness is seen as essential to his or her ability to effectively utilize contemplative pedagogy. As one faculty member remarked, “The teacher’s awareness is essential in the classroom.” And the VPAA
confirmed that “a commitment and demonstration of involvement with some spiritual or contemplative practice” is an important factor in personnel decisions.

Teaching-Learning Structures and Approaches at Naropa

In this section, I present perspectives on the teaching approaches used at Naropa based on the interviews I conducted with faculty members, as well as with the president and VPAA. My goal is to give the reader a sense of the lived experience of contemplative education among Naropa faculty and how this pedagogy is situated, so to speak, in the context of higher education. The material I derived from the interviews is very rich and varied, and in the context of this dissertation I can only cover some of the more salient themes that emerged—many of which could be studied at length individually.

Like CIIS faculty, Naropa faculty exhibited a strong commitment to active, experiential and learner-centered education. There seem to be a number of reasons for this, the first of which is the educational culture created by Naropa founder, Chögyam Trungpa, based on his understanding of and approach to Buddhism. As noted above, Trungpa emphasized in hiring faculty that he was interested only in people who had a strong spiritual practice such as meditation. Although to the naïve onlooker meditation and contemplation may appear to be passive mental activities, they are anything but passive. As one faculty member stated, “Contemplative traditions are not exclusively conceptual in nature. So there’s a training in how to use our minds so as to open to all parts of our experience, including both the conceptual and non-conceptual”—with the non-conceptual aspect involving, among other things, sensory and somatic experience. Another faculty member emphasized the importance of practice in this way: “It’s very important to teach capacity to go from theoretical knowledge to practical application.”
Trungpa also practiced various contemplative arts such as ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) and calligraphy, and the practice of such arts have been part of the school from its earliest days. Additionally, Trungpa created his own active pedagogies based on the Buddhist educational model—including the so-called “warrior’s exam,” a highly active and interactive examination process that I describe later in this section. What these several influences appear to have created is an institutional culture that values pedagogical experimentation and innovation aimed at creating educational approaches that engage and transform students on multiple levels. As one faculty member observed,

Faculty at Naropa did not get their [active teaching approaches] from somewhere else; they came from the beginnings of Naropa. The beginnings of Naropa were very experimental; they really made it up as they went along. And what they had to go on was their teacher, who was there through the mid-eighties. Faculty learned from each other, they experimented on each other a lot. They observed one another’s class and would then adapt practices in their own way. There was a lot of cross-fertilization among the original faculty. That experimental attitude is where [innovative pedagogies] come from. They took their own [spiritual] practices and brought them into the classroom, and used whatever worked.

This observation was confirmed by a long-time faculty member who stated:

Faculty did a lot of collaborative work [in the early days]—teach-ins with each other, for example. I learned from my colleagues, we did a lot of brainstorming on pedagogy. Because we did not have a lot of students and money was tight, we had time to play around. We were young, we did team teaching, we created. It was very electric and alive.
In addition the educational culture that reflects the founder’s philosophy and the school’s early development, there is sense among faculty members that students are best served by being drawn very actively into the educational experience. As one faculty member stated, “We all underneath yearn to be put on the spot, we yearn to find discipline in our experience. When you push students and give them a way to develop discipline in their lives, they start to shine.” This was echoed by another faculty member who stated “The pedagogy is very active and from the students’ point of view, they are put on the spot again and again.” A third faculty member, linking active approaches to the contemplative approach stated

[Contemplative education] is really a particular approach to participatory learning, we could say, in which the learner is not spoon-fed, but is brought to thresholds that they themselves must actively cross in terms of gaining understanding.

This active educational culture appears to be supported by the students as well as the faculty; as a faculty member remarked,

Our students wouldn’t let us default to a “stand and deliver” style of teaching, unless [a teacher is] very entertaining…. So we have to mix it at Naropa—there are some active, experiential pieces, some digestion pieces. It’s part of the academic culture that classes have to have an interactive, experiential component.

Classes are fairly small, so we can actually talk.

Another faculty member stated simply: “One of the things I appreciate about Naropa is that students expect me to show up in the classroom….”

There are a number of forms these active pedagogies take. From a review of the Program descriptions of Naropa’s graduate programs on the Naropa website (retrieved on
January 20, 2009, from www.naropa.edu/academics/graduate/index.cfm), nearly all of the programs in counseling/therapy fields require some sort of practicum experience such as an internship or service learning-type experience, which is not surprising since they prepare individuals to engage in licensed therapeutic practice; most of these programs also include somatic/embodied activities and meditation practice. The graduate programs in the arts involve the practice of various arts, such as acting and writing. The religious studies programs all have very strong meditation practice components, as does the contemplative education program. And the remaining program—and environmental leadership—involves carrying out a project with another organization. Many of these programs include learner-centered educational activities such as culminating papers/theses, capstone courses, and the development of a portfolio.

Undergraduate majors are varied in their use of active and learner-centered pedagogies, requiring such things as senior papers, capstone courses, meditation practice, service-learning and internship placements, artistic performances, and skills development (such as interpersonal dialogue). It appears from program descriptions that the undergraduate majors are not as strongly anchored in contemplative practices as the graduate programs, though contemplative practices are certainly a component; the undergraduate faculty, however, exhibited a strong commitment to their spiritual practices.

As noted above, Naropa has developed a unique active, learner-centered pedagogy: the warrior’s exam. Here’s how one faculty member described it to me:

It’s a culminating experience for individual courses, and it’s based on the Tibetan Buddhist debate tradition. It’s a way students are asked to be on the spot. With the
freshmen, it’s a one-on-one exam, with students being paired. The students sit in a circle, witnessed by everyone. The student being questioned pulls a question out of a hat (they know the questions in advance), and the other student serves as questioner. They are graded on the quality of their presence and the freshness of their response, and also not only content, but on how they can convey the meaning through their own personal experience. They are also graded on being a questioner. The questioner first reads the question, but has to follow up with a fresh question of his own. It forces everyone to be present. It’s a very scary thing for new students, but they come to love it. They begin and end with a bow. It’s very formal. Everyone in the circle has to be present as well to heighten the sense of presence for the people in the middle of the circle. For graduate students I make it scarier, I write customized questions and personally ask them, which is really fun.

The warrior’s exam is an example of an innovative contemplative teaching method that includes important learning-centered components such as public performance and the integration of knowledge in a culminating experience.

Before moving on to examining other aspects of the contemplative approach to education, I include the following description of another contemplative teaching method that a faculty member uses in one of her courses that includes learner-centered components:

This is a course in dialogue, not about dialogue: I teach students how to dialogue. I use the some of the practices from the book *The Art of Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together*. In contemplative mind, in the tree of contemplative
pedagogies, there is a whole branch devoted to dialogue. That’s one of the practices important in everyday world. So it’s a course where we learn about religious pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism. Early on I have them work in dyads to practice dialogue, and I have them work with a partner of another religion from outside of Naropa to have extensive dialogues. We partner with a Muslim foundation in Boulder where we have a dinner and then do one-on-one dialogues between our students and their members. The whole thing is about learning how to carry on dialogue—where you can learn to really listen and suspend judgment and respect [others] and voice [your perspective]. I also encourage them to develop an inner dialogue while they are involved in dialogue with a partner.

This activity involves some important aspects of contemplative education that several faculty members noted in the interviews: developing the ability to listen deeply to others and oneself, cultivation of personal skills that promote interpersonal understanding and compassion, suspending judgment, and welcoming diversity. It is learner-centered in that it is active, engaged with the community, and conducted in small groups.

A number of faculty members emphasized that contemplative education is entirely compatible with traditional academic skills and academic rigor (a couple of faculty members used the term “contemplative rigor,” which I took to mean academic rigor with a contemplative twist). One of these contemplative twists is that a first-person, reflective component to research and scholarship is welcomed and encouraged. As one faculty member stated,

I’m very big on reading and writing—teaching people how to read a classical text, how to understand a text … and I require a lot of writing. I work with academic
writing skills combining Eastern and Western methods—I feel that the tendency to force students to write objectively actually takes out the contemplative voice, so I try to bring in the inner research—the students doing research on their own experience…. Each semester I add a new writing skill. They write 3rd person papers but draw upon 1st person approaches as a resource. In the second semester, they write a traditional research paper, and then they exchange papers and write a response. I teach them how to write response papers that are both critical and constructive. They learn how to support the writing of their classmates. This cuts down the competitive approach and strengthens writing. I ask them to respond to a classmate with a learning style very different than their own. I want them to learn how to be helpful to someone who is different from them. So students rewrite their papers based on feedback from me and their fellow student, and they learn how to write a better paper based on diverse feedback. They are working with the challenge of possibly getting very diverse feedback from their classmate and me. They have to demonstrate in the finished paper how they are integrating feedback from two sources, giving equal weight—have to show that they’ve taken their peers seriously.

This approach, like the warrior’s exam, is another good example of how contemplative education integrates components of learner-centered education, such as providing feedback, group work, reflexivity, and developing meta-cognition through exposure to different learning styles and points of view. One interesting thing to note is the simple idea that careful attention to developing academic skills—the idea of academic
rigor—can be approached as its own spiritual practice or discipline. As one faculty member stated simply: “I expect people to write well. It’s a discipline.”

Some faculty members emphasized that certain contemplative skills mirror traditional academic skills and therefore support their development. One faculty member offered the following observation:

In the culture of Western research there’s a tradition of skepticism—the idea that you don’t believe anything on face value, that you question everything. Skepticism is related to this idea of non-judgmental attention, and I believe there is a lot of overlap between the attentional practices that come with contemplative practice and the ability to think skeptically and to think critically.

The same faculty member also described how contemplative practices foster critical thinking:

There is a very direct relationship between contemplative practice and critical thinking. Contemplative practice, particularly as it is applied to education, trains capacities that are necessary to critical thinking—necessary but not sufficient. So, for instance, I think of attention is a kind of a mental muscle. In a sense there’s a positive correlation between strong attentional acuity and happiness, successfulness, good organization of behavior, good problem-solving skills and good critical thinking…this capacity to pay attention is essential for critical thinking.

Another faculty member linked contemplative practices with the skills needed for conducting empirical research:
Empiricism has to do with observation and experience, and prioritizing observations over interpretations. If observed data disagree with the theory that one holds, it’s not the data that have to move over, it’s the theory that needs to be revised in order to accommodate the full set of known data. That’s how it works in science, and there’s a parallel within the contemplative sphere of experience where we may have an idea of who we are or what the world is—our understanding of reality. And then we are also constantly accruing a set of observed experiences if, indeed, we are noticing our experience—that’s a prerequisite. And so if we actually notice what we’re living through, if we actually recognize our experience as such, then we can use that in some ways as data: as subjectively observed—as all observations are—life experience that is undeniable. It’s unassailable—each of us has our own lived experience, and nobody can change that.

What these comments indicate is that—from the perspective of contemplative educators—a contemplative approach is not only compatible with traditional academic skills, but supports their development and, in a sense, broadens them. It was evident that the Naropa faculty are interested in exploring ways in which to utilize conventional pedagogies to support contemplative development and contemplative pedagogies to support the development of conventional academic skills.

It’s interesting to note that there is a fair degree of overlap in the range of academic programs offered at Naropa and CIIS. Both institutions, for instance, offer a wide range of programs in psychology and counseling. This is no accident: as was noted in the CIIS campus narrative, religion/spiritual traditions contain great insights into human psychology, and there is probably no spiritual tradition that is more filled with
psychological insight than Buddhism. Both institutions offer programs in religious
studies for obvious reasons and also because of their founding philosophies, and both
offer programs in the arts and in social sciences—fields where spiritual and embodied
practices can be used to support creative expression and effective interpersonal
relationships. Among Naropa faculty, there is a sense that contemplative education could
be applied to any academic field, though some are more accessible to this pedagogy than
others. As one faculty member stated:

There are fields where it may be harder to apply a contemplative approach—
mathematics, for example. What it takes is for contemplative practitioners to be
scholars in those fields and, as they teach, they will find ways to integrate those
practices. The contemplative is like water that seeps into whatever you’re doing.
As plumbers become contemplative practitioners, there will be a contemplative
approach to plumbing.

A faculty member in the environmental leadership program noted that scientific
fields tend to be more resistant to spiritual approaches, but that this resistance diminishes
the study of science:

Except in a few emerging scientific fields, there is a bigger split [between
objective knowledge and inner experience] for the sciences than other fields…. Science seems to need to squelch anything around sensibility. We need both
ancient and modern science—the whole spectrum. It’s dogmatic to cut off either
one. This [broader approach] opens people up. It’s clear that Stonehenge, for
example, had unbelievably sophisticated astronomical knowledge.
The same faculty member noted that “Some students are more open-minded to esoteric [knowledge and practices] in other fields, but may not be open to it in science because they haven’t rethought it.” This is an example of how students—and indeed all of us—may to some degree inhabit conflicting paradigms in different aspects of life.

Another facet of contemplative education that several faculty members discussed was the importance of allowing for not-knowing, ambiguity, impartiality, and other similar mental qualities that contrast with the idea of coming to a conclusion or arriving at a sense of certainty. This was expressed by faculty members in a variety of ways:

- I try to be faithful to the idea that I don’t know all the answers, and I try to tell them that I don’t know all the answers.
- [C]ontemplative practice … teaches a kind of equanimity between ideas—there’s not any automatic kneejerk acceptance or rejection of any particular idea. There’s a sense of working to have, in the beginning, a neutral relationship to ideas and to engage with all ideas openly and with curiosity. And that’s essential for contemplative practice.
- One of the things we say is “Don’t believe everything you think.” So there is a quality of open curiosity.
- This program is very threatening to one’s beliefs of how things work, and threatening to someone who wants to feel confident in what they know. But if you’re willing to acknowledge what you do not know, you also do know what you know. It’s not that you should never know, but the knowing comes out of some kind of integration, testing things out: Is this my experience?
• I ask the students to work [with the thought]: you have no business making meaning of something until you’ve fully seen it, noticed it. What [characterizes] a good judge in a courtroom? To be impartial, to hear all sides, to hold multiple perspectives, to not rush to conclusions, and to stay open to as much information as possible.

• The research on creatives is that they not only enjoy solving problems, but that they actually go out and look for problems. There’s actually an enjoyment to hang out in the ambiguity, to hang out in the tensions of not getting resolution—or that it will come through a kind of wrestling match with all of the variables. And as you practice staying open to all the variables and recompose it and reconfigure it, you begin to arrive at your version of what completion is.

• No matter what discipline you ask about, as you work your way through, there are always moments where you can’t explain or where you don’t know, no matter what you’re doing. I don’t know what a minute from now is. Our culture insists that we explain, and we’re also completely obsessed with the origins of things: where did this come from, who is the first.

• What is the essence of a good education? I would boil it down to this simply: cultivating the capacity to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously, to not abandon the viewpoint that you hold, but to also know that that is one of multiple perspectives—and to stay as open and curious as possible.
Another theme that emerged from my interview is the idea that contemplative education encourages slowing down, doing less—the idea that sometimes less is more.

As one faculty member stated,

Sometimes we take one short quote. If they walk out with [a deep understanding of] that, you’ve done so much work…. This is the *lexio divina* concept. When you get to a passage the intrigues and moves you, stop! Stay with it. You don’t have to read all 72 pages…. We’re not hunter-gathering knowledge. That’s pointless activity, that’s 8th grade activity. At the college we’re all about [the question]: In what way can I integrate the knowledge into my life and in what way is it transformative for me?

Another faculty member referred the understanding that can be derived from slowing down in this way:

When I slow myself down—and so much of contemplative practice in education is learning how to slow down to absorb the full field of what’s going on—I’m [able to experience] subject and object; I’m here, it’s there. And as I start to observe and encounter, I also inhabit. I actually, in the meaning of empathy, feel into, feel within, and so I begin to have a relationship with what I’m seeing and I start to translate what I’m seeing.

A third faculty member implied that slowing down is what is needed for a sane and effective life:

If we’re in this for the long haul, we have to take time on a daily basis to prepare ourselves for the coming day, and to take on one less task rather than one more, because the world in which we are living just wants us to be busy, whether or not
that busyness is creative, constructive, compassionate, helpful, effective. I find it’s not an easy thing to impart.

Similar to CIIS, none of the faculty members with whom I spoke saw traditional academic structures as a major impediment to a contemplative approach to education, though they could envision useful refinements. Also, as is the case at CIIS, many faculty members utilize retreats as a way of setting aside a block of time for meditation and other purposes. As one faculty member stated in response to whether she felt that traditional academic structures impede her work,

Sometimes I think grading does. I don’t think accreditation does, I don’t think semesters do. Being contemplative doesn’t mean not having structure. Lots of traditions thrive within structures. I try to be very clear about what grades mean and don’t mean; if we were to dispense with grading, that could hurt students who want to go on to another place.

The same faculty member also stated,

We have been a little too locked into semesters and we’re looking at also scheduling blocks, say a spring block. In our department, we have seven weeks of class, we sit [i.e., meditate] during the 8th week, and then have seven more weeks of class. So that’s one way to work within the structure and can get around it. We could [create] some more innovative structures.

Another faculty made the following remark on traditional academic structures:

All the conventional things—tests, papers, etc.—are extremely useful because they are part of the culture. We’re not trying to create a completely different
world here, we’re trying to create practices that will change the way the world is as it is. Not to create something brand new, but to shift it.

Most of the faculty stated, in one way or another, that fostering community is an important goal for them. As one faculty member noted,

After we meditate, we re-arrange into a large circle. We start with announcements, which to my mind is about creating community. Community is a big piece of our program. We’ve been struggling for years to figure out what we mean by that; it’s actually a piece of the pedagogy in our program. People meditate to get to know themselves very well, to know their own habits—habitual patterns of mind and emotion and so on—so that they can be completely present with people. That [i.e., meditation] is not enough—they also need a lot of experience interacting. A lot of things that are relational do not come up on the cushion [i.e., while meditating].

Other faculty members echoed this idea that being in community is an important of contemplative education because students need practice in learning how to relate. As one faculty member stated, “We’re a cohort model. A lot of the practice they get in interacting with others is in the cohort model. They are together for three years—whatever you name it, it will come up.” As another stated,

One big piece of community is having a mirror to see how you’re doing, getting feedback—seeing how you respond to people, seeing how they respond to you, seeing how group dynamics happen, seeing what sets you off—learning how to deal with that, to be present, being able to skillfully give feedback.
An important aspect of fostering community in the classroom is creating a classroom culture that supports contemplative development. As a faculty member stated, Embedded [contemplative education] for me means that I along with my students have created a culture that models contemplative practices. So there’s a culture in the classroom that gets created. One of the aspects of the culture is respect for oneself and the other—there’s both an implicit and explicit value in listening to each other’s speech and reflecting on each other’s and on one’s own speech, [and in] speaking and listening respectfully. You also have a responsibility to challenge habits of mind and body that are inherited as a package deal rather than consciously adopted. A culture of respect, of fairness, but also very importantly a culture where you’ve not only learned something but where you examine the process of learning at any one moment, and you’re reflecting on your personal engagement with the material. And where you are demonstrating the principles that are being taught rather than just regurgitating what you’ve been taught.

Building community is also seen as a way to bring out the best in the students. As one faculty member stated,

I want the class to become a community of learners, rather than a group of strangers. One of the things I try to do is I never give them back written work in class, I have them come to my office to get the paper back. When they are in my office we talk about how the semester is going, how other courses are going, etc. This way I get to see them several times a semester. In the case of a silent, shy person, I might say that their work is good and encourage them to share their perspective [in class], and often they do speak up. I make it a point to know their
names at the first class session. I may say “there are some students who are shy and it may be nice to hear from them.”

Related to the idea of community is the idea of building the student-teacher relationship to support a student’s educational journey. In some cases, that takes the form of mentoring, which at Naropa is handled in a sophisticated way. As one faculty member stated,

In this department, education very much takes place by way of relationship. Every student chooses two mentors from the faculty who we then pay a stipend to for working with them inter-disciplinarily. So real learning happens in relationship, and we can assess that relationship. We track data on the quality and growth of that relationship: inquiry, initiation, clash moment, how is it coming to closure…. [There are] eight types of conversations between protégés and mentors that [the mentors] observe they are having [with the students].

Another faculty member stated that “The whole notion of the student-teacher relationship is very important at Naropa and in Tibetan Buddhism. There is a balance between friendliness and formality, precision/guidelines and flexibility.”

Like CIIS, rituals seem to play an important role at Naropa, with the most widespread example being bowing to each other at the start and end of each class. As one faculty member stated,

Like most classes, we start and end with a bow, holding a posture that is wakeful, that reaffirms our basic goodness, basic sanity, Buddha nature, whatever you want to term it, and acknowledges the same traits in everyone else. It really does break through the habitual mind. For a moment people are present—at least ideally.
This use of ritual relates to the idea of somatic or embodied experience, which is also important at Naropa. As one faculty member stated,

The body is the ultimate feedback mechanism. The body is always giving intelligent signals. If those intelligent subtle signals are not listened to, there are cumulative effects over time as illness. The body is constantly informing, and then there are ways to pay attention to what and how it is informing, and also with our thoughts as well.

Being or having a body means that every moment we’re alive; in addition to thinking or feeling or whatever else we’re doing, we’re also, if you will, “bodying.” And since that’s always part of what’s happening in a moment of experience, there’s at least a potential for a valuable contribution [from]—or interaction with—somatic processing.

Central to contemplative education is the idea that each individual possesses innate knowledge and wisdom, and that this knowledge and wisdom manifests on multiple levels, including the somatic level as just mentioned. Also, along with innate wisdom and knowledge is innate goodness. What contemplative practices do, in part, is remove the blocks to the flow of this knowledge, wisdom and goodness, and attune people so that they can become more aware of what their inner nature has to offer. This view of human nature results in what one faculty member referred to as “a real honoring of each individual person.” The following are the reflections of several faculty members on the innate nature of human beings that contemplative education is designed, in part, to nurture:
• [By doing] what we’re doing—this notion of mindful awareness, of paying attention to the experiential quality of one’s life, of actually showing up and being present—what you begin to notice is the authority that your own experience has for you and that the immediately present world has for you. The narrative of one’s life has an authority of its own.

• I try to pull out of the students the belief in their own wisdom, the experience of their own wisdom, and their own basic goodness—and to trust that and develop confidence so that they can do the things that they long to do.

• The central thing that contemplative education brings to the whole field [of higher education] is trust and a sense of respect for students. They are not naïve participants in education and they do not come without insight or the capacity to generate knowledge themselves, and that was the big turning point for me—to say that knowledge does not come from the library or lab exclusively, which is pretty much what higher education institutions think…. There’s a kind of impoverishment in how we view the potential of students. There are things about us that don’t develop—that are self-existing right from the beginning.

While the faculty see students as having positive innate qualities and abilities that contemplative education can unlock, several also talked about blocks to effective learning and action that students come with and how contemplative educational practices can help students to overcome these blocks. As one faculty member stated, “Many students come from conventional colleges and many have lost their heart somewhere in the educational process.” Another stated that
“[Students] may come in feeling really badly about themselves, and we have to spend the first few semesters really seeing the wisdom in them and helping them see it as well, and help them trust it, and then they show up, develop more confidence and then they just begin to blossom. For most of them, they just want something that means something to them personally, and education hasn’t necessarily in the past.

A couple of faculty members noted the corrosive effect of popular culture on students:

• We also emphasize this idea of maitre which is friendliness towards self, and which is not the same as “being nice to yourself.” It’s the opposite of self-aggression, which is rampant in this culture, and the fires of that are fanned by all sorts of cultural things such as advertising.

• We are pretty much trained and in some cases educated from the popular culture to have a lazy mind, an impulsive mind, to have a sound-bite mind, to not critically think our way through things.

So there is a remedial aspect, so to speak, to contemplative education that is aimed at undoing the harmful habits and conditioning engendered by personal experience or the influence of societal messages and social mores.

Meta-cognition is an important feature of the contemplative educational approach, as are the related ideas of self-reflection and self-inquiry. As one faculty member stated, Broadly speaking, contemplative education is not just learning something, but reflecting on the process of learning, and reflecting on one’s direct experience of learning. And the goal of contemplative education is not just to learn things, but to
sharpen the capacity to reflect upon learning and to reflect upon one’s personal relationship to learning. Also, there is a direct application of that reflection on learning to one’s own development as an awake human being.

By learning meditation a student is invited to notice their experience—this is, from a psychological perspective, meta-cognition. And this has additional levels of meta-cognition—you can notice what you notice, for example. And so there is this opportunity to progress along a path of self-discovery, self-knowledge, self-understanding—that is what I mean by engaging their minds in a contemplative manner.

As indicated above, requiring students to engage in self-reflection is a central aspect of contemplative education. This is how a faculty member described his used of self-reflection:

Pedagogically one of the things I try to do in almost all of my courses is to ask students to write a reflective piece…. For example, in the course Introduction to Peace Studies, I would ask them to consider violence in their lives: how their lives have been affected by violence, or how [through violence] they have affected their own lives and others. [I find that] they come into the inquiry with a textbook of their own too, so it’s not only about just reading a half-dozen books by other people. The assumption by which I teach recognizes that these students are not empty vessels.

Before moving on to the next section, I provide one more perspective on contemplative education: its holistic quality, which is implicit in many of the observations offered above. As one faculty member stated,
I appreciate Gardner’s work on the various intelligences, multiple intelligences. I think the idea is that our beings are so multifaceted, that [we should ask]: Why leave out part, why disenfranchise part, why not recognize the totality of what it means to be a human being? That is why I keep using the phrase “holistic education.” In contemplative education we take a particular approach to holistic education where we’re really interested in educating the whole person and taking advantage of their entire skill set, all of their cognitive and other abilities, different ways of knowing—different ways of using one’s mind.

Another faculty member offered the following observation:

“Integration” is a huge word: we’re learning at all levels, so we’re taking in things through the intellect, the senses… sensing capacities, through the heart, the intuition; this is a full 360 degree learning. And so the person is alive, tuned into what they sense and feel, and how they actually care about what they are learning. That brings a quality of awakeness and aliveness to learning.

The president related Naropa’s contemplative approach to education to earlier pre-Enlightenment approaches that were fundamentally holistic:

[With the Enlightenment—the “I think therefore I am” of Descartes—somehow or other the key internal organ migrated to the head, whereas education until then had been of heart as well as of head. And I think with the virtually concurrent or slightly later scientific revolution the emphasis migrated from the inner being to the outer world. So 300 years ago there was this diversion from what had been an understanding of human beings to a narrower understanding of education, saying that it’s chiefly a cognitive enterprise and it’s chiefly about the external world,
whereas we know the way pre-enlightenment educators all around the world knew that education was about self and world, and about head and heart. What we’re doing is reclaiming a more thorough understanding of what it means to be human and what the corresponding goals of education are.

The Effect of Contemplative Education on Students

By and large, the faculty were very positive both about the type of students that Naropa attracts and the effects that contemplative education has on students. The following are a few of the many observations that faculty members shared with me:

- Confidence is developed. All of our students want to make a contribution. By the second or third semester, that comes out more and more, and they want to figure out how [to make a contribution]—that’s the only question.
- The best thing about Naropa is that the students are alive and awake. They don’t fall asleep in class, they come prepared to engage you, and it’s very unpredictable.
- Students sometimes don’t recognize what they gotten, but others see it. For example: a group of student restored a hillside … [and] an outsider commented on how collaborative the group was.
- People turn up more personally in their own education, develop the courage to speak what’s true, and inquire at a level that’s important and meaningful for them.
• One of the things I find is that by the end of the second semester there’s a kind of shininess in the students—they are beginning to really trust themselves, trust their own wisdom, feel a quality of excitement about what they can develop and can share with the world—and a tremendous desire to be of benefit to others out of that.

• Most students develop a quality of poise and self-confidence about who they are and what they can do, less apology for what they can’t do—self acceptance. They are also very good at being with people—we get that feedback from the internship sites.

There can also be some drawbacks to the contemplative approach, though they are seen as minor compared the benefits. As one faculty member stated: “There’s all kind of privileges that go with different traditions that can live in a subtle way at a place like Naropa.” Another faculty member stated

One of our struggles is that there is so much focus on personal process: how we’re doing, etc. [Sometimes students] are not chewing on enough socially relevant information. This creates a student who has a lot of unexamined privilege—there’s a quality that my personal experience is privileged, and I marginalize interpersonal, social, relational issues.

Along the same lines, a third faculty member stated that “Naropa students can veer a little too much into process because they are intrigued with their own thoughts. They hold their alternative views tightly, which can highjack a class sometimes.”

*Academic Governance*
In terms of academic governance, CIIS and Naropa share some interesting parallels. Both started out with homegrown governance structures and tended to rely often on hiring academic leaders who were part of the lineage and strongly supported the mission, but lacked academic administrative experience; both have a fair number of faculty members who were trained at the institution; and both institutions now have a president and a VPAA whose spiritual practices are not those of the founder, who are experienced administrators from other conventional higher education institutions, and who are interested in bringing in best practices and building the capacity of faculty to work within a more conventional governance structure. As the Naropa president stated,

[W]hile Naropa doesn’t yet embody all of the governance and policy preferences that mainstream higher education does, that certainly is the direction that we’re moving in. When the board asked me to come here, it was with the fairly explicit hope that I would help us move closer to mainstream education both so that we could share what we learned about teaching about inner work as our distinctive contribution to American higher education and, at the same time, learn best practices from mainstream institutions so that we wouldn’t reinvent the wheel, and in fact could become more efficient. I suspect that all institutions fall somewhat short of the ideal policy booklet and the ideal governance; [however], we have an aspiration to act like a robust, mature institutional, and I think we’re getting there.

The faculty recognize their own challenges in assuming conventional governance responsibilities. One faculty member remarked that “Faculty are weak in terms of their role in faculty governance,” and another stated that
In terms of solid faculty governance, we need capacity building. The faculty don’t know how to take equal share. A good portion of the faculty have never taught elsewhere or been exposed to faculty governance systems—[they are] not used to leading and don’t know what leading is. There’s plenty of empowerment. Faculty need to learn how to push.

Another noted that

The initial founding group operated under a guru model, so it’s taken some time to create procedures. The school is moving towards more of a structure in academic governance. Previously, they just processed things too much; were afraid to take a vote.

Overall, the faculty seem to welcome the gradual introduction of more conventional structures. As one faculty member stated,

For me, [the traditional academic structure] is a reasonably good fit. I like to learn in community, in a group, and I like academic community because everyone is a peer, each with their own expertise—unlike a spiritual community with a guru. This feels more democratic.

However, there are challenges to adapting conventional governance practices, given Naropa’s contemplative educational philosophy. As an example of these challenges, the VPAA stated

We’re coming into a conversation about faculty rewards and how this relates to contemplative practice. There is great variability in how faculty compile their dossiers around the contemplative dimension, and I have had conversations with the governance bodies [about this] and they have come to the same conclusion.
We’re now trying to specify and clarify for personnel decisions what is the faculty member’s engagement with a contemplative practice. What do we evaluate? We’re not going to ask for a meditation log. What do we expect them to write about, to demonstrate? That’s a conversation we’re beginning to have.

Naropa has developed some administrative/governance structures and practices that are reflective of its contemplative approach. One faculty member stated that “In meetings … we’ll have a bell of mindfulness that is used to cut the momentum of speedy living and thinking.” The president described an innovative structure—the Elders Council—that he developed:

I want to give an example of something that sets us apart. Several years ago there were some publicly disruptive incidents that made for widespread unhappiness that involved some personnel issues and values questions. And I was startled to discover the virulence of some of the public protests, which to me seemed to depart from the qualities of what I felt to be contemplative life. And they demonstrated that there wasn’t the deep seated trust of one another that I would have hoped for in the institution. And after some months of dwelling on this I hit upon something that spoke to the situation. I asked myself, where does trust come from in an institution? And the answer I gave myself was that it comes from trustworthy people and found myself drawn to a parallel in mainstream education: how is it that faculty go about identifying people to handle decision-making where trust is most required—matters of tenure and promotion. In my experience, most colleges have a committee that undertakes the peer review and makes those recommendations. In my experience, people who get elected to such a committee
are not the scholars, best teachers, the campus politicos, but are people who colleagues trust. What if I tried to identify the most trustworthy people and brought them together to talk with me and periodically with the community? So I asked faculty, staff and students: Who do you trust? There were about 120 names that came forward, but there were about 8 or 10 mentioned qualitatively more than others. So what I did, together with my senior diversity officer, was ask those 8 or 10 people if they would come together, on a monthly basis, to engage in a conversation that was safe in a place outside of the conventional structure—no reporting lines here. It’s just a group that sort of exists as its own “symbol of the sacred”—I’ve never called it that before. Because it’s an unusual creation, it’s taken more than a year to take its seat, but it’s come to play a role in offering listening circles to the campus community, particularly around vexing issues—of transition most recently. It provides a safe space with one another and with skilled, trustworthy people. [It is] really [there] to provide a safety valve—they are basically a listening circle to let my hair down in a way that I don’t do with anyone else, even the board.

The degree of shared governance and teamwork in an institution is, according to Barr and Tagg, an indicator of whether an institution tends towards being learner-centered. I address this in the next chapter.

Assessment

Like CIIS, Naropa enjoys a comfortable relationship with its regional accreditor.

As the VPAA stated,
We just hosted our liaison from the Higher Learning Commission in preparation for reaccreditation in 2010. Our unique mission does not detract from nor does it contradict our ability to meet the demands of our external regional accreditor. We’re adopting and adapting to the language and the practices that are expected of higher education institutions more generally: outcomes assessment, strategic planning. We’ve moved [those efforts] very far along in the last couple of years, and I think faculty are seeing that none of that is incompatible with our contemplative aspiration and practices.

Like CIIS, Naropa also sees the assessment movement as compatible with its unusual mission—and in some sense supportive of contemplative education—provided that a wider and more flexible approach is utilized. As he VPAA stated,

Outcomes assessment is a contemplative practice. Outcomes assessment is asking people to clarify and reflect on what it is that they do. We could get into whether certain types of outcomes are as easily measured as others and, for example, what does a series of standardized quantitative measure on some aspects of students’ compassion tell us about students’ contemplative practices. We could debate that, but the larger enterprise is a contemplative enterprise….

A faculty member, remarking on assessment in the context of Naropa, stated:

We could say there are current movements in research that are leveling the playing field a little more for studying things that are not reducible to numbers and are not inside a more patriarchal or hierarchical way of operating, where traditional research has been birthed. The traditional methods of research are insufficient to pick up the kinds of things we’re talking about. Non-traditional
educational practices—or practices a little outside the box—should be ready to hold themselves to “big boy” standards—and I mean that in all its patriarchal sexist way. I think that alternative practices could use a little more [muscle] tone about weeding out their own pseudo science….  

[Alternative fields] have to apply their own understanding of skepticism—for example, grounded theory, participatory action research, new methodology in qualitative interviewing. These are the kind of things we could really benefit from. The day is gone where qualitative research is being marginalized, and [where] research does not marginalize outlying populations. We’re getting outside of a restrictive box with research.

Some faculty see Naropa as having a long way to go in developing the capacity to do assessment effectively. One faculty member stated that “Naropa’s unique challenge is to assess what we’re doing,” another that “We’re at the ground floor in doing this,” a third that “You need time and resources to do assessment [properly], and we’re a small and struggling institution and so we’re hard-pressed for time,” and a fourth that “Measureable outcomes is a little tough for us sometimes.” However, despite the perceived challenges to performing assessment in accordance with external norms and practices, my sense of the faculty is that individual and group assessment of teaching methodology in relation to student learning outcomes is an informal characteristic of the institutional culture. Just as Naropa students develop meta-cognition through meditation practices that can lead to reflection on how they learn, faculty members I spoke with at Naropa evidenced meta-cognition in respect to their teaching practices. As one faculty member stated,
There’s a way in which I have a lot of faith in the assessment process if I don’t buy into standard techniques. I am constantly assessing what the student has learned as being relevant in our domain by using tests, assignments, etc. At the same time, I have to evaluate whether the person can make the information [taught in the program] personally and professionally applicable.

Another faculty member stated,

We do want to know whether we’re doing what we say we’re doing. We don’t have measures for many subtle things. We all talk regularly about how our students are doing…. We do a ton of human assessment.

In response to the challenges of adapting itself to the prevailing assessment movement, the University appears to be finding mechanisms that are suitable to its mission and educational practices. As the president stated,

[W]e’re in the midst of becoming more articulate about the uses of more subtle instruments, such as being portfolio based, that invite students to be reflexive about their own growth, as well as the faculty member’s assistance to students in becoming more reflexive. I position us with other institutions that understand the importance of outcomes analysis, but in subtle ways that are more like NSSE and the like.

The ultimate challenge in assessment is that some of the outcomes of contemplative approaches to education—those related to personal growth, inner balance, insight, and so on—may not manifest for years if not decades. As the president remarked,
“Any kind of education that is worth its salt—either in liberal arts or in contemplative education—needs a long time horizon [to allow for meaningful assessment].”

As noted earlier, Barr and Tagg assert that there is an important connection between an institution’s commitment to assessment and its ability to engage in learner-centered education. I return to this point in the next chapter.

Cross-Case Analysis

*Common Aspects of Spiritual/Contemplative Approaches to Education*

My grand tour research question articulates two major goals for my dissertation: to better understand and define the emerging paradigm of contemplative/spiritually oriented higher education, and to explore whether spiritually oriented higher educational practices complement, advance and/or exemplify learner-centered educational practices and thereby promote deep learning. In this section I articulate the broad contours of spiritually oriented higher education, drawing upon the case narratives and aspects of my literature review. In the next chapter I examine the connection, overlap and synergy between the spiritual education paradigm and the learner-centered educational paradigm, and how spiritual/contemplative approaches to education thereby promote deep learning. Throughout the remainder of this chapter and the following chapter I also address several of the ancillary research questions that I posed in Chapter 1. Note that a few of these ancillary questions—such as the effects of spiritual pedagogy on students and whether conventional academic governance structures need to be changed in order to
accommodate a contemplative/spiritual approach to education—have already, in essence, been addressed in the context of the campus narratives.

Before identifying the contours of spiritually oriented education, I offer a few caveats and observations about my conclusions. As noted in the research methodology chapter, my goal is to offer naturalistic generalizations based primarily on the two cases I studied; however, as discussed in that chapter, there are inherent limitations in making generalizations when using qualitative research approaches such as case study. Another caveat is that inevitably an institution’s educational vision and mission—its theory, in a sense, of what it is about—is a portrayal of its ideal reality, while its actual reality (if I may express it in that way) is always a bit messier and less comprehensive and less systematic; so in formulating a conceptual understanding of a phenomenon, one is faced with the question of whether the formulation should reflect to some degree the ideal portrayal of the vision in addition to the reality that one actually encountered. Finally, my discussions with faculty and staff on spiritual/contemplative teaching-learning approaches inevitably moved into discussions on related areas such as the goals/competencies associated with courses and programs, the philosophy and values underlying the educational approaches, and the ultimate learning outcomes that were intended and observed. In short, in sketching the contours of this emerging paradigm, there are issues as to where to draw the boundaries. Given the above considerations, my primary approach to articulating a spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm is to identify the themes common to the CIIS and Naropa narratives, with more weight given to the material derived from interviews.
In my interviews, a couple of metaphors were offered for CIIS’s and Naropa’s educational approaches. For CIIS’s integral education, it was the metaphor of a family portrait (“Integral education at CIIS is like Wittgenstein’s family portrait, where no one feature is emphasized across all programs, but all programs embody a family resemblance to one another”); for Naropa’s contemplative education, it was the metaphor of a complex sculpture (“Contemplative education is like a complex 3-D sculpture and no one photograph will do justice to that, but if you walk around and take a picture from various angles, you begin to get a sense of its dynamism and vitality”). What these metaphors indicate—accurately in my opinion—is that while spiritually oriented education is most directly operationalized on the course and program level by individual faculty members who all have their own particular perspectives and practices, it must be viewed on the institutional level in order to understand it reasonably comprehensively.

For me, another metaphor comes to mind: a symphony. While no single musician can individually create a symphony, a group of musicians collectively can. Additionally, no symphony makes use generally of every type of instrument in existence, but rather a subset of available instruments. And all the musicians are operating within an agreed set of parameters, whether of tempo or key, though occasionally new parameters are explored and developed, and sometimes a musician can play off key. These sorts of metaphors would apply, I imagine, to any broad educational approach such as liberal arts or integrative education. With the above considerations in mind, as well as the understanding that there are exceptions to any generalization, I now turn to articulating several of the broad traits of spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm.
Established religions/wisdom traditions provide the foundation. At the outset of my research, I anticipated that I would find that CIIS and Naropa had created a generalized or eclectic spirituality—a sort of spiritual Esperanto—that provided the spiritual/philosophical foundation for the institution. What I found instead was that faculty, staff and students, as individuals, generally operated primarily out of a specific established religion or tradition with which they resonated, and that there were also a number of individuals who were interested in—and derived insight and practices from—one or more religions/traditions other than their primary one. Faculty are careful, however, to balance the expression of particular spiritual beliefs and practices with opportunities for the expression of other beliefs and practices and to gauge whether and to what degree students are open to the inclusion of spiritual practices and information. They also tend to utilize practices that are not readily identifiable with a particular religion, such as simple meditation practices and rituals, unless the course or program has a particular spiritual/religious focus such as Buddhist studies. In short, faculty create a solid and explicit place for spiritual/religious expression while maintaining an awareness of the need for sensitivity and inclusiveness.

Understanding and welcoming diversity is a central value, as is creating community. Since faculty, staff and students at CIIS and Naropa collectively exhibit a wide diversity of spiritual beliefs and practices, mutual respect and understanding is essential to developing a shared community and sense of purpose, and conversely fostering a sense of community and purpose supports inclusivity and tolerance. While there is an explicit acceptance of a spiritual reality among students, faculty and staff at both campuses, faculty are also sensitive as indicated above to not overstepping bounds
in terms of expression. Apart from the interest in building a cohesive campus community, there is an understanding that working with diversity helps students to develop important interpersonal skills and beneficial values such as compassion, and supports useful intellectual development such as meta-cognition as students broaden their awareness to include multiple cultural and personal realities. For some of the same reasons, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary study is valued and supported, though not always achieved in practice.

**Dedicated spiritual practice on the part of faculty is an essential aspect of contemplative/spiritually oriented education.** Faculty at CIIS and Naropa share Parker Palmer’s view that their effectiveness as teachers reflects the extent to which they have developed their self-awareness, and that effective teaching requires a high degree of presence and authenticity. Self-awareness, presence and authenticity enable a faculty member to be a model and mentor to students, and to have the intuitive ability to incorporate the unexpected twists and turns and teachable moments that arise in classroom in order to make the learning experience come alive. Spiritual awareness can trump pedagogy when it comes to effective teaching: a highly realized person can make a lecture compelling because of the quality of presence or being that he or she brings to the educational encounter.

**Dedicated spiritual practice on the part of students is an essential aspect of contemplative/spiritually oriented education.** Faculty at CIIS and Naropa are interested in more than inculcating academic or professional information, knowledge and skills: they are also interested in helping to bring about psychological and spiritual transformation in students. While profound transformation can happen through
intellectual understanding alone (“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”), on a practical level all religions and wisdom traditions recognize that deeply ingrained physical and emotional habits—conditioned feelings and actions—are impediments to developing spiritual awareness and engaging in fruitful action in the world. So while students arrive with the potential to access from within deep insight, knowledge and intuition, they also arrive with emotional and spiritual blocks and habits that impede effective learning and interpersonal relating, as well as impede access to their inner wisdom. Spiritual practice is one of the most effective means by which to break down these blocks and habits and thereby transform individuals. On a more mundane level, the faculty also utilize short meditations and contemplative activities at the start of class to bring everyone into the present moment, which facilitates effective and engaged attention and participation.

**Students have within them multiple intelligences that can be developed through a holistic educational approach.** Related to the idea that students arrive with innate wisdom and knowledge that can be accessed through certain spiritual/contemplative practices is the idea that students also possess multiple intelligences—cognitive, emotional, embodied/somatic, spiritual, and so forth. These various intelligences can be accessed and/or developed through a variety of means including meditation practices, the arts, deep contemplation of phenomena, and practical skills training (e.g., practicing deep listening). One might say that this holistic approach dethrones the mind/intellect from its privileged position in higher education and instead acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing that, if fostered, conduce to a deeper, more comprehensive competence in various dimensions of life.
Active/practical/experiential educational activities are needed to support inner transformation and the development of multiple intelligences/competencies. Related to the idea of holistically fostering multiple intelligences is the idea that higher education should include a practical component—often one that includes interpersonal interaction. The effective translation of knowledge and skills taught in the classroom to real-life activity—like the translation of values and spiritual insights into action—requires practice. Theoretical knowledge plays an important role, but it is remains incomplete or one-dimensional without application. Moreover, without practice students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop confidence and willpower, and move towards mastery of an art or skill. Important community-oriented abilities, and a deepened commitment to service, are further developed through practical experience that includes an interpersonal component, and practice helps uncover areas where knowledge and understanding may be incomplete. Moreover, it’s important to balance disciplinary content with the process of inner developmental; inner development is, in a sense, another dimension of content.

Fostering meta-cognition/self-awareness is an essential aspect of contemplative/spiritually oriented education. There are, as noted previously, a number of psychological/soul qualities and abilities that a contemplative/spiritual approach to education aims to foster in students. However, perhaps the most fundamental is meta-cognition or self-awareness. Meta-cognition extends beyond self-awareness of the cognitive content of one’s mind to self-awareness of somatic/sensory input and feeling states. What meta-cognition allows for is a dis-identification from one’s mind and emotions; this, in turn, allows for a number of inner developments, among which are: a
greater understanding of one’s learning style and hence control over learning environments; greater objectivity regarding one’s own viewpoints and a corresponding openness to other points of view; a lessening of reactivity and corresponding ability to maintain equanimity and be proactive; greater self-awareness and honesty regarding one’s personal abilities and challenges, and so on. First-person work/reflexivity is a valued and important component of a spiritual/contemplative approach to education because it helps students to develop meta-cognition, and first-person experience is a valid source of knowledge.

Various inner orientations—generally not cultivated in conventional higher education environments—are seen as valuable to the intellectual, psychological and soul development of students, among which are: resting in not-knowing, not rushing to conclusions, suspension of judgment; slowing down, less is more; and acknowledging one’s fallibility, being kind towards oneself, accepting one’s humanness. By the time students arrive at a higher education institution—whether as undergraduate or graduate students—they have already been deeply conditioned by their society, family and personal experiences in certain ways of thinking, feeling and being and are, to some degree, psychologically or spiritually limited or damaged and therefore in need of inner healing. Unless higher education programs provide a space for inner healing through classroom activities and a culture that supports transformation in a healthy direction (though not at the level of personal therapy), students will be impeded by their own conditioned ways of being from a much more creative, motivated and effective engagement with learning. Another way of stating this is that in addition to
traditional academic skills such as writing, students need a strong psychological/spiritual foundation upon which to base their learning; and just as colleges are sometimes called upon to provide remedial courses for skills development, they may also be called upon to offer remedial soul development. On a more mundane level, some of these attitudes (e.g., slowing down/less is more) support good learning practices—with the *lexio devina* concept noted above as an example—and also support academic skills such as critical reasoning and objectivity.

**Traditional academic abilities and structures are valued and supported in the context of contemplative/spiritual understanding.** As noted in the campus narratives above, neither CIIS nor Naropa view conventional/traditional higher education structures and practices as fundamentally antithetical to their unusual educational missions and approaches. Quite the contrary—conventional structures and practices can be very supportive. Both institutions are working to further develop conventional academic governance structures based on best practices and to build the faculty’s capacity to work effectively within these structures. Similarly, both institutions are working hard to develop their capacity to engage effectively in outcomes assessment, though in this case the use of qualitative methodology is seen as necessary. External accreditation is generally seen as helpful to the institutions and supportive of their missions, with the one counter-example of APA accreditation of CIIS’s PsyD program where some degree of conflict appears to exist based on incompatible paradigms of human psychology.
Just as conventional governance structures and practices are considered compatible with unconventional spiritual/contemplative educational approaches, spiritual/contemplative educational approaches are considered compatible with the development of conventional academic skills. The faculty and administrative leadership at both institutions emphasized the fundamental importance of academic skills and academic rigor, and they regard spiritual/contemplative practices as conducive of developing these skills. As noted earlier, certain spiritual practices mirror and expand upon academic skills; also, careful attention to the development of academic skills is considered another spiritual discipline. So just as multiple intelligences include cognitive intelligence as a component, so too do spiritual/contemplative educational approaches include cultivation of traditional academic skills—though, as noted earlier, often with a spiritual or contemplative slant or expansion.

Concluding Thoughts

With the analysis in the preceding section, I have achieved, I believe, one key goal of my dissertation: conceptualizing a model or paradigm for spiritually oriented higher education. I have also demonstrated that faculty members at CIIS and Naropa do share a distinctive philosophy of education, though there were variations in how they described the overall philosophy and the aspects of teaching and learning that they considered most significant. Given the inherent limitations of qualitative research discussed in Chapter 3, it is safe to say that there are a number of other ways that this model/paradigm could logically be conceptualized; I would, however, anticipate a reasonable degree of agreement among different models given the relative consistency of the information I derived from interviews, the materials obtained onsite, and the literature
review. Before moving on in the next chapter to an analysis of the overlap and potential synergy between the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm and the learner-centered educational paradigm, I first address a couple of the remaining ancillary research questions set forth in Chapter 1 that have not already been addressed. I also share some other observations on the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm based on cross-case analysis.

As noted above, there is a fair degree of overlap in the range of academic programs offered at Naropa and CIIS, with the primary emphasis being on programs in psychology/counseling, religion/spirituality, and the arts and social sciences. The only exceptions were programs related to environmental studies at Naropa and integrative health at CIIS, fields that nicely lend themselves to inclusion of a spiritual dimension (e.g., the Gaia theory). The similarity of programs does not indicate that it would be impossible for certain academic disciplines—such as mathematics or the so-called hard sciences—to meaningful incorporate a spiritual/contemplative dimension (many of the great thinkers and innovators in these fields were, after all, almost mystical in their outlook), but rather that these may be fields where currently the materialist paradigm is more strongly prevalent and therefore the pool of potential students correspondingly smaller. Also, small, relatively underfunded institutions such as Naropa and CIIS simply cannot offer quality programs in every academic discipline, so it’s essential for them to define and operate within an appropriate niche. The fact that both institutions offer such a diverse array of psychology/counseling programs indicates, I believe, that Eastern wisdom traditions provide a profound body of knowledge and practices that enable a
deep understanding of the human psyche and a provide variety of means by which to deal with its maladies.

As implied earlier, the primary preparation that faculty need in order to utilize a contemplative/spiritual approach to higher education is a deep and committed personal spiritual practice. This is, as noted earlier, in line with Parker Palmer’s viewpoint. The following quote from Palmer, which also appears in Chapter 1 above, makes this point:

[K]nowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are…. And when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will only know it abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (1993, p.2)

Beyond their spiritual understanding and self-awareness, faculty would obviously need the disciplinary expertise required to teach in any academic field in higher education. Additionally, an understanding of teaching methodology is obviously a plus, as is an ability to communicate in a way that engages students and creates a sense of connection.

Faculty members were nearly unanimous in their enthusiasm about their institutions; they expressed appreciation for having the latitude to teach subjects that are personally meaningful, and for being able to incorporate their spiritual beliefs and practices into their teaching. From the well-considered responses that faculty gave to the many questions I asked, as well as from the welcome I received on both campuses, it was evident that faculty were passionate about the educational mission, philosophy and approaches of their institutions. From brief remarks here and there, it was clear that
neither campus is without its issues and that there have been rough stretches and occasional periods of discord in the past; however, at least at this point in the development of these two institutions, faculty members on both campuses—as well as administrative leaders—indicate that they are able to be authentic in their work, and that they derive ample personal and professional meaning and satisfaction from it.

I end with the observation that both institutions have largely succeeded in articulating an ideal model or paradigm for their respective educational approaches and, on a programmatic/institutional level, appear to have achieved much of the ideal within what are reasonably conventional higher education parameters. There will always be, I believe, an elusive aspect to spiritual/contemplative approaches to education, namely how to embed or integrate more deeply these approaches into the very essence of the institution. As several faculty members in both institutions stated in various ways, it is easy to default to an intellectual/informational presentation of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, or to incorporate in a piecemeal way various spiritual practices into primarily intellectually oriented programs, rather than achieve a truly integrated approach on all levels. But like any comprehensive and worthwhile paradigm in education, perfection in practice must forever be strived for and, to some degree, remain elusive.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I address the second half of the grand tour research question that I posed in Chapter 1: In what ways, if any, do spiritual/contemplative approaches to higher education complement, advance and/or exemplify learner-centered educational approaches and thereby promote deep learning? As mentioned in Chapter 1, I am also interested in analyzing whether these two approaches are synergistic in the sense of being mutually reinforcing. After I analyze these aspects of my central research question, I examine the study’s implications for higher education practitioners and then complete the dissertation with a discussion of possible directions for future research.

Analysis of Findings

From the presentation of findings and the articulation of a spiritually oriented/contemplative model or paradigm in the previous chapter, it should be evident that these educational approaches do indeed complement, advance, and exemplify learner-centered educational approaches, and thereby promote deep learning. In order to understand the degree to which they do so, I now return to the conceptual framework I presented in Chapter 1 that contrasts the “instruction paradigm” with the “learning paradigm”; I restate it here for the sake of the reader’s convenience.
Table 1: Contrasting Characteristics of the Instruction and Learning Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTION PARADIGM</th>
<th>LEARNING PARADIGM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching/Learning Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atomistic; parts prior to whole; learner focuses on</td>
<td>Holistic; whole prior to parts; student sees how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning discrete bits of information</td>
<td>object of learning relates to prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time held constant, learning varies</td>
<td>Learning held constant, time varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-minute lecture, 3-unit course</td>
<td>Learning environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes start/end at same time</td>
<td>Environment ready when student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One teacher, one classroom</td>
<td>Uses varied learning experiences and settings to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent disciplines, departments</td>
<td>maximize learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covering material</td>
<td>Specified learning results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-course assessment/evaluation</td>
<td>Pre/during/post assessments; high ratio of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading within classes by instructors</td>
<td>to evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private assessment</td>
<td>External evaluations of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree equals accumulated credit hours</td>
<td>Public assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work is viewed only by the course instructor</td>
<td>Degree equals demonstrated knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time horizon is generally seen as successful completion</td>
<td>Requires frequent public student performances (i.e.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of course or degree</td>
<td>demonstration of learned knowledge and skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge exists “out there”</td>
<td>Knowledge exists within each person and is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge comes in “chunks” and “bits” delivered by</td>
<td>influenced by individual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructors</td>
<td>Students participate in constructing and creating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is cumulative and linear</td>
<td>Learning is a nesting and interacting of frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects the “storehouse of knowledge” metaphor</td>
<td>Reflects the “learning how to ride a bicycle” metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on the sign: the surface appearance of the text, problem, etc.</td>
<td>Focuses on the signified: the meaning of the text problem, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning is teacher-centered and directed</td>
<td>Learning is student-centered and directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Live” teacher, “live” students required</td>
<td>“Active” learner required, but not necessarily a “live” teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inert/passive: learner receives what is given, information remains static</td>
<td>Active: learner is the conscious agent of understanding, shapes and works with information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The classroom and learning are competitive and individualistic</td>
<td>Learning environments and learning are cooperative, collaborative, and supportive; there are stable communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent/ability are often perceived as rare</td>
<td>Talent/ability are perceived as abundant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes extrinsic goals and motivation; students motivated by grades</td>
<td>Emphasizes intrinsic goals/motivation; students are supported in developing and pursuing own goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May reinforce and be reinforced by mindless rote learning</td>
<td>Reinforces and is reinforced by mindfulness (including self-reflection and meta-cognition)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nature of Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty are primarily lecturers</th>
<th>Faculty are primarily designers of learning methods and environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and students act independently and in isolation</td>
<td>Faculty and students work in teams with each other and other staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers classify and sort students</td>
<td>Teachers develop every student’s competencies and talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff serve/support faculty and the process of instruction</td>
<td>All staff are educators who produce student learning and success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any expert can teach

Empowering learning is challenging and complex, and seen as a skill apart from expertise in a subject area

| Line governance; independent actors | Shared governance; teamwork |

Before I analyze in more depth the connection between the learner-centered and spiritual/contemplative educational paradigms, I note several observations and caveats. It was beyond the scope of my dissertation to research directly and extensively whether CIIS and Naropa faculty have designed their courses and programs so as to be learner-centered. To do so would have involved, among other things, analyzing course syllabi and program curricula and asking faculty to describe in detail how they conduct their classroom activities; the need to obtain data on other aspects of my research topic required balancing the focus of my attention among several areas. Also, I note that while these two paradigms share some terminology, such as “holistic” and “mindfulness,” they use the terminology somewhat differently. Furthermore, as noted earlier, my generalizations are naturalistic, given that I conducted a case study of two institutions and interviewed a sampling of faculty at those institutions. Finally, as noted earlier, the learner-centered educational paradigm aims primarily at cognitive development while the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm aims at whole person development, including the spiritual dimension. So there is not a neat correspondence between the concepts that define the two paradigms that would make the task of analyzing one from the perspective of the other completely straightforward (an observation of Barr and Tagg, 1995, pp. 14-15, applies here: “A paradigm is like the rules of a game: one of the functions of the rules is to define the playing field. But a new paradigm may specify a
First, I address the question of whether the spiritual/contemplative approach to education exemplifies in practice important aspects of learner-centered education. Another way of stating this is: To what degree do faculty who utilize a spiritual approach also tend to utilize a learner-centered approach, whether or not they may intentionally be doing so. After addressing this question, I move on to the question of whether these two approaches are complementary and synergistic. To answer the first question—the degree to which faculty who utilize a spiritual approach also tend to utilize a learner-centered approach—I refer to the table above. Rather than addressing one-by-one the components listed in the table, I will address those components for which I can offer observations based primarily on my research data and the model I presented in Chapter 4. For several of the components, I do not have information upon which to base an observation either way. I group my observations and analyses according to the three subheadings in the table: “Teaching/Learning Structures,” “Learning Theory,” and “Nature of Roles.”

Teaching Learning Structures

The teaching and learning approaches used by faculty at Naropa and CIIS, as indicated in interviews and published materials, reflect several of the components in the “Teaching Learning Structures” section of the chart above. Interdisciplinary study was and still is at the heart of the vision and mission of both of the institutions I studied (though it is not necessarily a characteristic of every program within each institution), and
departmental and inter-departmental collaboration were evident at Naropa (I do not have enough data to judge the level of collaboration at CIIS). One interesting point to note is that within a given discipline, students often have to engage in cross-paradigmatic study which is, to my mind, a lot like interdisciplinary study: not only do they learn material from the perspective of the spiritual/contemplative paradigm, but they must also learn material from a conventional perspective as well in order to be able to interact effectively with conventionally trained colleagues in their field. This is particularly true, I believe, of the psychology/counseling programs, though true of other programs as well.

A number of faculty members at both institutions described assignments that required students to make presentations to their fellow students. Naropa, in particular, has a strong tradition of public presentation through the use of the “warrior’s exam,” and a couple of faculty members talked about the need to put students on the spot as part of the educational experience. The focus on embodied learning and the use of rituals was another aspect of both institutions that caused students to have to demonstrate their learning publicly. CIIS faculty sometimes scheduled class retreats so that students would have a large block of time in which to make presentations to their fellow students.

Faculty at both institutions were, overall, innovative and willing to experiment with their teaching practices, and in a number of programs learning activities took place in a variety of outside settings as well as in the classroom. At Naropa, in particular, faculty members described the highly experimental beginnings of the institution, and the willingness to experiment with teaching practices still seems very much a part of the Naropa culture.
A couple of faculty members at Naropa described how they allow students to redo assignments based on feedback, and that working with and incorporating feedback from diverse sources was an important skill to develop. I do not have data from CIIS on this.

There was some degree of public assessment of the counseling psychology programs at CIIS, since graduates were eligible for state licensure in some places, and data on the overall success rates on licensing exams are collected. Naropa has recently begun participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement from which the University will derive assessment data from an external source. Counseling internships in affiliated clinics and agencies naturally involve some degree external assessment by patients and staff, and a program such as the M.F.A. in Theater at Naropa requires culminating public performances of its students. However, beyond these sorts of external assessment-type activities, Naropa and CIIS seem reasonably conventional in the degree to which public assessment exists, which is to say that it appears to be modest. Generally, student evaluation appears to be conducted at the course level, though faculty at Naropa noted that departmental faculty members work together in some departments to formulate student outcomes (I do not have information on department-level work at CIIS). Faculty and staff at both institutions expressed strong support for developing comprehensive, meaningful and effective assessment processes, but don’t seem to be much farther ahead in these efforts than other colleges with which I’m familiar (several faculty members at both CIIS and Naropa stated that their institutions were still at the beginning stages of implementing comprehensive assessment processes). At both institutions, however, the faculty and academic leadership are engaged in serious, departmental and institution-wide efforts to better define their educational models and articulate the outcomes of their
education, and have made solid headway in this direction. Because Naropa’s and CIIS’s programs have a goal of inner transformation of students as well as mastery of discipline-based knowledge, faculty and staff noted generally that assessment activities required use of innovative qualitative approaches in order to be meaningful and effective.

By and large, both institutions were organized in accordance conventional academic structures, including semesters, discrete for-credit courses, and so on. Faculty did, however, occasionally vary the academic structure through scheduling retreats and other special activities. Online courses were less bound by the formalities of time. Overall, however, it seemed to me that neither institution is wildly innovative in regard to academic structures in a way that Barr and Tagg envision for learning paradigm colleges, though the article by Ferrer et al. (2005) on transformative integral education I referenced earlier envisions a radical reorienting of the academic calendar to bring about a deeper level of integration of this model of education into an institution.

There was no indication that degrees were awarded for anything other than completion of required courses and other program requirements such as a thesis. However, many programs do require culminating projects such as capstone papers and portfolios that demonstrated some reasonable degree of mastery of an integrated body of knowledge.

The educational process at Naropa and CIIS is holistic in the ways described in the previous chapter, though not quite in the sense meant by Barr and Tagg in the above chart. Faculty and staff recognize that a long time horizon is needed for the development of a person on all of the various levels of being, and learning contemplative practices
such as meditation provide a foundation for ongoing inner development over the course of a lifetime.

Learning Theory

In a number of important ways, the spiritual/contemplative approach to learning by which Naropa and CIIS faculty operate coincides with student-centered learning theory, as presented by Barr and Tagg. Innate knowledge and wisdom are seen to exist in every student and are accessible through meditation and other contemplative activities; students are unique in their expression of this innate knowledge and wisdom, and have unique talents and abilities to be cultivated. Additionally, spiritual/contemplative practices strengthen a student’s sense of purpose and deepen motivation, and help students to clarify personal goals by strengthening the faculty of intuition.

A number of the faculty members at both campuses described the ways in which they work to build a sense of community in their classes and among cohorts in a program, including ample use of group projects. The very act of sitting together in meditation and engaging in collective rituals in class and on campus supports the development of community and a sense of shared purpose. Similarly, meditation retreats and other types of retreats foster a sense of community by bringing students together for long stretches of time. Beyond class and campus community-building activities, the two institutions encourage involvement with external communities through internships and service learning-type activities, which further supports the development of a community-oriented perspective.

Mindfulness, meta-cognition, self-awareness and self-reflection are all essential aspects of both meditation practice and the educational approaches of Naropa and CIIS.
While students are expected to develop a reasonably level of mastery of the external/objective knowledge component of their academic disciplines, they also engage in an inner process of self-cultivation through mindfulness, self-awareness and self-reflection. Faculty teach students how to utilize traditional academic skills that support objectivity while at the same time they often encourage or require students to draw upon the knowledge and insight derived through self-reflection. Additionally, both institutions are interested in their students developing awareness around cultural and religious diversity and, in a number of cases, this type of work is incorporated into courses and programs; furthermore, interpersonal engagement is also supported as a way of deepening self-knowledge. These types of activities support the development of meta-cognition by exposing students to people with different values, beliefs, learning styles, and so on. Moreover, exposure to diversity helps students to understand that knowledge is, to some extent, culturally derived and constructed.

As noted in the previous chapter, faculty at Naropa and CIIS often incorporate active learning components into courses, and this is seen as an essential way of internalizing and embodying knowledge. This is in line with the metaphor of learning how to ride a bike. Several faculty members also expressed the idea that they see themselves more as facilitators of student learning than instructors. While learning is student-centered to a certain degree at CIIS and Naropa (in a few cases, it appears, students even participate in creating the course syllabus), faculty also feel that they are responsible for providing direction—so it’s more of a partnership. One important way, as noted in the previous chapter, in which the spiritual/contemplative educational approach diverges from the student-centered learning theory of Barr and Tagg is the relatively
unimportant place that Barr and Tagg assign to having a “live teacher.” In line with Parker Palmer’s perspective, many of the faculty members at CIIS and Naropa with whom I spoke expressed the idea that their degree of self-awareness, presence, openness and authenticity exerts an important influence on the quality of student learning and the classroom culture.

Finally, the idea of seeking the significance behind written works (and information in general) is at the core of both institutions, and in some cases students are asked to deeply ponder just a single line of text as a way to access deeper insight. As mentioned previously, Naropa University is named after a Buddhist monk who abandoned a life of scholarship in a Buddhist university to pursue the deeper significance and meaning behind the words of the classical Buddhist texts. Additionally, it is understood that study of the microcosm can reveal an understanding of the macrocosm, and that optimal learning is not furthered simply by inculcating large amounts of information. Finally, patient contemplation of a phenomenon such as a tree is seen as both a spiritual discipline as well as a way to arrive at deeper and more integrated knowledge of the phenomenon that can include a non-verbal or intuitive dimension.

*Nature of Roles*

While faculty do lecture at both institutions and see this as a useful way to convey content information, as noted above they also utilize active approaches and experiment with pedagogy. Many of the faculty with whom I spoke indicated that they encourage or require students to work in teams. While there’s a certain amount of team teaching that happens at both institutions and this seems to be a valued approach, one faculty member at Naropa stated that the added expense of team teaching precludes its widespread use.
As described earlier, shared governance is a strongly held value and both institutions are moving to strengthen their shared governance structures. Collegiality and interpersonal process seem to be important values at both institutions (the VPAA at Naropa mentioned that it was important for the faculty to discuss periodically the deeper dimensions of professional relationships beyond what might be specified in the organizational chart or an employment contract). I did not find out, however, how departments functioned in general in terms of teamwork, nor did I gather any information at either institution on the role that non-academic staff members play in supporting student learning. In my conversations with faculty about their students, they generally expressed great respect for their capabilities and the need to support them in developing skills and attitudes that would strengthen their capacity to think and learn. A number of faculty members saw themselves as mentors, which implies to me that they see each student as an individual in need of personal support in the educational journey.

Synergy between the Paradigms

From the material presented above, I am confident in concluding that faculty members who use a spiritual/contemplative approach to education also, to a solid degree (though I doubt universally), use a variety of learner-centered teaching methods, whether or not they would describe them as such. This implies, I believe, that even though these two educational approaches developed for different reasons, they share on an operational level a fair number of similar characteristics and practices, and aim for many of the same learning outcomes. So despite the fact that faculty members who subscribe to the learning paradigm would describe their teaching-learning philosophy and approaches differently from faculty members who subscribe to the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm,
there is nonetheless a significant degree of overlap between these paradigms. This overlap demonstrates what might be described as a basic compatibility, on an operational level, between these two paradigms. Of course, many individual faculty members at conventional institutions who might be entirely open to learner-centered teaching methods would, as indicated in the literature review, balk at adopting a spiritual/contemplative philosophy of education and its associated teaching methods. I will return to this latter point later on after first discussing the ways in which these two approaches might be complementary and synergistic on an operational level.

From the information and findings presented thus far, the complementary nature of these two paradigms seems straightforward: the emphasis of the learner-centered approach is on a student’s intellectual development while the emphasis of the spiritual/contemplative approach is on the development of the whole person, including the multiple intelligences associated with the dimensions of mind, body/sensation, emotion/feeling, soul/spirit, and so on. Another way in which they are complementary is that the learner-centered approach emphasizes persistent, interrelated activity, while the spiritual/contemplative approach—which also recognizes the need for an active educational component—places a major emphasis on inner cultivation and the development of presence and self-awareness through meditation and other contemplative practices. The very fact that, as noted above, faculty at Naropa and CIIS have developed and adopted a variety of learner-centered teaching methods and have explicitly articulated the goal of bringing together Eastern and Western educational approaches and perspectives indicates that these institutions see these two approaches as being complementary and synergistic. (As noted earlier, by “synergy” I mean the interaction or
integration of these two approaches to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.)

The synergistic, mutually reinforcing quality of these two paradigms also seems straightforward. The following are several examples of the synergy that the literature review and research findings point to:

- Meditation and contemplation helps individuals to deal with their distracting thoughts and mental chatter and strengthen attentional ability, which in turn helps individuals to focus more effectively on academic work.
- Cultivating attitudes such as non-judgment, non-aversion, equanimity and an inner sense of spaciousness helps to foster a greater openness to different points of view and greater intellectual objectivity.
- Meditation and contemplation help to clarify personal goals and strengthen intention, which increases motivation to learn and engage purposefully in academic work.
- Learning how to rest in not-knowing and ambiguity, and to be comfortable with non-resolution of problems—as well as the cultivation of intuition—help to strengthen creative problem-solving.
- Contemplative practices can support inner healing processes and removal of inner psychological blocks that impede interpersonal relating and mental focus and clarity, which in turn support the ability to engage in academic work and be a collaborative member of an academic community.
- Active approaches to education provide an opportunity to apply psychological insights and spiritual understanding derived through meditation and
contemplation to concrete learning situations, allowing for testing and strengthening and expanding insights and understanding.

• Fostering emotional intelligence supports the goal of graduating students who will use their intellectual abilities in socially responsible and effective ways.

• Service learning and other types of active pedagogies that engage students with their community support the development of personal commitment to compassionate and engaged service to others.

• Self-awareness and self-reflection support the development of critical thinking.

• Contemplative practices encourage students to go below the surface in seeking understanding of ideas and phenomena.

• Creating an environment where faculty, staff and students feel that they can honesty acknowledge their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices is good for morale within institutions and strengthens commitment to higher education itself by enhancing a sense of authenticity that counters cynicism—provided, of course, that spiritual/religious expression is respectful, non-dogmatic and inclusive.

Implications of the Research for Higher Education

Based on the observations above regarding the overlap and potential synergy between the learner-centered educational paradigm and the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm, as well as on information presented in the literature review chapter and the research findings chapter, I now turn to examining the implications of my research for higher education practitioners—particularly faculty and academic administrators—and, more generally, for institutional practice within higher education. I note that a number of implications of my research have already been presented (though
not labeled as such), so my goal here is to summarize what I see as the key implications of this study. After presenting this summary, I examine the challenges that higher education practitioners might face in efforts to incorporate a spiritual/contemplative dimension into teaching methods in conventional higher education institutions—the implications of implementation.

The following are several of the central or key implications of this study for higher education practitioners that reflect the findings and information presented in this dissertation:

- In practice, a spiritual/contemplative approach to teaching and learning is compatible with, and complements, a learner-centered approach.
- Adding a spiritual/contemplative dimension to learner-centered teaching methods is likely to deepen student learning significantly.
- Spiritual/contemplative approaches to education support and enhance the development of a number of important traditional academic skills such as critical and objective thinking, empirical research, textual analysis, and problem-solving.
- Spiritual/contemplative approaches to education support the development of affective qualities that many conventional higher education practitioners consider important, such as emotional intelligence, commitment to social engagement, a sense of purpose, the ability to listen deeply, compassion, equanimity, the ability to cooperate, and acceptance of differences.
- Spiritual/contemplative approaches foster creativity and innovative thinking.
- The goals of spiritual/contemplative education—like liberal arts education—cannot normally be achieved in the context of a single course or a few courses;
rather, a series of courses in the context of an a well-designed and integrated program can collectively incorporate the multiple dimensions of spiritual/contemplative education.

Just as complementary and alternative medicine is slowly influencing or exerting a transformative effect on conventional medicine, so too is conventional medicine influencing complementary and alternative medicine; this illustrates the idea that contrasting paradigms coming into contact can over time bring about mutual transformation and a degree of harmonization. I believe that the same thing is likely to happen with spiritual/contemplative approaches and conventional approaches to higher education, namely that they may broadly exert a mutually transformative influence on one another—as is already happening at Naropa and CIIS, and at a number of conventional institutions. This possibility points to potential implications for institutional practice within higher education, both for convention institutions and spiritually oriented institutions. For conventional higher education institutions, the following are what I see as three of the more important implications for institutional practice:

• If, as research indicates, large numbers of students, staff and faculty consider spiritual and religious seeking and expression an important or even essential aspect of their lives, conventional higher education institutions risk alienating a substantial portion of their key constituencies if they do not find ways to accommodate this inner dimension. The feeling of alienation has implications for both the academic and business sides of higher education, and thoughtful leaders owe it to their institutions to anticipate the potential corrosive effects of alienation and to envision ways to address this feeling.
• If, as research and commonsense indicate, humans are truly multidimensional beings and a holistic development of their manifold nature is more likely to produce ethical and engaged citizens, innovative and creative individuals, critical thinkers, compassionate individuals, and so on, then there is both a logical and moral imperative to explore integrated approaches to higher education, including ones that include a spiritual/contemplative component.

• As conventional institutions experiment with incorporating a spiritual/contemplative component into teaching methodology and the content of academic programs, they may have to adopt or develop new assessment approaches and new methods for research and inquiry, many of which will be more qualitatively or subjectively oriented (this is already happening, but may need to progress further). Additionally, they will need to figure out how to accommodate potentially radically differing perspectives on spirituality and religion among students and faculty, and deal with the intense feelings that these sometimes charged subjects may trigger.

For institutions like CIIS and Naropa that have already embraced a spiritual/contemplative orientation, there are different implications for institutional practice, the following being two of the more important ones:

• Rigorous academic work supported by conventional practices such as outcomes assessment is compatible with a spiritual/contemplative approach, but a higher education institution that both embraces this approach and seeks conventional forms of recognition (e.g., regional accreditation) must be prepared to adopt and adapt conventional practices in logically defensible ways.
• As Parker Palmer and others note, just as the sometimes one-sided focus on intellectual development grounded in a materialistic worldview—as found in some conventional institutions—may result in unbalanced development of individual students, so too are there potential dangers associated with an emphasis on spiritual development at the expense of developing intellectual skills. These dangers include an over-fascination with one’s subjective self that may impede a productive and balanced engagement with the external world, and a dismissal of useful intellectual tools such as the scientific method and logical reasoning, which may impede effective thinking and communication.

Ultimately, as these two paradigms interact and exert a mutual influence, new integrated ways of human thinking, feeling and action may evolve. Philosophers such as Rudolf Steiner, who articulated a scientific approach to spirituality, point to these new ways. This may be the ultimate implication for higher education practice: the necessity of reformulating and re-envisioning traditional intellectual and scholarly practices.

The Challenges of Implementation

The implications listed above, as well as other findings presented in this paper, indicate strongly that fostering greater holism in higher education—a holism that reflects both an ancient understanding of balanced human development and at the same time incorporates advances in understanding in science and other fields—would be highly beneficial to students and society alike. There are, however, major challenges to restoring holism in many if not most higher education institutions. So it’s important for individuals who wish to incorporate the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm into courses or programs, or to attempt institution-wide change, to first understand these challenges.
The primary challenge—one that is widely reflected in the literature I surveyed—is that many people within higher education accept, sometimes without question, the materialist paradigm and believe that science is the sole and ultimate source of knowledge (i.e., the doctrine of scientism). For such individuals, the spiritual/contemplative educational paradigm might appear silly or delusional or dangerous, depending on an individual’s perspective. So an advocate of this paradigm should understand the emotional intensity and subjective certainty with which most people embrace their worldviews, and be prepared for something less than a rational discussion with some people when advocating for inclusion of a spiritual dimension. Understanding that, almost by definition, competing paradigms are logically and emotionally irreconcilable is a useful first step in figuring out a strategy to bring about change in this area.

Apart from a potential clash between fundamentally incompatible paradigms, there are many other factors within individual higher education institutions that might hinder acceptance of the goal of trying to incorporate a greater holism in courses and programs, and especially incorporating a spiritual/contemplative dimension. Among these are the following:

- Within an institution that attracts a heterogeneous student body, some students might welcome spiritually oriented practices and perspectives in their courses, while others might not. Also, there would likely be a range of tolerance, understanding and acceptance of diverse beliefs and practices, so bringing in this sort of subject matter could create problems.
• Within public higher education institutions, there might be First Amendment concerns (“separation of church and state”) if spiritual practices are introduced into classroom settings. For public primary and secondary schools, moments of silence have not been allowed based on the First Amendment, so practices such as meditation might be considered as crossing the line in a public higher education institution.

• In general, the curricula for courses and programs are fairly well set. Faculty often feel under pressure to cover required material and often there is something of a proprietary feeling that faculty have for material in their course, so proposals to integrate spiritual/contemplative practices and information might be seen as crowding out other, more important content. Another way of saying this is that time is seen by many as a scarce resource in a course or program, and therefore proposals to redirect part of the focus of a course or program to spiritual/contemplative content and practices may be resisted by faculty who feel that they are being asked to give something up.

• Within any program there is a level of resistance or inertia that impedes any type of proposed change; the more fundamental or radical or extensive the proposed change, the stronger the resistance is likely to be. For some fields, the resistance may also come from external entities such as accreditors.

• Many faculty and staff may feel that it is simply not the job of a higher education institution to enter into these areas even if they are seen as useful to human development on various levels. Especially with the strong vocational focus that currently characterizes much of education at all levels, this approach may seem to
some as irrelevant to higher education just as some see the liberal arts as being irrelevant. Also, many see the primary role of higher education as cultivating intellectual skills.

- Most colleges have well established missions and well defined niches within higher education. Movement into a new realm may offer uncertain benefits while threatening a well established institutional identity. Advocates of spirituality might have concerns about their reputations with colleagues in their institution or their academic field if they are too vocal about their interests in incorporating spirituality/contemplation into their teaching methods.

Understanding that there are a variety of potential challenges a higher education practitioner might face in trying to bring about innovation in this area, what is a good strategy? While I do not have a magic formula for how to be a successful innovator, I offer the following strategies and advice to higher education practitioners, some of which are reflected my research findings and the literature review:

- Make the case for spiritual/contemplative approaches using the terminology of a more widely accepted paradigm. As noted above, for example, the integrative education and transformative education paradigms lend themselves to being extended to include a spiritual/contemplative dimension, and some writers have already done this.

- Show colleagues how spiritual/contemplative knowledge and practices can advance some of their explicit goals as teachers, such as development of certain affective qualities as described earlier in this section.
• Describe contemplative practices not as being religious in nature (which they need not be), but as powerful human technologies that can bring about important benefits such as stress reduction, increased sense of well-being, enhanced concentration and focus, and so on.

• Demonstrate to institutional leadership that data show that students are increasingly seeking a spiritual dimension in higher education programs and institutions. Just as many conventional healthcare institutions have embraced integrative medicine based on prudent financial considerations despite philosophic reservations, so too some in higher education may be willing to experiment for similar reasons.

• Start experimenting on a small scale with individual courses and extra-curricular activities. Starting small may also mean using only brief meditative or contemplative practices with which the students feel comfortable, or keeping discussions and assignments related to spirituality relatively modest and contained. Enthusiastic responses from students to these experiments—assuming there are such responses—will carry weight with some colleagues.

• Have the courage to start conversations with students and colleagues about authenticity and personal beliefs; what you may feel is your own, isolated perspective may turn out to be widespread. Changes on the level of activity start with changes in ideas and perspectives; expressing a particular perspective helps to strengthen an idea if it has a certain force of truth or logic or attunement to current human consciousness. However, be circumspect or you might be accused of proselytizing.
• Be willing to have your innovative spiritual/contemplative teaching approaches assessed and evaluated according to conventional higher education assessment practices, while at the same time work to educate colleagues as to the need for alternative assessment approaches.

• Draw upon the knowledge and practices developed by pioneering institutions such as CIIS and Naropa, as well as newer organizations such as the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE), which is an initiative of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society noted earlier. Both Naropa and ACMHE offer workshops on contemplative educational practices.

As noted above, a teacher who has a strong spiritual/contemplative practice can bring a spiritual dimension into the classroom without ever mentioning a word about spirituality or contemplation. The spiritual awareness of a teacher—as manifested in his or her presence, self-awareness, authenticity, and openness to the spontaneous opportunities and teachable moments that can make a class come alive—has a force to it that can transform the classroom into a “sacred space” (a phrase used by a Naropa faculty member). Also, as several of the faculty members I interviewed noted, as well as Parker Palmer, there are ways in which even the most conventional academic activities can be approached as contemplative practices. Finally, the way in which a faculty member conducts himself or herself in the classroom models a certain behavior that can create a spiritually-oriented classroom culture. In short, there are many ways, both subtle and direct, that higher education practitioners can contribute to a transformation in higher education in the direction of greater holism.
Suggestions for Future Research

This study, I believe, suggests various directions for future study and research. The following are a number of them:

• In this study, I did not seek to disaggregate the observations of faculty on spiritual/contemplative teaching practices in higher education based on demographic factors such as gender, race, age and ethnicity. Similarly, while this study indicates that a faculty member’s academic discipline is likely to influence his or her perspective on spiritual/contemplative teaching practices, I did not pursue this direction of research either. It would be worthwhile to know whether there are significant variations in faculty perspectives on such practices that might correlate with faculty demographic factors and/or academic discipline.

• In this study, I did not review the curricula of specific academic programs offered by CIIS and Naropa, or the syllabi of courses that make up their academic programs. A careful review of these materials would provide valuable detailed information on the various ways in which institutions whose missions include integrating spiritual/contemplative content and teaching practices into their programs, as well as combining a spiritually oriented education with student-centered teaching methods, operationalize their mission in practice. Also, such a study would shed light on how the nature of specific academic disciplines might influence the ways which this integration happens.

• A case study of Naropa and CIIS students would be worthwhile. While it is very useful to learn about the perspectives of faculty members on the effects and effectiveness of spiritual/contemplative educational approaches, interviewing
students and observing classes would reveal other aspects of this educational approach beyond those I was able to learn about through interviews with faculty and senior staff.

- As noted in Chapter 1, Kuhn’s paradigm theory was developed for the natural sciences, but is now widely applied to social science fields such as education. It would be interesting to study the ways in which paradigm theory has been or needs to be adapted in order to be applied to the social science domain.

- This study indicates that a spiritual/contemplative approach to education has certain beneficial effects on students in the cognitive and affective domains. It would be helpful to study whether these indications are correct and to what extent these effects are observed. In other words, can it be demonstrated that spiritual/contemplative practices have the effects on students that they are claimed to have?

- What are the legal issues around integrating spiritual/contemplative practices into public higher education institutions? On the one hand, practitioners see these as simply techniques or technologies for human growth and development, while others see these practices as religious in nature. It would be useful to understand what the legal parameters may be.

- It was noted in the findings that spiritual/contemplative practices can help individual students address psychological and spiritual issues and habitual patterns of behavior that may impede being an effective student and handling rigorous academic work. It would be interesting to see whether these practices can
be used in a remedial way to help increase the persistence and success of college students.

• Among holistic educators on the primary and secondary level, it is well understood that students move through distinct psychological, cognitive, spiritual and other developmental phases at different ages that require changes in how education is provided. Some wisdom/spiritual traditions describe how throughout adulthood an inner evolution continues on the spiritual level with changes associated with different ages. It would be interesting to see whether these stages in adult development could and should be somehow taken into account in post-secondary education.

• It would be worthwhile to develop a multidimensional model of holistic deep learning in higher education. Such a model would illustrate the ways in which student learning is deepened through developing the multiple abilities and capacities of students. Among other things, this model might define the competencies that are associated with development along multiple dimensions (e.g., intellect, emotional intelligence, and intuitive awareness). To the extent that varied capacities along different dimensions are developed within students, new competencies would result. For example, a focus on intellectual development coupled with the development of wisdom and emotional intelligence might result in competencies associated with strong leadership ability. The figure below is a simple two-dimensional example of how such a model might be constructed.
A model like this might indicate, for example, that developing informational/technical knowledge without a concomitant development of a student’s wisdom (represented by the lower left quadrant) might be inadvisable, since utilization of knowledge and technical skills without a firm foundation of wisdom and discernment can sometimes be ineffective or even harmful. Such an indication is contrary to the conventional idea that, all things being equal, inculcating more knowledge and skills is always a desirable goal.

**Conclusion**

As I note in my personal statement in Appendix A, I support efforts to integrate spirituality and contemplative practices into higher education programs and institutions because I believe that the spiritual dimension of human beings is real and valid and in
need of cultivation. Also, I believe that a holistic approach to education is more likely to develop in students a wider range of human talents and interests than a conventional cognitive oriented approach, and more likely to support the development of personally and socially beneficial values. Many people feel alienated and a lack of a sense of shared purpose, and the world we live in is rife with conflict, because collectively our emotional intelligence and spiritual awareness are still at a somewhat rudimentary level. Developing intellectual and practical/professional skills alone will not solve our societal and personal problems. In fact, a well-developed intellect possessed by an otherwise emotionally or spiritually unbalanced person can wreak havoc: it takes intelligence to design an atom bomb or to develop in a laboratory genetically modified crops that harm life and pollute the natural environment; it takes wisdom to choose a worthwhile vocation, and to understand and live in accordance with the unseen laws and forces that govern existence. I believe that the research findings presented in this paper support a number of my beliefs and perspectives, and I hope that they prove compelling to the reader. I also hope that the findings make the case that we all would, on a practical level, be better served by a more holistic approach to higher education, no matter how seemingly impractical some people may consider this.
APPENDIX A

MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE STUDY

Since 1992, I have been involved professionally with alternative/holistic medicine higher education. As the president of an acupuncture college for nine years, founding dean of an acupuncture master’s degree program in a chiropractic college, and currently as the executive director of an accrediting agency for doctoral programs in naturopathic medicine, I have seen firsthand the powerful benefits that many healthcare consumers derive from various holistic practices—benefits that conventional medicine, while useful in its own right, is often unable to provide. These benefits come largely out of the understanding that the body, mind and spirit are interconnected, and that deep healing can be better effectuated when practitioners and patients alike are engaged on all three of these levels. Students who are attracted to these healthcare fields frequently have their own spiritual practices; one reason behind their motivation for—and success in—undertaking a demanding medical training program in a holistic field without an easy career path available to them upon graduation is that they are afforded an opportunity to combine their spiritual interests and practices with a professional vocation. I have also found that my own spiritual interests and contemplative practices have supported my administrative activities in this field, and have led to a deeper sense of meaning in my work.

I received my undergraduate education at the University of Chicago, an institution I was drawn to because of its emphasis on intellectual development through the study of the Great Books. Though the courses I took were intellectually demanding, they were
often delivered using the “instruction paradigm.” To counter a feeling of disconnection that I experienced due to the one-sided focus on the intellect and the relatively passive nature of the educational experience, I sought out while in school part-time jobs in the “real world,” and ended up eventually working as a clinical chemist in a hospital laboratory—a responsible job that provided a welcome balance to my studies. As I reflect on it now, although this job was not related to my studies, taking it on was my own way of creating a service-learning type of experience in college.

I have two professional degrees: one in law and one in mathematics education. My Master of Arts in Teaching program (MAT) had a strong learner-centered component, including practice teaching and other teaching-related activities, and I enjoyed the program and got a lot out of it. I embarked on the MAT program not because of a professional goal to teach high school mathematics, but because I had been accepted into the Peace Corps to teach high school mathematics in Malaysia, and had nearly a year to go before leaving home. Having this time on my hands, I thought it would be helpful to learn something about the art of teaching. Not long after I arrived at the high school in Malaysia to which I was posted, I discovered—once I had sufficient knowledge of the Malaysian language—that my students had little or no idea of what it meant to “understand” a mathematical concept. Rather, they considered memorization and understanding as synonymous. Consequently, even the slightest variation in a mathematical problem they had already memorized made it impossible for all but a very few students to solve the new problem. One of my main goals, besides simply covering the extensive syllabus in order to prepare students for a demanding national exam, eventually came to be conveying the very concept of understanding—the gut feeling that
you really know something. After two years of teaching, utilizing an active learning approach I had learned in my MAT program that was uncharacteristic of the learning environment I was in, I succeeded with a few students who, timidly at first, would occasionally raise their hand and say “Teacher, I don’t really understand….”

My JD program, in contrast, utilized almost exclusively an instruction-centered approach—an approach I found troubling at the time, as it seemed to foster competition and anxiety rather than a love for the discipline, and it made the transition from theory to practice difficult. I have long believed that education should combine, as seamlessly as possible, theory with meaningful opportunities to practice, and for this reason I appreciate the fact that holistic medical programs generally strive to create learning environments based on this approach.

As a parent, I have been involved for a number of years with the Waldorf education movement, where the combination of spirit-oriented education and learner-centered education emphasizing active engagement from first grade on up has been achieved to a remarkable degree. And I have observed in students who have completed a Waldorf education through the primary grades an unusual degree of poise, thoughtfulness and capability.

My educational, professional and personal experiences outlined above—and much reading I have done besides—led me to think that both of the emerging educational paradigms I studied in my dissertation are not only relevant and timely, but that combined they are likely to provide an even greater benefit to higher education students and, thereby, to the society that these students will one day serve and be responsible for.
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Script for Use with Faculty

- What does the concept of “contemplative education” or “spiritual education” mean to you in the context of higher education? Can you define this as a pedagogical model or approach?

- In what ways do you integrate spirituality—spiritual ideas and/or contemplative practices—into the classroom?

- What are you trying to accomplish by integrating spirituality/contemplative practices into the classroom?

- Do you use what are termed “learner- (or student-) centered” teaching methods? What are some of the methods you use? How do you combine these methods with a spiritual approach? What do you consider to be some of the most effective pedagogies being used in conventional higher education?

- What do you see as the primary challenges facing college and graduate students at this time? What part, if any, does your pedagogical approach play in helping students to address these challenges?

- From your observations, how does your educational approach affect students? How does it affect their ability to learn the subject matter of the course? What are the benefits of this approach to students? What are the drawbacks? Can the “learning outcomes” of this approach be assessed and recognized?

- What does your educational approach and philosophy require of you as an instructor? Are their special skills or perspectives you need to utilize this educational approach? What special training is necessary for an instructor who might wish to utilize this approach? What role does your awareness, etc., play in the classroom? How might the hiring new faculty at Naropa differ from more conventional higher education institutions?
• Are there certain fields or disciplines that lend themselves better to this approach? Are there certain ones that don’t lend themselves, or only marginally so? Is contemplative education useful for all students?

• Do you receive guidance and opportunities for professional development from the institution that support you in utilizing your educational approach?

• What are the personal and professional rewards that you derive from your educational approach? What are the personal and professional drawbacks, if any?

• Is the structure of faculty governance different in a place like Naropa, or do conventional models work for what you are trying to accomplish? What about the faculty rewards system?

• Given that your educational approach may be considered by some educators as out of the mainstream, what is your perception as to the legitimacy of this approach within higher education? What challenges, if any, doe Naropa (or you personally) face in using a contemplative approach in a higher education setting?

• As you know, there is in higher education a well-established assessment movement. Does outcomes assessment make sense in the context of contemplative education? If so, how must assessment be changed, augmented or whatever to do justice to contemplative education?

• Are there any faculty or staff members that you think it would be valuable for me to interview regarding these subjects?

• Which written works and individuals have had an important influence on your educational philosophy and methodology?

• Is there anything that we have not covered in this interview that you think it is important for me to know about?
• If you are teaching a class later this week, would it be possible for me to observe it?

Interview Script for Use with Senior Staff

• What does the concept of “contemplative education” or “spiritual education” mean to you in the context of higher education? How does this relate to the mission/identity of your institution?

• In what ways does your institution encourage faculty to integrate spirituality—spiritual ideas and/or contemplative practices—into the classroom?

• What is your institution trying to accomplish by creating an educational model that integrates spirituality/contemplative practices into the classroom?

• What do you see as the primary challenges facing college and graduates students at this time? How does your institution’s model of education address these challenges?

• Would you say that your institution is, overall, “learning (or student) centered” in regard to the faculty’s approach to teaching? How well does this pedagogy complement or combine with a spiritual/contemplative approach to education?

• From your perspective, how does your institution’s educational approach affect students? How does it affect their ability to learn the subject matter of various courses? What appear to be the benefits of this approach to students? What appear to be the drawbacks?

• What are the most salient ways in which your institution varies from more conventional or traditional higher education institutions? How would your institution’s approach to spiritual questions differ from what might be attempted in a secular public university or a non-faith-based private university?

• What challenges does your institution face as a regionally accredited, multipurpose university with an unconventional philosophy of education? Have accreditation visitors raised questions about your institution’s educational approach?
• How does your institution support faculty in utilizing a contemplative/spiritual pedagogy? What are the personal and professional rewards that you see your faculty deriving from this educational approach? What are the personal and professional drawbacks? What challenges, if any, do you face in using your approach in a higher education setting?

• What are the criteria you use to select faculty?

• What about your institution’s pedagogy do you think is most innovative or unique?

• There are other institutions that are also incorporating spiritual/contemplative approaches in their programs. Are there other approaches that differ from your institution’s approach that you see as viable or worthwhile?

• Are there any faculty or staff members that you think it would be valuable for me to interview regarding these subjects?

• Which written works and individuals have had an important influence on your educational philosophy and methodology?

• Is there anything that we have not covered in this interview that you think it is important for me to know about?


Chaudhuri, H. (n.d.). Education for the whole person. Published article, no citation information available; obtained through the CIIS archives.


