ABSTRACT

Parents or Professors? An Examination of the Contingent Influences on Evangelical
College Student Political Views

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This analysis examines the contingent influences of family religious identity and the college experience on student political views at Evangelical colleges and universities. While the college-effects literature confirms that student interaction with faculty, peers, and the institution challenges pre-existing perspectives, American Evangelicalism in part maintains its identity through an extensive education system. By applying Dodson's (2014) contingency perspective on the effects of higher education to the relationship between faculty and family influences, I argue that Evangelical colleges both expand and constrain the plausibility structures of American Evangelicalism. Results from this thesis suggest that Christian higher education mitigates polarization and has a moderating effect on student political views, directly challenging the critique that they promote either liberal or conservative indoctrination. This study offers insight into the ways in which these institutions' influence on student political views are contingent upon pre-college religious identity.

Parents or Professors? An Examination of the Contingent Influences on Evangelical College
Student Political Views

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 2014, President Michael Lindsay of Gordon College, a member school of the

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), signed on to a letter requesting

a religious freedom exemption from the mandate of non-discriminate hiring based on

sexual orientation. Though receiving a significant amount of press coverage for the

polarizing act, Lindsey was not alone in a request for exemption but was in fact among

26 other CCCU presidents who had pursued similar exemptions (Tracy, 2014). Once

again questions regarding the role of Christian higher education in a pluralistic context

re-surfaced, with Wenham, MA as the newest battle site of the culture war over the

symbolic territory of higher education. In his 1991 book *Culture Wars*, sociologist James

Hunter named Gordon, along with others, an institution that by definition was caught

between a rock and a hard place. He contended that institutions like it must either adjust

to cultural pressures and risk losing important aspects of their identity, or, participate in

the fight to remain distinctive against the challenges. While Lindsey argued that his

signature did not reflect the political views of the institution, policies on hiring faculty at

Evangelical colleges are considered vital in maintaining the religious identity of the

institution.

Despite being historically sectarian in nature and at times fearful for their own

survival, Marsden (2014) reminds us that schools like those which are part of the CCCU

have developed a resilience in the 21st century that has allowed them to slowly move

beyond their "marginal and beleaguered" status compared to mainstream higher

education (p. 265). Even with these renewed insights by one of their must vocal preservationists, the fear of secularization remains influential as these institutions attempt to balance their commitment to high education standards and a distinctly Christian identity amidst modernity's secular influences.

Much of the story of these Evangelical colleges and universities is explicated in terms of their rise to prominence amidst the tensions that these institutions held while Evangelicals distinguished themselves from fundamentalism (Ringenberg, 2006; Marsden, 1996; Noll, 1995). Additionally, scholarship has also focused on the ways in which an overt Christian faith as embodied by Evangelical colleges might have a home within a pervasively secular academic environment (Ream and Glanzer, 2013; Glanzer and Ream, 2009). Lastly, sociologists of religion have also found these schools to be a prime site to check the values pulse of American Evangelical cohorts (Hunter, 1993; Penning and Smidt, 2002). In short, these institutions have played a distinct role in both the religious and higher educational landscapes of the United States. The Gordon case is the latest manifestation of a longstanding contention. The question of viability for these schools is not a new topic, but one that has received steady scholarly attention. For the Evangelical college, under what conditions does accommodation mean secularization and the relinquishing of a distinctly Christian identity?

Theoretical Background

Critics of the college-as-transformation perspective have emerged, arguing that this utopian vision of the Ivory Tower fails to account for the self-selection bias in the colleges people choose. Though few would fully dismiss college as a futile attempt in affecting student perspectives, the revisionist critic argues that in many cases, family

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background does more to influence how students actually engage with and experience college. In short, people are primed to experience transformation based on their family background. In terms of student political attitudes, sociologist Kyle Dodson (2014) offers a contingent perspective whereby college can either "reinforce or strengthen" or "undermine and diminish" already present viewpoints (p. 139). This challenges the notion that college attendance is highly influential in isolation in affecting student political views and engagement. Recent studies have noted that this effect is significantly diminished when controlling for pre-college characteristics (Binder and Wood, 2013). For this study on the political views of Evangelical college students, the relationship between family background and on campus experiences will be the focus of our investigation into how the contingency perspective of higher education functions within these particular school cultures.

Plausibility Structures

According to the theory of plausibility structures, beliefs break down without the corresponding system or context of plausibility to back them up (Berger, 2014). Religion influences college student value systems in complex ways. This influence is prior to college attendance in direct socialization, but also through the cultivation and maintenance of plausibility structures that support the socialization. The contingency perspective of higher education, which considers the interaction of pre-college and college experiences (Dodson, 2014), offers a helpful framework for understanding how plausibility structures play a role in shaping college student political attitudes at Evangelical colleges. Following the precedent set by Peterson (2001), who applied Berger's framework to consider how religion "conditions" the influences of education,

this thesis examines the ongoing relationship between American Evangelicalism and higher education by investigating the role of pre-college family and religious identity in conjunction with the Evangelical college environment in shaping, or conditioning, student political views. Though scholarship abounds on the topic of how students develop their values and belief systems and how students are affected by their experience towards more liberal or conservative ideas, few studies to my knowledge have considered how student perspectives are affected by religious plausibility structures at Evangelical colleges.

Evangelical Colleges

This study is modeled after others that have considered the role of the evangelical education system in terms of validating Evangelical ideals (Hammond and Hunter, 1984), and based on the assumption that Evangelical colleges in particular are "foundational to the Evangelical subculture" (Dougherty, Hulbert, and Palmer, 2014). In considering the role that these schools play in that subculture, rather than considering college as a distinct influence on student political views, following Binder and Wood (2013) this study focuses on the interaction of college and pre-college influences on student political views. For Evangelical colleges specifically, using the framework of plausibility structures gives an account for cultural aspects of religion beyond individual religious experiences. Taking the multiplicity of potential influences into account, this thesis offers insight into how a student's family and religious background fosters Evangelical plausibility structures that are facilitated, mitigated, or challenged through Evangelical Colleges. The goal of this project is to consider the role that these schools play in the lives of young adults as well as their role in keeping Evangelicalism distinctive, yet

committed to engaging in the larger culture. This study not only offers a description of how Evangelical identity is maintained and challenged through the lens of plausibility structures but also offers insight into the culturally contingent view of how college affects young adults.

Well-documented influences of political attitudes across the life course include religion, family, peers, and educational attainment. The majority of studies document these effects as discrete rather than considering the larger interactions and complexity of how college might reinforce pre-existing views and beliefs. Religion influences young adults both culturally and structurally in terms of their moral order, learned competencies, and ties to specific types of organizations (Smith, 2003). To the degree that religion influences politics, religious influences on political attitudes are interrelated and dependent on particular paths taken. Evangelical colleges operate within a larger Evangelical ecosystem and represent a coalescing of beliefs, norms, and values that impact student opinions. This thesis specifically considers the contingent effects of parents and professors on Evangelical college student political attitudes.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Some argue that the effects of friends and family are the strongest influences on changing attitudes during the college years (Davies, 1965; Hanson, Weeden, Pascarella, Blaich, 2012). The distinctions of these influences are helpful, but limited in providing a more complex view regarding the more diffuse effects of college. However, some aspects of college are more active socializing forces than others. One such active effect continually cited is the interaction students have with their faculty members. Astin (1997) confirmed that faculty members do have a strong effect on student development in college. More relevant to this study, they have a direct effect on student political ideology (Horowitz, 2007; Hanson, Weeden, Pascarella, Blaich, 2012).

Evangelical college students are not immune to the traditional effects of college, but also have a distinctive set of experiences. For example, the idea that faculty promote liberal attitudes in college students receives popular support, but for those students attending religious colleges, Mariani and Hewitt (2008) found they were less likely than their secular counterparts to develop more liberal political attitudes. In terms of their religiosity, while many young adults become less religious after going to college, this is not the case for students attending Evangelical colleges, who tend to show higher commitment towards religion (Penning & Smidt, 2002; Regnerus, Stokes, and Corts, 2011; Dougherty, Hulbert, and Palmer, 2014). This is one way that Evangelicals in particular have been able to keep liberalization at bay-- through developing their own system of education (Petersen, 2001; Farrel, 2011). While Hunter (1993) found that

students at Evangelical colleges were indeed becoming more secular, a more recent study by Smidt and Penning (2002), which replicated Hunter's study, found these students at Evangelical colleges had more conservative views. As the replication study by Smidt and Penning (2002) shows, Evangelical colleges are not stagnant operations, but rather they and their students evolve with shifts in the culture at large.

Studying Evangelical attitudes has offered insight into the changing political landscape of conservative Protestants at specific moments in time. While the hypothesis that college influences political views has been thoroughly tested in terms of the college-effects literature, to date no study has examined the Contingent Perspective of how college influences young adult political views specifically at Evangelical colleges. Beyond describing the potential nuances of Christian higher education within the larger college-effects literature, this study also adds to recent insight regarding how college affects young adults, and explores the need to consider them as products of multiple experiences over their life course (Binder and Wood, 2013). This study fills multiple gaps by considering how political identities exist and develop in the context of this Evangelical subculture represented through churches, families, and peer groups specifically while students are attending Evangelical colleges.

Holding the Tensions: Evangelicalism

How to handle perceived catalysts to secularity is a historical boundary-making concern for Evangelicals. The task of boundary making was routinized, according to Smith (1998) beginning with the restructuring of neo-Evangelical religious identity in the 1940's. During this time, it became apparent quickly that the old "wineskins" of fundamentalism could not contain the emerging Evangelical movement, which was

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taking root and breaking out of the mold (Smith, 1998, p. 13). At that particular point in time, any moderate point of view was seen as problematic for identity-maintenance (Smith, 1998). Evangelicalism had evolved over time to the point where it could not hold the tensions with fundamentalism without breaking out of the mold. Using subcultural religious theory to describe Evangelicalism as embattled and thriving, Smith (1998) holds that a degree of contention is necessary to keep Evangelicalism from breaking off once again as it did with fundamentalism. Historical evidence shows that "Evangelicalism uses its cultural tools to construct a subcultural reality in which counterbalancing centripetal and centrifugal forces pull against each other in dynamic tension, maintaining both difference from and engagement with American society" (Smith, 1998, p.150). Using Evangelical college student political views as a point of departure, this study adds to the literature on the necessary conditions for what Smith (1998) characterizes as distinction with engagement.

The Role of Higher Education

In his seminal work the *Idea of a Christian College,* Arthur Holmes (1987) outlines purpose and vision for a distinctively Christian version of higher education in the United States. Though at times referred to as Christian higher education (Ream and Glanzer, 2009), or Evangelical colleges (Dougherty, Hulbert, and Palmer, 2014), according to the terms of their membership, these institutions adhere to a unique vision on the integration of Christian faith with the liberal aims of higher education (Benne, 2001). Each of the schools within the Council can be described as Evangelical and committed to both high education standards and an orthodox Christianity. Member institutions do not see themselves as promoting indoctrination but rather as taking

seriously the notion of academic freedom in order to maintain their reputations and identity.

      According to Holmes (1987), the best of these schools diligently promote critical dialogue and discussion. The CCCU is made up of both denominational and non-denominational Christian institutions with membership requirements such as full time faculty professing a faith in Jesus Christ, and that courses be taught from a biblical worldview (www.cccu.org). Critiques of homogeneity, however, were challenged by the recent findings in the CCCU Denominational Study in conducted in 2012. According to Rine, Glanzer, and Davignon (2013), while faculty at CCCU schools are assumed to share similar sentiments with their institutions, their views were found to be diverse in part due to the variation in "educational backgrounds, religious identities, theological beliefs, and professional preferences…"(p. 256). Similarly, students do not always have the same beliefs or views as their institutions. Conservative Protestants or Evangelicals are not a homogenous group, but rather are diverse and often adaptive to new challenges (Beilo, 2014, Carpenter, 2013). Despite the fact that these schools operate in a "niche market," they also must be able to "recruit and cater to young adults who are shaped by our present cultural moment" (Davignon, Glanzer, and Rine, 2013 p. 316-317). This thesis explores the effects of diversity of thought within the CCCU faculty and student body.

Pre-college Influences

      Within the scholarly literature, there has been a resurgence of interest in the complexity of religious and political socialization in terms of peers, family, and religious institutions (Cornwall, 1988). One way of conceiving the influence of parental religious

identity is the way it takes place in the form of channeling (Himmelfarb, 1979; Cornwall, 1988) whereby parents may socialize children into secondary institutions such as schools and peer groups that have both direct and indirect influences on children's values. Amman (2014) defined parental religious socialization "as the transmission of religious values from parents to their adolescent children and the cultural and political contextualization of those religious values by parents" (p. 2). Since parents often dictate what types of social experiences children have, the influence on their identity is not always direct but also indirect (Amman, 2014). This thesis defines pre college family background, or identity, using this idea of indirect influence.

Through a variety of experiences, children learn politics form their parents throughout their lives (Hatemi et al. 2009). Although previous studies have looked at how parents influence children through religious socialization and the effect this has on their religion, very few studies have considered how this affects the political views specifically (Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel, 2009; Amman, 2014). Despite the widespread view that a core function of higher education is to challenge student ideologies, arguably eighteen years of one identity is difficult to undo in four years. For Evangelical college students, the role family members play in shaping their political identification is not mutually exclusive from religious identity. In many cases, students come to college either already with their opinions formed, or if not, they are primed for changes in their political ideology based on college experiences (Jennings and Stoker, 2008). College in this case does not negate family formation but rather interacts with pre-college criteria to either reinforce or challenge earlier strong influences of home (Dodson, 2014). Following this line of research, the prior work of parents, family, church and other institutions can be

enhanced or diminished based on the college environment and the path involved in a particular student's experience (Dodson, 2014).

Institutional Effects

Even if students who come to attend Evangelical colleges are from Conservative religious families, at college they are still likely to interact with diverse members of the school community. Despite homogeneity relative to other institutions, even within a controlled environment, exposure to a wide array of differences through higher education and new ideas is palpable. The curricular component of higher education, for example, teaches a wide variety of perspectives that help to shape student political perspectives and to challenge their pre-existing opinions, often noted through interaction with faculty (Dodson, 2014). This is confirmed by recent data gathered from the Freshmen Survey and College Senior Survey which reported that faculty members do not have the liberalizing effect on college student political views that they were once thought to have. Instead, the findings noted that engagement with faculty had a more moderating effect that promoted a centrist view of politics (Dodson, 2014). In terms of co-curricular influences, the result is quite different. Recent studies show that students tended to self-select into the types of student groups that reinforced their prior perspectives and mirrored their preconceptions (Dodson, 2014).

Evangelicals and Same Sex Marriage

A contentious issue within evangelicalism, which is particularly noteworthy on Evangelical college campuses and as also highlighted in the Gordon case, is that of homosexuality. An exploration of the cultural landscape within which this debate has

taken place reveals that conservative Protestants are becoming increasingly tolerant of homosexuality (Steensland and Goff, 2014). Most recently, Bean and Martinez (2014) found that Evangelical approaches to dealing with the issue of homosexuality are often mixed and negotiated. Their work confirms Hempel and Bartkowski's (2008) notion that Evangelicals drew upon different aspects of their values depending on if they were dealing with issues or people. Bean and Martinez (2014) found that evangelicals operated with a structured ambivalence towards the issue of same sex marriage specifically.

> In some situations, Evangelicals draw strong subcultural boundaries against gays and lesbians, constructing the gay rights movement as a threat to their "biblical" view of marriage. In other situations, Evangelicals focus on sharing love and compassion to gay and lesbian individuals. But it is practically difficult to draw on both scripts at once within a particular social setting (Bean and Martinez, 2014, p. 403).

Despite the presence of these competing scripts within their operative plausibility structures, Evangelicals are in fact more accepting of same sex marriage than they have been in the past. Levels of acceptance have increased from 35 percent of the general population in 2001 to 52 percent in 2014, with pronounced differences across generations (Pew forum, 2014). While acceptance among Evangelicals remains lower than among the general population at large, Evangelicals have also developed more favorable attitudes towards same sex marriage. In a decade, white Evangelical Protestants went from 11 percent favoring same sex marriage to 19 percent favoring (Ward, 2013). An exploration of the attitudes of Evangelical college students is included in this study in order due to the implications of the public policy regarding the issue of homosexuality on Evangelical College campuses.

CHAPTER THREE

Data and Method

Binder and Wood (2013) make a strong case for considering higher education through a sociological lens. Premised on the fact that much of the scholarship in the area of higher education is part of the "college effects" literature, their argument is that this heavy social psychological perspective limits the unit of analysis to the individual student (Binder and Wood, p. 312). This study attempts to understand how students are formed amidst particular types of religious and political cultures and the way that those cultures are maintained or challenged through higher education. In considering what influences college student political views at Evangelical colleges, a series of guiding questions were addressed in the analysis. First, do increased levels of pre-college exposure to conservative religious culture influence college students at Evangelical colleges and universities to identify as more politically conservative? Secondly, do students whose parents had a strong influence on their decision to attend their school report more conservative political views at Evangelical colleges? Thirdly, how does the political ideology of faculty correlate with student political views? What effect do co-curricular activities or class year experiences have on how students identify politically? Lastly, what is the effect of the interaction between family religious identity and faculty perspectives?

In order to explore these guiding questions surrounding the role of pre-college and college effects on student political views in addition to the particular role of religion in

shaping college student values, this study analyzed data gathered from institutions in the CCCU. Despite the fact that there is great diversity in terms of values within the CCCU as noted by Rine, Glanzer, and Davignon (2013) and Davignon, Glanzer, and Rine (2013), member schools do share a commitment to orthodox tenants of Evangelical Protestant faith such as biblical inerrancy (Patterson, 2001). These institutions have arguably maintained a degree of what Smith (1998) called "distinction with engagement," despite the influence of secular culture.

The sample analyzed was taken from the CCCU Denominational Study on the values and attitudes of students and faculty who respectively attended and were employed by CCCU institutions in 2011-2012. Each of the member institutions of the CCCU in North America was extended an invitation for survey participation. The final sample for this thesis included only those institutions that had a response rate of 30 or more individual respondents of both students and faculty, which included 23 institutions of wide geographical and denominational affiliation, including non-denominational. The sample was reduced to include only traditional undergraduate students under the age of 25. The final N represented 4,550 students and 1,337 CCCU faculty members who responded to the question regarding their political views.

The primary dependent variable was a measure of student political views on a 7-point scale ranging from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. Additionally, a secondary dependent variable was included measuring student perspectives on same sex marriage in comparison to their institution in order to see how student political orientations mattered in terms of a contentious political issue within Evangelicalism. Possible response for this question included "more liberal," "the same," "more

conservative," and "don't know." This variable was recoded into a binary variable comparing "more liberal" with "the same as" and "more conservative" categories. A series of independent variables were included in the analysis to test the effect of pre-college family identity as well as the college experience including family, peer, and institutional influences (see Table 3.1). In order to consider the particular role that faculty as a collective have on student political views at Evangelical colleges, a percentage of conservative, moderate, and liberal faculty members was assigned to each institution which totaled up to 100% of their respective faculty. Demographic control variables were included of race, class year, and gender. Multivariate Ordered Least Squares Regression was used in the analysis on student political views, and Binary Logistic Regression was applied to the analysis on student views on same-sex marriage.

Table 3.1

Operationalization of Variables

Student Views	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following? My own political positions: 1=Extremely Conservative-7=Extremely Liberal
Same Sex Marriage	How would you compare yourself to your college or university regarding these religious Beliefs? Beliefs regarding same-sex marriage 1=more liberal, 0=the same as or more conservative
Faculty Political views	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following?- My own political positions: 1=Extremely Conservative-7=Extremely Liberal
% liberal faculty	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following?- My own political positions: Leaning liberal, Liberal, or extremely liberal
% moderate faculty	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following?- My own political positions: Moderate
% conservative faculty	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following?- My own political positions: Extremely conservative, conservative, leaning conservative
Attending classes	During the past year, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities-Attending classes/labs 1=None, 2=less than an hour, 3=1-2 hours, 4=3-5 hours, 5=6-10 hours, 6=11-15 hours, 7=16-20 hours, 8= over 20 hours
Studying	During the past year, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities-Studying/Homework 1=None, 2=less than an hour, 3=1-2 hours, 4=3-5 hours, 5=6-10 hours, 6=11-15 hours, 7=16-20 hours, 8= over 20 hours
Church Attendance	During the past year, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities-church attendance and activities 1=None, 2=less than an hour, 3=1-2 hours, 4=3-5 hours, 5=6-10 hours, 6=11-15 hours, 7=16-20 hours, 8= over 20 hours
Volunteering	During the past year, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities-community service 1=None, 2=less than an hour, 3=1-2 hours, 4=3-5 hours, 5=6-10 hours, 6=11-15 hours, 7=16-20 hours, 8= over 20 hours
Student Organization	During the past year, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities-student clubs/groups 1=None, 2=less than an hour, 3=1-2 hours, 4=3-5 hours, 5=6-10 hours, 6=11-15 hours, 7=16-20 hours, 8= over 20 hours
Parental Influence on college choice (1,0)	Below are some reasons that might have influenced your decisions to attend this particular college: My parents wanted me to come here 1=Important, 0 =not important
Church Political Views	Regarding political statements or positions in general, how would you characterize the following?- My church congregation at home: 1=Extremely Conservative-7=Extremely Liberal
Conservative Parents (1,0)	Which if any, of the following terms would you use to describe the religious identity of your father: theologically conservative; OR your mother: theologically conservative
Race	White=1, nonwhite=0
Sex	Male=1, female=0
Class year	What is your present academic classification 1=Freshman, 2=Sophomore, 3=Junior, 4=Senior

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey, 2012

Table 3.2.

Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name	Mean or %	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Student Political Views	3.18	1.44	1	7	6
Conservative	62%				
Moderate	20%				
Liberal	18%				
College					
Faculty Political views	3.10	0.58	1	7	6
% liberal faculty	19.00%				
% moderate faculty	24.00%				
% conservative faculty	57.00%				
Same Sex Marriage (1,0)	22.4%				
classes (hours)	6.25	1.18	1	8	
Church Attendance	4.47	2.18	1	7	
Volunteer (hours)	2.52	1.6	1	8	
Student Organization (hours)	2.69	1.49	1	8	
Pre-college					
Parent Influence on college choice (1,0)	38.70%				
Home church views	2.5	1.17	1	7	
Conservative	80.30%				
Moderate	13.00%				
Liberal	6.70%				
Theologically Conservative Parents (1,0)	38.00%				
Demographics					
Race					
White	83.30%				
Non-White	16.70%				
Sex					
Male	31.60%				
Female	68.40%				
Class year					
Freshmen	23.67%				
Sophomore	23.75%				
Junior	23.47%				
Senior	29.11%				

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey, 2012; N=4,550 students, 1,337 faculty

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

In order to consider these guiding research questions regarding influences on student political views at Evangelical colleges, this analysis modeled the effects to show how religious and family identity before college, along with the added experience of college socialization, affects how students identify in terms of their political views. In order to consider the impact of each of these influences in terms of their relativity to one another, a series of four interaction effects which measured pre-college religious identity and college effects in terms of one another were also included in the analyses. The interaction effect variables included 1) the percent of faculty members who identified as moderate interacted with the church political views variable and 2) the percent of faculty members who identified as moderate interacted with the conservative parent variable. This interaction was repeated for the percentages of liberal faculty as well. This analysis shows that while both pre-college and college effects are important; the conservative nature of students' pre-college religious identity has a strong effect even when students experience liberalizing influences in college.

Once the main effects and interaction effects on student political views are noted in table 4.1, the analysis is replicated using logistic regression with a new dependent variable measuring the views of same sex marriage as compared with the student's respective institution (see table 4.3).

Table 4.1

OLS Regression Coefficients ƀ (Standardized Coefficients β) for Student Political Views

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
Intercept	2.19***	3.5***	2.64***	1.72***	1.39***	1.62***	1.54 ***	1.54	1.48***
Sex	-.02(-.01)	-.01(-.002)	-.02(-.01)	-.02 (-.006)	-.01(-.006)	-.17 (-.005)	-.03(-.01)	-.03(-.01)	-.03(-.01)
Race	-.15(-.03)*	-.28 (-.06)***	-.15 (-.04)**	-.11(-.02)	-.11(-.02)	-.10 (-.02)	-.16(-.04)**	-.16(-.04)**	-.17(-.04)**
church political views	.48 (.40)***		.45(.37)***	.48(.39)***	.61(.50)***	.48 (.39)***	.45 (.37)***	.45(.37)***	.45(.37)***
conservative parent	-.10(-.03)*		-.13(-.04)**	-.13(-.04)***	-.13(-.04)**	.07 (.02)	-.12(-.04)**	-.12(-.04)**	.03(.01)
parental influence on college choice	-.19(-.06)***		-.19 (-.06)***	-.28(-.06)***	-.18(-.06)***	-.18(-.06)***	-.19 (-.06)***	-.19(-.06)***	-.19(-.06)***
class year		.12 (.09)***	.16(.13)***	.16(.13)***	.16(.13)***	.16 (.13)***	.16(.13)***	.16(.13)***	.16(.13)***
classes		-.03(-.02)	-.01(-.01)	-.01 (-.007)	-.01(-.008)	-.01(-.008)	-.009 (-.007)	-.009(-.007)	-.01 (-.008)
volunteering		.02(.02)	.04(.04)**	.03(,02)	.03(.03)	.03 (.02)	.04 (.03)*	.04(.03)*	.04(.03)*
involvement		.04(.04)**	.03(.03)*	.03(.04)**	.03(.04)*	.03*.04)**	.03 (.03)*	.03(.03)*	.03(.03)*
church attendance		-.07 (-.11)***	-.04(-.06)***	-.04(-.06)***	-.04(-.06)***	-.04(-.06)***	-.04 (-.06)***	-.04(-.06)***	-.04(-.05)***
% conservative faculty			-.01(-.15)***						
% moderate faculty				.007 (.04)**	.02(.14)***	.01 (.07)***			
% moderate faculty X church political views					-.007(-.15)**				
% moderate faculty X conservative parent						-.01 (-.08)*			
% liberal faculty							.01 (.17)***	.01(.17)***	.02(.20)***
% liberal faculty X church political views								-.00(-.00)	
% liberal faculty X conservative parent									-.006(-.07)*
R²	0.18	0.03	0.23	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.23	0.22	0.23
N	3881	4153	3698	3698	3698	3698	3698	3698	3698

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey, 2012; * *p* < .05; ** p < .01, *** p <.001

Discrete Influences

In testing the effect of the values of a student's family of origin on how students identified politically at Evangelical colleges, it was clear that regardless of institutional engagement or the effect of college, a conservative religious upbringing had a strong effect on political views identified in college (Model 1). Considering the theological views of parents as well as the political views of student's home churches allows us to control for pre-college identity as well as social contexts for those beliefs. The political views of student's home churches were highly correlated with their reported political views while at college, either liberal or conservative. If a student reported at least one parent having conservative theological opinions, as expected, that student was more likely to report having political opinions on the conservative end of the spectrum.

Without controlling for the student's family of origin, various experiences in college were significant influences on student political views (see Model 2). The more hours students spent in church while at college, the more likely they were to report more conservative political views. Consistent with the liberalization thesis, upperclassmen were more likely than underclassmen to report more liberal political views ($p<.001$ Anova) even though students were attending an Evangelical college. The more time CCCU students spent involved with student organizations, the more likely they were to report more liberal political attitudes. It is however, important to note that only 3% of the variance in student political attitudes was explained by the college effects model, while approximately 18% of the variance was explained by pre-college family religious identity model (See models 2 and 1).

Combined Influences

Though much empirical research suggests that faculty members have a liberalizing effect on students (Horowitz, 2007), more recently, sociologists have noted that faculty members play a moderating role (Dodson, 2014), and also that in some cases they press students towards more conservative ideas (Binder and Wood, 2013). As such, there is disagreement in previous research regarding the role that faculty play in the development of college student's political views. For the combined effects modeling in this analysis (see models 3-4, 7), I included the political ideology of CCCU faculty as a predictor variable of interest. The percentages of faculty that represented CCCU schools that identified as politically conservative, moderate, or liberal surprisingly had a generally normal distribution overall and were included separately in order to understand the role of each type in affecting student political views. Students were more likely to report conservative political views when a higher percentage of conservative faculty (see model 3) were present at the institution, while increases in the percentages of moderate and liberal faculty were associated with more liberal political views in students (see models 4 and 7).

A student's class year was a significant predictor variable across all regression analyses. For example, in terms of competing effects on student political views, the percentage of faculty at a given institution that identified as liberal mattered across all class years, though time spent engaging in student organizations was significant only during the senior year. Pre-college effects, including the views of the home church of the student as well as the extent to which parents influenced their child's choice of schooling were significant, though in the sophomore, junior, and senior year whether or not at least

one parent was theologically conservative had no effect on the student's political views

(See Table 4.2)

Table 4.2

OLS Regression Coefficients b (Standardized Coefficients β) for % Liberal Faculty by Class

Variables	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Intercept	1.53***	1.78***	2.2***	2.23***
sex	.22(.07)**	-.05(-.01)	-.16(-.05)	-.10(-.03)
race	-.18(-.04)	-.13(-.03)	-.20(-.04)	-.11(-.02)
church political views	.51(.45)***	.45(.38)***	.42(.34)***	.40(.32)***
conservative parent	-.35(-.12)***	-.08(-.02)	-.12(-.04)	-.02(-.008)
classes	.00(.00)	.00(.00)	.02(-.01)	-.005(-.003)
volunteering	.01(.01)	.05(.04)	.12(.10)	.004(.003)
involvement	-.02(-.02)	.04(.04)	.04(.05)	.05(.06)*
church attendance	-.03(-.05)	-.05(-.07)*	-.04(-.06)*	-.04(-.06)*
parental influence on college choice	-.19(-.07)*	-.26(-.09)**	-.16(-.05)	-.13(-.04)
% liberal faculty	.009(.10)***	.01(.19)***	.02(.02)***	.01(.19)***
R2	0.3	0.24	0.22	0.17
N	863	866	862	1107

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey, 2012; * *p* < .05; ** p < .01, *** p <.001

Contingent Influences

These initial results point towards the need to consider the Evangelical college environment in tandem with the views of the students' family of origin in order to understand the complexity of how students arrive at their political ideals at Evangelical colleges. While we could simply conclude that both pre-college effects and institutional effects matter in terms of how Evangelical college students report their political views as discrete indicators, an exploration of the contingency perspective is warranted. Though separated analytically, conceptually the two spheres act as inextricably woven across the life course rather than mutually exclusive influences. Rather than isolated influences of pre-college and college as distinct categories, this account takes into consideration the

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Evangelical subculture to which these students are connected across the life course (see Table 4.1, models 5-6, 8-9). Though the majority of CCCU students are from conservative religious and political backgrounds and the majority of faculty identified as conservative, recent studies note the relatively substantial number of students and faculty identifying as moderate or liberal. In order to consider under what conditions students might be affected by the diversity of faculty political views during college and under what conditions they might simply retain their pre-existing opinions fostered by family religious identity, an interaction effect of student home church political views and the percent of institutional faculty reporting moderate or liberal political views was included. Additionally, the interaction effect of theologically conservative parents and the same faculty groupings was considered.

The results from this analysis revealed that the impact of faculty member political views is contingent upon the type of home from which the students originated. For example, students who grew up attending a more conservative church were more likely to report having liberal political views, despite increases in the percentage of moderate faculty, while the opposite was true for students reportedly from more liberal upbringing--who were on average more likely to report more conservative political views based on this same increase (see table 4.1, model 5, figure 1). Though the effects sizes were small, this is in line with Dodson's (2014) findings that faculty tend to moderate rather than indoctrinate in terms of political attitudes. The collective faculty comprised of divergent political perspectives work to challenge previously held opinions and systems of thought and by doing so, challenging the plausibility structures of Evangelical Protestantism.
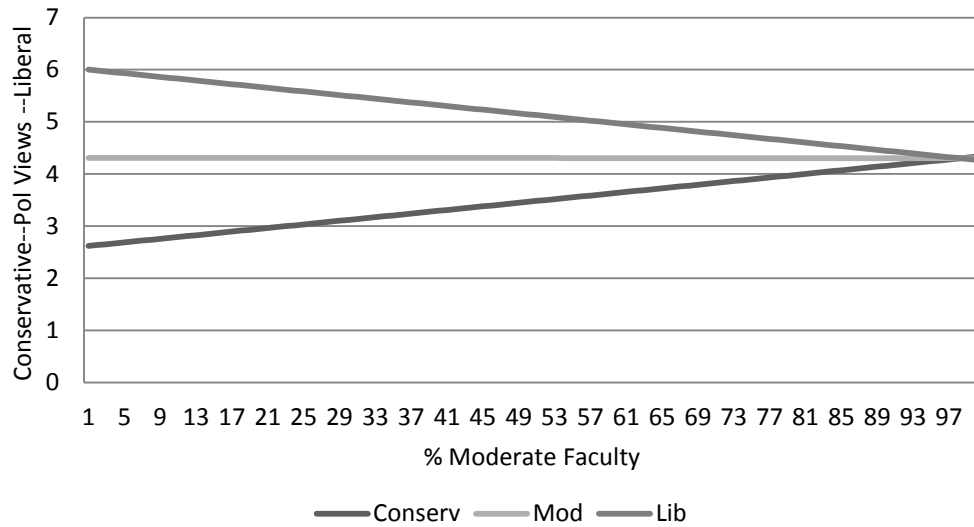
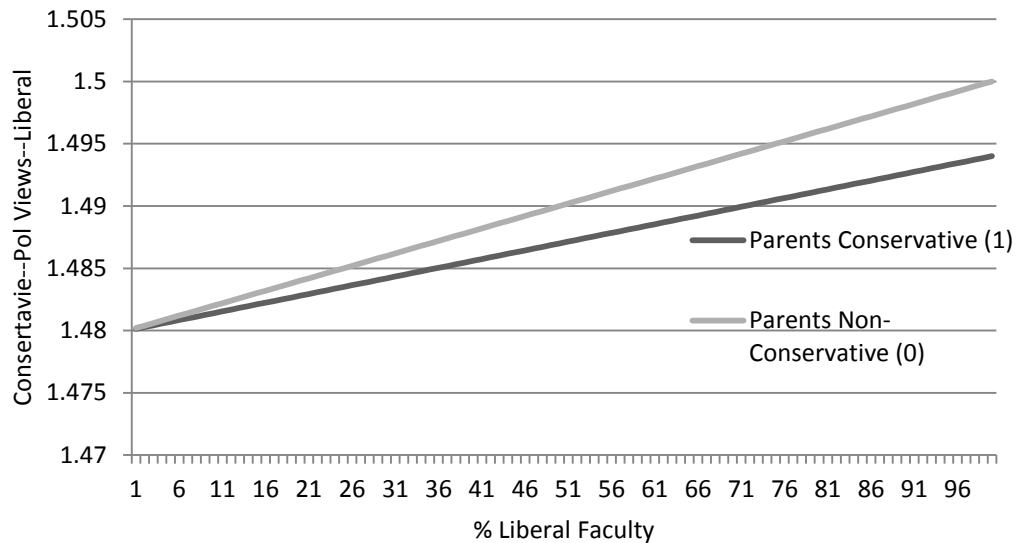Figure 4.1. The Effect of Moderate Faculty and Home Church Political Views

Figure 4.2 The Effect of Liberal Faculty and Conservative Parents

Even though the percentage of liberal faculty at an institution was a significant predictor in terms of students identifying as more liberal, when considered in light of terms of their family of origin and particularly the conservative theological views of their parents, the effect is mitigated (see Table 4.1, model 9; Figure 4.2). These findings on the contingent influences of higher education beg further investigation as to the necessary

conditions for faculty member political orientations collectively to influence student political views on specific issues.

In recent decades, traditional views have come into conflict with the dominant culture in regards to the issue of same sex marriage, notably on Evangelical college campuses. Even though traditional Evangelical perspectives on marriage and the family are often reinforced at evangelical colleges (Dougherty, Hulbert, and Palmer, 2014), a quarter of CCCU faculty members in the sample identified as being more liberal than their respective institutions in regards to same sex marriage. Because of this contention, the political views modeling progression represented in tables 4.1 and 4.2 was replicated with a second dependent variable, which was a binary variable of whether or not students identified as either more liberal than (1), or the same as/more conservative than (0) their institution on the topic of same sex marriage. While the majority of students at CCCU schools reported having similar or more conservative attitudes than their institution on the particular topic, this issue represents a highly politicized concern within Evangelical Christianity and thus the minority opinion is worthy of exploration, taking the discrete, combined, and contingent effects of college into account.

In this replicated analysis on student views on same sex marriage compared to their institution, there were some striking differences from the predictors of political attitudes on the seven-point scale. One was that as institutions increased the percentage of moderate faculty members, there was no significant effect, though increases in liberal and conservative faculty members remained strong predictors of student views

Table 4.3.

Binary Logistic Regression Odds Ratios for Student Views on Same Sex Marriage

Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
Intercept	-1.88***	-1.20***	-1.10***	-2.31***	-2.88***	-2.22***	-2.5***	-2.51***	-2.5***
sex	1.01	1.02	1.04	1.04	1.05	1.04	1.02	1.02	1.02
race	1.10	1.05	1.02	1.08	1.09	1.08	1	1	0.99
church political views	1.25***		1.2***	1.24***	1.56***	1.24***	1.19***	1.2***	1.19***
conservative parent	094		0.89	0.89	0.89	0.75	0.89	0.89	1.14
Parental influence on college choice	.78**		.78**	.79**	.79**	1**	.78**	.78**	.78**
class year		1.23***	1.27***	1.26***	1.26***	1.26***	1.27***	1.27***	1.27***
classes		0.99	1.02	1.02	1.02	0.98	1.02	1.02	1.02
volunteering		0.97	1	0.98	0.98	1.05	1	1	1
involvement		1.05	1.05	1.05	1.05	0.86	1.05	1.05	1.05
church attendance		.84***	0.85***	0.86***	0.85***	0.79***	0.86***	0.86***	0.86***
% conservative faculty			0.98***						
% moderate faculty				1.01	1.04**	1.01			
% moderate faculty X church political views					0.98**				
% moderate faculty X conservative parent						1.01			
% liberal faculty							1.02***	1.02***	1.02***
% liberal faculty X church political views								1	
% liberal faculty X conservative parent									0.99
Max Rescaled R^2	.02	.05	.08	.07	.07	.06	.09	.08	.08
N	3708	4176	3524	3524	3524	3524	3524	3524	3524

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey, 2012; * *p* < .05; ** p < .01, *** p< .001

Similar effects from the previous dependent variable were seen in terms of the effect of college, though this time the class year effect was more prominent and the interaction effects with family of origin less so (see Table 4.4). Perhaps most interesting is the fact that whether or not the students had conservative parents was not a significant predictor of their perspectives. Even though faculty and family of origin were significant in this model and while the effects of family, religion, and college matters, this issue is arguably related more specifically to being older than it is to liberalizing forces of higher education or of the pull to the right from parental sway.

Table 4.4.

Binary Logistic Regression Odds Ratios for Student Views on Same Sex Marriage by Class Year

Variables	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Intercept	-2.13*	-1.58*	-2.58***	-1.51**
sex	1.56	0.81	1.14	0.91
race	0.71	0.95	1.14	1.21
church political views	1.21*	1.26**	1.07	1.23***
conservative parent	0.8	0.82	0.83	1.02
classes	1.02	1.06	1.14	0.94
volunteering	1.03	1.05	1.03	0.94
involvement	0.87	1.01	1.116	1.1*
church attendance	0.86**	0.81***	0.85***	0.88***
parental influence on college choice	0.92	0.6*	0.84	0.83
% liberal faculty	1.01	1.02***	1.01***	1.02***
Max Rescaled R^2	.07	.1	.06	.1
N	795	828	827	1074

Source: CCCU Denominational Survey 2012; * *p* < .05; ** p < .01, *** p< .001

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Parents or Professors?

The literature notes that interaction with faculty, peers, and the higher education institution as a whole all influence college students on multiple levels of engagement, collectively opening their horizons to new ways of seeing the world. The counter or revisionist perspective maintains that students self-select into institutions, programs, and student organizations that serve to reinforce their opinions, ideals, and beliefs as developed during childhood. Dodson (2014) offers a third view, the contingency perspective, noting that under certain conditions, either pre-college or college effects may have a more direct influence on college student political views and that the pre-selection and institutional effects are reciprocal in nature rather than distinct from one another. This contingency perspective helps to frame the findings of this study in terms of the effect of religion, family, and the Evangelical college experience on student political views and highlights the fact that these effects are intertwined with one another rather than separated.

The findings in this study confirm recent explanations of the contingent perspective of how college affects students, particularly in regards to their political views. Situated as an intersection of work in political culture, higher education, and the sociology of religion, this undertaking considers not the individual as the main focus, but rather the environment and culture surrounding higher education. This follows in the

legacy of Binder and Wood (2013) who considered the campus and its "sub-environments as the key objects of study" (p. 314). In short, it matters what kind of students and what kinds of colleges and what kind of families they come from in predicting what political views with which students might identify. Even though most students and faculty at CCCU schools are Evangelical, these institutions and the communities of people who make up these institutions are not homogenous. This study confirms that the political views of faculty, for example, do influence students, but they also challenge the conventional understanding of college faculty of having a one-directional effect. While the distribution of CCCU faculty political perspectives is skewed to the right due to a high concentration of conservative Protestants, these findings reveal that overall, CCCU faculty have a moderating effect when considered in light of family identity.

The Politics of Belief

Berger (1967) defines plausibility structures both as systems of meaning as well as the sociocultural contexts that help main the legitimacy of one's beliefs. This study reveals the capacity and constraints of both families and faculty members in influencing student political views at Evangelical colleges. Exposure to conservative pre-college religious identity remains influential when students leave the home environment, even when student perspectives are challenged by more moderate or liberal views. In this sense, home remains "close" to the student through Berger's notion of plausibility structures. One way this occurs is that parents who have a strong influence on their student's choice in college might channel them into Evangelical colleges, ensuring the students' value structure remains intact. Dodson (2014) has already noted the flaws in the

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transformative perspective as well as the countering pre-socialization perspective of how college influences student political views, and this study confirms his findings as they relate to the world of Christian higher education.

In considering whether the influences of parents and professors are cooperative, contingent, or competing, the answer is, "yes." Another possibility remains, that the influences are also cultural in nature. That is to say that a major challenge to the plausibility of any belief system is pluralism, which by default "multiplies the number of plausibility structures in an individual's social environment" (Berger, 2014, p. 32). While parents and professors matter, the plausibility structures that surround them also count. These plausibility structures are at times maintained, mitigated, or broken by the effects of pluralism, and CCCU institutions are not immune to this phenomenon. Core tenants of Berger's theory that apply to Evangelical colleges are the institutionalized control of dissent as a way of maintaining plausibility. As noted in the Gordon case, ensuring minimal dissent through the hiring process ensures that faculty or staff will not challenge plausibility structures of Evangelicalism. CCCU institutions support academic freedom and yet also require specific commitments to biblical and moral authority from their community members. In other words, one way the institutions maintain plausibility structures by hiring, accepting, and promoting those who promote the institutional values. This institutional maintenance of Conservative Protestant culture conditions the impact of traditionally liberalizing factors that challenge the belief system of students while attending college.

Which Way to Go?

It is possible that Evangelical college faculty, both individually and as a collective, are well suited to provide balanced influences to Evangelical political culture. By challenging Evangelical political ideology, collectively, the minority moderate and liberal faculty and CCCU institutions as a whole are well suited to expand the plausibility structures of Evangelicalism.

To the extent that the political orientations of Evangelicals mimics their religious concerns, this study on Evangelical colleges offers insight into the role that non-conservative faculty at Evangelical colleges might play in maintaining this contentious identity within Evangelicalism by challenging the status quo. CCCU schools are committed to the integration of faith and learning at every level of their institution Many scholars of faith-based higher education argue there are benefits to homogenous faculty, namely that doing so enables institutions to better maintain orthodox religious commitments. On the one hand there is a perceived benefit of containing dissension, which in the long run reduces the likelihood of decline (Ringenberg, 2006). However, on the other hand, politically non-conservative faculty may also provide a necessary challenge to more conservative tendencies. This study calls into question the role of faculty in maintaining strong ties to evangelicalism. The results show that faculty do play a significant role in maintaining orthodoxy, but under certain conditions the efforts most often used to preserve identity, such as maintaining a homogenous faculty, may be called into question. While it is indeed the case that liberal leaning faculty influence student political views, depending on the partisan distribution, these faculty may be collectively muted by the plausibility structures including Evangelical family background, and other

aspects of the college experience that help to maintain Evangelical plausibility structures at CCCU schools.

Limitations

Future studies could employ multi-level modeling techniques in order to understand the important differences present in CCCU institutions. Additionally, one might argue that student self- report on parent or church views might be more likely to place them on the more conservative end of the spectrum. However, it is also the case that the majority of students come from conservative families by the very nature that they are attending a CCCU institution. Further studies should explore the enrollment statistics of these institutions in regards to religious traditions of student families of origin. For this particular study all faculty members were included in the sample, not only full-time faculty members. Because the purpose of this study was to understand a general distribution of political identities at any given institution, it was not necessary to exclude part time or adjunct faculty.

Conclusion

Family background is not solely deterministic in determining student's political views, nor can Evangelical college campuses and their faculty be considered completely causal or influential in isolation. As this study shows, parents and professors are contingent upon one another and together interact to at times maintain, but also to expand and challenge Evangelical plausibility structures. This research on Evangelical colleges has added to the growing body of literature, which considers the implications of family background on student political attitudes, and also adds to the understanding of how religion and family affect young adults beyond childhood experiences. Evangelical

colleges play a distinct role in the socialization of Evangelical young adults, but also as such are influential on the larger Evangelical culture. Analyzing the role of plausibility structures in affecting student political views offers a nuanced explanation about how pre-college and college might interact at the cultural level.

Rather than considering the isolated effects of family, religion, and higher education, scholars and practitioners would do well to approach both empirical and practical work from the contingent perspective of how young adults acquire their political views. In terms of Evangelical colleges, approaching these findings from the maintenance or challenging of plausibility structures is also helpful. The strength of Evangelical culture from which CCCU institutions draw their students remains a strong influence throughout the college experience at college, even with the influence of non-conservative faculty members, and even within a pluralistic society. Though faculty at Evangelical colleges who were reportedly moderate or liberal offered a counter perspective within the institution, this group does not always necessarily pose a threat to Evangelicalism but rather at times may actually help to maintain a certain degree of appropriate tension. These faculty members represent a challenge to the status quo that can actually support Smith's (1998) model for Evangelicalism's success, which is high tension and high integration with the world.

My goal in this research was not to diminish the role that either family, church, or college might play in influencing college student political attitudes, nor to ignore the real challenges to plausibility structures of Evangelical identity, but rather to offer a more nuanced account of how family religious background may operate in tandem with Evangelical colleges. By collectively expanding what counts as an Evangelical

perspective, faculty help Evangelical culture maintain an important degree of distinction with engagement one that includes a certain degree of disparate views. President Lindsey wants to retain Gordon's distinction, though perhaps at the expense of its engagement with the larger culture.

Much in the way sociologists like Peter Berger have renounced the secularization paradigm, Marsden (2014) challenges the previously dominant affirmation of endemic secularization in Christian higher education. While higher education has been struggling in recent decades, Marsden (2014) argues that this unique brand has instead experienced a revitalization and renewal in the religious market economy. In considering the conditions of modernity's impact on Christian higher education, there is limited scholarly work regarding how in fact Christian higher education operates outside of this secularization thesis. This study is an attempt at considering how Evangelical colleges might operate in a paradigm of pluralism. The results of this thesis offer insight into the limitations of framing Evangelical colleges through a narrative of decline, and propose along the lines of recent scholarship that perhaps this particular form of higher education is not inevitably bound to modernity's slippery slope

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