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## The Effects of the Mennonite Church USA on Enrollment in Mennonite Institutions of Higher Education

Katherine Anna Steiner  
*Wright State University*

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THE EFFECTS OF THE MENNONITE CHURCH USA ON ENROLLMENT IN  
MENNONITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

By

KATHERINE A. STEINER  
B.A., Wright State University, 2002

2010  
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

June 2010

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Katherine A. Steiner ENTITLED The Effects of the Mennonite Church USA on Enrollment In Mennonite Institutions of Higher Education BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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Joanne Risacher, Ph.D., Co-Chair

---

Charles W. Ryan, Ph.D., Co-Chair

---

Jill Lindsey, Ph.D., Dept. Chair

Committee on Final Examination:

---

Charles W. Ryan, Ph.D., Co-Chair

---

Joanne Risacher, Ph.D., Co-Chair and Advisor

---

Suzanne Franco, Ed.D.

---

Eric Fulcomer, Ph.D.

---

Andrew Hsu, Ph.D.  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

## Abstract

Steiner, Katherine M.A., Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education and Human Services, Wright State University, 2010. The Effects of the Mennonite Church USA on Enrollment in Mennonite Institutions of Higher Education.

The purpose of this study was to determine if enrollment at Mennonite institutions of higher education was impacted after the Mennonite Church (MC) USA formed in 2002. There are five Mennonite institutions of higher education in the United States: Bethel College in Kansas, Bluffton University in Ohio, Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, Goshen College in Indiana, and Hesston College in Kansas. This parallel mixed methods study identified how the merger of the MC USA impacted the overall enrollment at Mennonite IHE. In addition, it explored enrollment based on gender, race, or Mennonite affiliation.

For the quantitative method of this research, pre-existing data obtained from the Mennonite Education Agency determined the percentage of change in student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. The quantitative results varied though three of the five Mennonite IHE experienced a decline in overall undergraduate enrollment between 2003 and 2008.

Qualitatively, this researcher captured the attitudes, perceptions, and professional observations of enrollment professionals at each of the Mennonite IHE through interviews. Common themes in the data indicated the pressure to increase enrollment

linked with a shrinking denominational pool of youth, competition with other institutions, and the cost of private education. Issues within the Mennonite community were also taken into consideration for this research.

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## Dedication

This is dedicated to my loving family.

Dave, your adoration gives me courage and confidence. I thank you for always indulging me and for making me laugh.

David, you always give me perspective. When I would wake up in the early morning hours to write, I paused at the Brian Andreas quote in our hallway. It says, “I sometimes wake in the early morning and listen to the soft breathing of my children and I think to myself, this is one thing I’ll never regret and I carry that quiet with me all day long.” You saved me and I would “dive like a scuba driver in the water” without you.

Mom and Dad, where would I be without you? It is that simple.

## Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

### **General Background**

The Mennonite Church (MC) USA formed in 2002 after a merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church ("About Mennonite Church USA," 2008). Following the merger, the MC USA established accountability for the operations of all five of the undergraduate Mennonite institutions of higher education (IHE). Within the MC USA exists the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA), an agency responsible for educational initiatives and data collection within Mennonite education.

Prior to the 2002 merger, the Mennonite Board of Education accounted for Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College, and Hesston College. Bethel College and Bluffton University operated under its own organization, the Higher Education Council (HEC). After the merger, the Mennonite Board of Education was dissolved; the MEA was formed and became responsible for data collection for all of the Mennonite IHE. Currently, the MEA accounts for more than 40 elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries in the United States, which serve more than 13,400 full time students ("FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency," 2008). The MEA has an individualized relationship with each Mennonite IHE and reports to MC USA.

This parallel mixed methods study examined the impact of the merger of the MC USA on enrollment in Mennonite IHE. This study sought to determine if the merger of

the MC USA impacted the overall enrollment at Mennonite IHE. In addition, it explored enrollment changes to determine if they are based on gender, race, or Mennonite affiliation. For the quantitative method of this research, pre-existing data obtained from the MEA was examined to determine the percentage of change in student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. Qualitatively, this study sought to document the attitudes, perceptions, and professional observations regarding enrollment trends of enrollment management officers at each of the Mennonite IHE through structured interviews. The relevance of this study is significant for religious and Mennonite communities, as little secular research has been conducted on the subject of Mennonite IHE. The main findings determined if the merger and formation of the MC USA affected enrollment of Mennonite IHE.

### **Significance of the Study**

Statistically, Schrag (2009) noted “MC USA’s membership is aging and shrinking, down 7 percent since 2003. To be a strong church in the 21st century, the denomination needs to do a better job of proving its relevance to young adults...” (para. 7). Historically the Mennonite community is antimodernism; this may likely render the Mennonite faith less attractive for young Mennonites. The MEA has streamlined data collection regarding students and the operations at Mennonite secondary and post-secondary schools. This study contributes to the Mennonite IHE community because it could be utilized to market and encourage enrollment at Mennonite IHE. The research could ultimately aid in making Mennonite IHE a more attractive educational option for

Mennonite youth, which could in turn affect sustainable leadership within the Mennonite community.

Very little secular research has been conducted about Mennonite IHE. Moreover, the Mennonite community itself rarely is examined. This study was designed to explore enrollment within a religious community with numerous challenges. It is the goal of the researcher to raise an awareness of the enrollment struggles and the direction of Mennonite IHE.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students' spirituality and religious identity are becoming important factors in college selection and Christian colleges, particularly evangelical in nature, are developing into one of the fastest growing sectors within higher education. "Colleges and universities with strong faith identities, which enforce strict rules on alcohol, relations with the opposite sex, and attendance at religious services, and offer classes from a religious perspective, are becoming more popular" (Riley, 2004, p. 1). Numerical data supports the anecdotal information. The 2008-2009 Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) profile stated that the total student enrollment was 319,289 for members and affiliates of the CCCU and that more than 230,000 students attended the estimated 200 evangelical Christian liberal arts colleges and Bible colleges in North America (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006). To substantiate this growth, CCCU member schools experienced growth by 70 percent between 1990 and 2004; enrollment at private, four year colleges grew 28 percent between 1990 and 2004 (CCCU, October 10, 2005)

As denominational colleges and universities have experienced increases in enrollment, it is important to question if this trend is maintained within the Mennonite IHE. If an intentional byproduct of the creation of MC USA was to create young leaders within the Mennonite community, was the 2002 merger successful in generating enrollment in Mennonite IHE? The following is the primary research question of this study: What is the relationship between the enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions and the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA?

### **Problem Under Investigation**

The Mennonite denomination has origins in the sixteenth century and an extensive history. The Mennonite denomination is part of the Christian Anabaptist religious sect that followed religious leader Menno Simmons. Like other Christian denominations, Mennonites commit to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In committing to Jesus Christ, Mennonites allow Christ to guide all daily actions. After acknowledging a personal relationship with Christ, Mennonites experience adult baptism to serve as a testimony to their belief in God and a pledge to their faith. Mennonites go through baptism as adults, rather than one in infancy like the majority of Christian based denominations.

Many Mennonites are still loyal to religious tradition and seek guidance from the church regarding decision making, while guided by a strong principle of separation of church and state. As strong Christian pacifists, it is Anabaptist tradition to either abstain from the political realm or to vote with the Moral Majority (Roth, 2004).

Media coverage of the 2008 presidential election indicated that the new generation of Mennonite college students had strong opinions on issues and that they were willing to publically commit to presidential candidates. Regarding the overall political climate after the presidential election, Krattenmaker (2009) wrote, “It has been a year of retreat and retrench for a conservative Christendom that enjoyed such outsize influence over American culture and politics through most of the decade. Mennonite college students received national media attention from major news sources, like CNN and The Chicago Tribune, for their verbal commitments and contributions to the presidential campaigns. Their political involvement was unlike their predecessors and contrary to previous Mennonite political practices (Leroux, 2008b). This information suggests the new generation of Mennonite youth has a greater interest in politics and the global world. As Mennonites are taking on a more active role in society, one should ask what is known about enrollment numbers and strategies at undergraduate Mennonite colleges.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were operationally defined for this study:

Anabaptist. Anabaptist for the purpose of this research will be defined as a faith tradition. Anabaptist refers to people with the religious belief of adult baptism. Anabaptists have conservative values. Pederson (2002) stated, “Defending family, craft, community, and faith from the acids of modernity has been precisely the Anabaptist agenda” (p. 342). Groups that claim Anabaptist heritage include the

Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Old German Baptist Brethrens, Puritans, Quakers, and Baptists.

Amish. A branch of the Anabaptist faith tradition often associated with the Mennonite sect. Jacob Amman branched away from the Mennonite sect and founded the Amish sect in 1632. The Amish practice shunning and tend to be more conservative than Mennonites.

Antimodernism. Antimodernism is a dismissal of modern ideals and behaviors in favor of a perceived more pure way of life. Antimodernism is typically associated with a rejection of technology, industry, and urbanization. Antimodernists intentionally create a reality that supports fundamental or simple living, which is an alternative to mainstream society.

Christians. Christians are followers of the Christian religion. They are individuals who adhere to teachings from the son of God, Jesus Christ, and the Bible. Christian theology claims that Jesus Christ modeled a virtuous life and was the savior of civilization when he died on the cross to bring salvation from sin to humanity.

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). According to the “About CCCU” (2008) website, the CCCU is a non-profit organization founded in 1976. The site also reported that it is an international association with 111 members in North America and 70 affiliate institutions in 24 countries.

Mennonite. Mennonites are a sect that embodies the Anabaptist faith tradition. Anabaptist-Mennonites are also identified as Christians. Mennonites have

Protestant origins that trace back to the Reformation period. In addition to adult baptism, Mennonites believe in “resisting dominant culture” (Pederson, 2002, p. 340), and “complete separation of church and state” (Suzuki, 1974, p. 3).

Mennonite Church (MC) USA. The Mennonite Church USA is an Anabaptist Christian denomination. MC USA has more than 109,000 members in 44 states and serves more than 939 congregations (“About Mennonite...”, 2008).

Mennonite Education Agency (MEA). The Mennonite Church USA oversees the MEA. The MEA helps provide leadership to more than “40 elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities and seminaries” (“FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency,” 2008). “Altogether, these educational institutions serve more than 13,400 full-time students” (“FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency,” 2008) of all ages within the Mennonite community.

Merger. The formation and creation of the Mennonite Church USA occurred after the merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. The merger occurred in February 2002 and put all Mennonite IHE under the Mennonite Church USA umbrella (Trollinger, 2001). The term “integration” is common vernacular in some Mennonite communities and synonymous to “merger”.

Minority. An individual who does not identify with a Caucasian racial identity, but is a United States citizen will be defined as a minority for the purpose of this research.

Old Order. Old Order refers to a particular group of Mennonites who practice plain living and who do not use technology. Plain living is a virtue within the Old Order that disregards anything that is showy or ostentatious. Technology is shunned because Old Order Mennonites choose to focus on community values and think technology would negatively impact their daily living.

Open coding. A systematic approach to analyze data. Involves creating categories of information from data. Themes are generally broad and then are organized more specifically. Data for this research will be gathered and collected through interviews.

Secular. Not religious. Worldly.

Shunning. The act of deliberately avoiding or associating with an individual or a group. A practice generally performed by the Amish, not the Mennonites.

Snowball sampling. How interview participants will be identified for this researcher. A key participant in the research will identify expert informants for this researcher so that purposeful data can be gathered for the qualitative component of the study. It is considered a purposeful way to gather a wealth of details from a few small number of cases (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Also known as chain sampling.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

The following research questions were developed to guide data collection in this study:

## **Research Questions**

Research Question One: What impact has the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA had on gender enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

Research Question Two: What impact has the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA had on religious affiliation of enrollees at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

Research Question Three: What impact has the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA had on minority enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

Research Question Four: What impact has the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA had on overall enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

Research Question Five: Which enrollment population experienced the most impact after the 2002 merger and formation of the MC USA?

## **Null Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis for this study is: The 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA had no significant statistical impact on enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States.

## **Assumptions**

No other enrollment initiatives or other factors have occurred during the selected time frame that has caused significant changes in enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States.

The data used in this study is self reported from the MEA. Due to the fact that the data were not gathered independently, theoretically there could be potential bias within data collection and reporting. However, for the purpose of this research, it is assumed that the quantitative data was reliable and accurately represents enrollment for the research questions under examination.

The 2002 merger and formation of the MEA was a strategic move to keep Mennonite youth engaged and vested in the Mennonite faith because the Mennonite denomination struggles to attract youth and retain membership.

## **Limitation and Delimitations**

Although the Anabaptist faith encompasses several denominations, this study will focus on the five undergraduate Mennonite IHE in the United States that affiliate with MC USA. Institutions include: Bethel College, Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College, and Hesston College. All of the colleges are private, four-year institutions, with the exception of Hesston College. Hesston College is a two-year college.

The five undergraduate Mennonite IHE are identified as part of the MEA and regularly report enrollment data to the MEA. This researcher has no control over the data that Mennonite IHE reported to the MEA. This researcher also did not attempt to identify and analyze independent enrollment strategies within individual MEA IHE.

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was the quantitative data. The data was not collected by this researcher. Rather, the data was pre-existing and made public by the MEA. It is known that Mennonite IHE are expected to self-report data annually to the MEA. Due to the fact that the data was independently gathered, it was not possible to confirm how the data collection occurred or the validity of the quantitative data.

Another limitation in this study was the small qualitative sample size. For the qualitative data analysis, five interviews were conducted. Additionally, the interviewees had a wide range of experience in higher education and connection to the Mennonite community. Some interviewees were new to positions at Mennonite institutions, whereas others had worked exclusively in Mennonite higher education. The assortment of experience and exposure to Mennonite higher education within the interviewee sampling size produced an array of responses. Additionally, interviewees may have been more likely to respond to interview questions with responses that were garnered appropriate or safe because of interviewees' employment within Mennonite higher education. Crabtree and Miller (1999) stated that "five to eight data sources or sampling units will often suffice for a homogeneous sample" (p. 42), though a larger sample size may have generated a more comprehensive qualitative data analysis.

The final limitation of this study is that it focused exclusively on undergraduate enrollment at Mennonite IHE rather than including graduate enrollment data. This decision was made by this researcher because Goshen College and Hesston Colleges do not offer graduate programs. However, a more complete data analysis could have occurred by exploring graduate enrollment at Bethel College, Bluffton University, and Eastern Mennonite University.

### **Summary**

This study provided independent research about the enrollment trends at Mennonite IHE. The results can be utilized within the Mennonite IHE community to develop enrollment at Mennonite IHE and to increase youth leadership within the denomination. Also, the data in this study could provide campus admissions staff with important information about potential student needs and career goals.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Because it is impossible to answer these research questions with addressing or creating an awareness of the evolution of the Mennonite culture, this researcher's embraced multiple facets of Mennonite higher education. To have an understanding of the current issues within Mennonite higher education, one must value the historical perspectives of Anabaptist education and also the development of the Mennonite Church USA. It is important to benchmark certain facets of Mennonite higher education with the Christian higher education. As one Mennonite stated, "Mennonites are not only a theology, but a culture. A close group; whatever organizations were started, were their own" (personal communication). With this in mind, the theology, history, and culture of the Mennonite faith are woven together like an intricate patchwork quilt. The literature review reflects these complicated relationships, rather than a systematic linear process.

This literature review focused on Christian higher education, Anabaptist education, the differentiation between Anabaptist faiths, Mennonite education, the merger of the Mennonite Church USA, and Mennonite youth. The topics in the following chapter were identified as critical information necessary to fully address the research questions. This researcher also intentionally choose not to reference the date of personal communications because it may have compromised the interviewees anonymity.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Historical Perspective**

Christian universities have European roots that date back to the medieval period. Many are still highly respected domains of higher education. For example, Ireland's Trinity College is recognized internationally; in the United States, the University of Notre Dame in Indiana is recognized on a national level; and Ohio's Cedarville College is recognized on a regional level for quality, faith based education. In America, seventeenth century Protestant settlers built colleges immediately after colonization because of a strong missionary spirit (Adrian, 2003). In fact, the development of higher education started with the Puritans, followed by Calvinists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and later the Jesuits. These groups prioritized building denominational specific institutions because IHE were viewed as a vehicle to instruct, unify, and mobilize youth concerning their identified religious beliefs (Adrian, 2003). Though conflicts between faith and reason created challenges for Christian colleges in the seventeenth century, Christian colleges have maintained and defended their religious traditions.

The Yale Report of 1829 encouraged IHE to incorporate a classical curriculum into academia that was consistent with the age of Enlightenment (Lucas, 2006), which valued liberty, individual rights, and reason. Adrian (2003) stated that as society transitioned into a "modern pluralistic culture" the Christian university was challenged by the Yale Report and the secular nature of the "multiversity" that was enormous in size and included a powerful academic presence. Religious traditions and religion-based curriculum became defunct during the enlightenment period when natural law and

universal order became customary (Adrian, 2003). This newly expressed “confidence in human reason” had a great influence on the transformation of higher education (Adrian, 2003) and the mid-nineteenth century marked the IHE shift from a denominational emphasis towards secularization.

The separation of church and state was a founding principle of America, but Hertzgaard (2002) posited that the educational systems were historic battlegrounds for Christian initiatives. Initiatives often included intelligent design in the classroom, prayer in school, and issues surrounding homosexuality and abortion. Within the context of higher education, Hertzgaard claimed America was “Determined to avoid the religious-based wars and power struggles that had bloodied Europe and other lands for centuries, the founders mandated a strict separation of church and state and complete freedom of religion” (p. 126). The separation of church and state is still a guiding principle at public institutions of higher education.

### **Anabaptists, Mennonites, Ethnic Mennonites, and Amish**

The Anabaptist faith tradition is international and refers to peoples with the religious belief of adult baptism. An exact date of when the Anabaptist faith was formed is not known, but historians speculate that the faith tradition took roots in the sixteenth century. According to Wittmer (1991),

They were in total disagreement with the Catholics, Luther and the Reformed movement. They wanted to return to a primitive, early-type of Christianity. The Anabaptists literally accepted the Bible as their dictate. They made it clear to both

church and state that they would stop taking oaths, would not drink and would never again pick up a sword. (p. 8)

Modern day Anabaptist sects include the Hutterites, Old German Baptist Brethrens, Amish, Mennonites, Puritans, Quakers, and Baptists.

Anabaptists are often characterized by a desire to live plain lifestyles of peace and justice making, the practice of nonviolence, communal living, dedication to service to Christ and to those in need, and by their simple, rural communities ("Anabaptist," 2008). Due to the conviction of separating church and state, Brown (1976) claimed,

Anabaptists have been labeled as separatists and isolationistic, imbibing a perfectionist ethic so as to pass by irresponsibly on the other side of the road.

Though perhaps true of many subsequent varieties, such a caricature is unfair to the early Anabaptists who were found preaching in cities with evangelistic zeal, confronting leaders of the church and state, and singing and witnessing to those gathered even when facing death. (p. 268)

Characterized as peaceful peoples, Anabaptists have endured tremendous religious persecution because of their views on primitive living and adult baptism.

Mennonites are Anabaptists who followed Menno Simons, the founder of the Mennonite sect. Like the Anabaptist faith tradition, the Mennonite sect is also international. "Menno Simon, a former Catholic...was the leader of the Anabaptists in Holland and his followers became known as Mennists. The name Mennonite was later applied to the Swiss and Dutch Anabaptists" (Wittmer, 1991, p. 11). With the Anabaptist tradition of plain living, pacifism, and a steadfast refusal to succumb to nationalism,

Burkholder (1976) stated that many have called Mennonites “‘pilgrims,’ ‘exiles,’ ‘aliens’, and ‘strangers’ in this world” (p. 262). Burkholder also posited,

In a twentieth century dominated by international militarism, the flash point was refusal of military participation. Because they rejected warfare, Mennonites in World War I were outcast. No set of relationships is more important for understanding Mennonite life and identity in the twentieth century than those which flowed from the Mennonite Encounter with their war making national communities. (p. 171)

There are subsets or branches of the Mennonite denomination including the Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites, Old Order Mennonites, Grofrfdale Conference of Mennonites/Wenger Mennonites, Stauffer Mennonites, Modern Mennonites, and various others.

Sociologists and Mennonites, themselves, distinguish levels of Mennonite identity with the term “ethnic” or “cultural”, though “ethnic” is more commonly used in vernacular. Mennonites who are generationally Mennonite or who have historical European Mennonite roots are characterized as “ethnic Mennonite” within the group. Regarding the status between ethnic Mennonites and non-ethnic Mennonites, one Mennonite noted, “The difference is not the awareness of discrepancy or hypocrisy, but rather the realization that we minority peoples, with ethnic backgrounds distinct from German or Swiss Mennonitism, could nevertheless also claim the Anabaptist Vision, because the vision is found in the New Testament and in other great traditions” (Burkholder, 1976, p. 216). Like most religions, there are people who join the church

who did not grow up in the church. Presently, individuals who are not born into the Mennonite faith can never be considered an ethnic Mennonite.

Looking at the way religious sects develop, Burkholder (1976) stated, “Anabaptism as a sect had its origins in dissidence; it then gained a ‘minority status’ from which it developed a sense of specialness that began to express itself ethnically” (p. 210). Mennonites who do not identify as ethnic often have a different status within the Mennonite community. The status is not good or bad, rather it is recognized for its uniqueness. Interestingly, the Mennonite community recognizes its status as a minority because of its inability to “achieve its ends in the larger society...or, because it rejects the type of power needed to achieve its own ends”

When people think of Mennonites often times their Anabaptist-Amish cousin comes to mind. Contrary to popular belief, “The Amish are offshoots of the more liberal Mennonites” (Whittmer, 1991, p. 11). Led by Jacob Amman in 1632, the “Ammans” or “Amish” branched away from the Mennonites. The division was over the practice of “shunning” or ex-communication. The practice of shunning is still part of the Amish faith but something that modern day Mennonites do not practice.

### **Anabaptist Education**

Anabaptists, particularly the Amish, have had a long standing controversy with public education standards and attendance requirements, beginning with persecution in the sixteenth and seventh centuries (Keim, 1975). Though various Anabaptists sects may share similar religious convictions, beliefs on education vary by sects and community. Some Anabaptists, particularly those who identify as Old Order, tend to reject formal

“higher education” and scientific thought, while others embrace education. Mennonite communities that consider themselves “Old Order” are extreme examples of conservative Mennonite sects. Old Order Mennonites identify with a strict lifestyle that is dictated by the concept of plain living. Johnson-Wiener (2007) indicated attitudes regarding education within Old Order communities implicated that the purpose of education was to prepare children for life in the Old Order, but not for the secular world. Within the Old Order, it is rare for individuals to receive education after the eight grade (Johnson-Wiener, 2007).

Keim (1975) stated many Amish do not attend school after the eighth grade because the Amish believe educating Amish youth is the right of the parent, rather than the role of the government. Keim (1975) directed readers to the 1972 court case *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, the landmark case that defined “education” and parental rights in succession with the First Amendment rights. In *Wisconsin v. Yoder* the courts favored the Amish and stated that Amish children were exempt from attending public schools under religious liberty (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 1972). According to Keim (1975) the court stated, “The Amish children would experience a useless anguish of living in two worlds. Either the public school is irrelevant in their lives as members of the Old Order Amish community or these secondary school values will make all future life as Amish impossible to them” (p. 120). *Wisconsin v. Yoder* still upholds the First Amendment and contributed greatly towards the cause of America’s religious freedom, but the lack of formalized public education continues to be a factor in Anabaptist education.

Since the *Wisconsin v. Yoder* court case established that Anabaptist children are exempt from attending public schools in 1972 (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 1972), the community plays a very important role in educating Anabaptist children, as many youth attend a parochial school within the community or participate in home schooling. Johnson-Wiener (2007) suggested that there was wide diversity in the elementary and post-secondary schooling within the Anabaptist community. Johnson-Wiener detailed her field research regarding Old Order Amish's practices, norms, and values regarding education. By conducting archival research, interviews, and field work in eight Old Order settlements in five Midwestern states (Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania), Johnson-Weiner concluded that within each Anabaptist community there were vast cultural differences and practices because Old Order schools were a reflection of the community values.

Ediger (1985) also acknowledged that Amish youth were not expected to proceed past an eighth grade education, but stated that problem solving, critical and creative thinking were not emphasized in primary school. In his study, Ediger (1985) reported that the educational goals of Old Order Amish in rural Bloomfield, Iowa were to receive an eighth grade education by studying Biblical stories, a strong emphasis on arithmetic, and learning from practical farm situations. Regarding textbooks, Ediger stated "young children use the Rod and Staff Reading series, students draw and color art from the Bible, and seventh and eighth grade students read selected writings from Ralph Waldo Emerson" (p. 423). He noted that arithmetic and science were functional to the Amish and had a purposeful educational value. Authors Waite and Crockett (1997) disagreed with Ediger and suggested that science was not beneficial to Amish youth because of

their very specific attitudes and ideas on Christ's role regarding evolution, gene alterations, and chemical reactions.

In regards to function, technology was another debatable topic for some Anabaptists. Generally speaking, modern day Mennonites have embraced technology. According to Waite and Crockett (1997), Mennonite peoples were more liberal than their Amish counterparts in their overall usage of technology and stated, "Technology is to be used to help Mennonites better serve their God" (p. 119).

### **Anabaptist-Mennonite Higher Education**

Anabaptist-Mennonites were late to accept higher education and the process of building institutions because they were steeped in the tradition of living a Christ-like life, which stressed biblical teachings and did not emphasize secular education (P. Keim, 2002). As other denominations became more established through the support of denominational based universities, some Mennonites eventually accepted education as a powerful tool to implement the mission of the church. The first North American Mennonite college, Bethel College located in Kansas, was founded in 1888 ("Fast Facts on Bethel College," 2008). To put this date in perspective, Harvard College, located in Massachusetts, was founded by the Puritans in 1636 (Lucas, 2006).

The motivation for building colleges was controversial among Mennonites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and this reluctance indicates a resistance to acculturation of higher education in the United States (P. Keim, 2002). Anabaptist tradition lends itself to the rejection of worldliness and modernity. Pederson (2002) stated, "American Anabaptists of one persuasion or another have chosen to resist almost every major intellectual and cultural

trend of the dominant society” (p. 341). Although there are certainly distinctions between sects within the Anabaptist faith, “...essentials of Anabaptist identity stressed community, family, and separation from a ‘worldly society’” (Pederson, p. 340). The notion of higher education within the larger Anabaptist community is still relatively controversial since many IHE involve state funding or require accountability to a governing body or accrediting agencies. Examples include the Board of Regents and the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement.

Sawatsky (1997) suggested that controversial attitudes towards education were deeply rooted in Mennonite history, but that education is at the very core of Mennonitism. Sawatsky posited that Menno Simons, the founder of the Mennonite sect, even had a position regarding schooling, “Menno’s position: education is legitimate but only if it is exercised in genuine humility----the glory of God and the service of humanity” (p. 189). Menno Simons was a proponent of education, but Sawatsky (1997) stated that Mennonites were generally hesitant about higher education. “You can send a Mennonite to Harvard, but you won’t get a Mennonite back,” is a common Mennonite saying that reflects the uncertainty and apprehension many Mennonites have regarding education.

In regards to popular thought, Keim (2002) stated many Mennonites view higher education as an opportunity to,

...Stem the loss of American-educated youth away from the church; To equip new leaders for Mennonite congregations in transition from rural, cultural, and linguistic isolation; To provide inspiration and resources for imaginative

reconstruction of Mennonite identity around new definitions of Anabaptist peoplehood, and to define a normative vision. (p. 266)

Even though educating a new generation of Mennonite leaders was generally deemed important, Sawatsky (1997) asserted that ambivalence was the most common Mennonite attitude towards higher education and that many Mennonites attended non-Mennonite schools and universities. Overall, Sawatsky summarized that higher education was deemed as unnecessary and dangerous within many conservative Mennonite sects because it was associated with “worldly conformity and pride, primary marks of Christian unfaithfulness” (p. 188). In order for Mennonite higher education to maintain respect from the Mennonite community, Menno Simon’s basic Anabaptist themes of living a Christ-like life of humility, simplicity, and obedience are incorporated into campuses through a campus mission statement, mandatory chapel, and required religion courses.

Sawatsky (1997) suggested that more emphasis could be placed on creation within Mennonite higher education. He argued, “A fully developed doctrine of creation is important not only for the areas of culture and the arts but also to enable Mennonites to respond appropriately to nature and the environment and, in turn, to have a more balanced appraisal of history and human activity” (p. 198). He also stated there were many theoretical questions that needed to be addressed within the Mennonite faith, including the direction of the faith’s future and expressed concerns that a Mennonite philosophy of higher education still does not exist.

Blogs from Anabaptist students confirmed that Mennonite IHE struggled to distinguish themselves from secular IHE. From a student perspective, one Mennonite IHE graduate (TOMDUNN, 2007) blogged about his continual frustration with the way the college was run. TOMDUNN indicated that Mennonite institutions were not run any differently than non-Mennonite institutions, that the colleges were about the “mighty dollar”, and that there were few displays of authentic Anabaptist values. There were numerous responses to his post that were supportive and adversary.

One blogger provided contrary perspective to TOMDUNN’s post and responded, “Crafting a coherent ‘Anabaptist university’ involves making sense of the way these two words overlap---which requires, first of all, that we do away with the notion that faithfulness might lead us to get rid of our universities” (TOMDUNN, 2007). Postings from Mennonite students and Mennonite IHE alumni indicated a gamut of opinions on how Mennonite IHE operated.

To appeal to the Mennonite community and to maintain enrollment at Mennonite IHE, it is important for Mennonite institutions to successfully blend the past and the future like many Christian colleges. According to the Mennonite Education Agency, five undergraduate higher education institutions currently operate in the United States: Bethel College located in Kansas, Bluffton University located in Ohio, Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) located in Virginia, Goshen College located in Indiana, and Hesston College located in Kansas (“FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency,” 2008). With the exception of Hesston College, a two year college, the Mennonite IHE are private, four-year liberal arts colleges.

### **Bethel College.**

Bethel College was the first Mennonite affiliated college. Bethel was established in 1887 and the four year liberal arts college is located in North Newton, KS. It had high state and national rankings; including being the only Kansas private college to be ranked in *Forbes* listing of “America’s Best Colleges” for 2008. In 2008, the school offered 21 majors and a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Bachelor of Science in Social Work degrees ("Fast Facts on Bethel College," 2008). Five hundred students were enrolled from 23 states and 20 countries in 2008. That academic year it was noted that 68% of traditional-age students lived on campus in one of three residence halls and Mennonites represented the largest single denomination at Bethel, but that more than half of the students were from backgrounds other than Mennonite ("Fast Facts on Bethel College," 2008). The College’s mission statement was: “Bethel College seeks to be a diverse community of learners committed to searching for authentic faith and academic achievement, providing rigorous instruction in the liberal arts and selected professional areas and inspiring intellectual, cultural and spiritual leaders for church and society” ("Fast Facts on Bethel College," 2008).

### **Goshen College.**

Established in 1894, Goshen College (GC) is a four-year liberal arts college located in Goshen, IN. After reporting that Goshen students were likely to have 10% less debt at Goshen compared to other private colleges, the college was listed as "least debt college" in *U.S. News & World Report’s* America’s Best Colleges guide ("Goshen College," 2008). Academically Goshen offered 32 majors, 34 minors, 18 teacher

certification programs, and numerous pre-professional and certificate programs. The Goshen College web site stated, “Final statistics, released by Goshen College’s registrar’s office, showed a total headcount of 971 students enrolled at Goshen College for the fall 2007-08 semester. GC's retention rate is 84%” (“Goshen College,” 2008). It also stated that Goshen ranked 12th among all colleges and universities for the presence of international students, who make up 10% of Goshen’s student body. In regards to student population and diversity, African-American, Native American, Asia-Pacific and Hispanic students made seven percent of the student body; students came from more than 35 states and 40 countries; and around 55% of the total student body reported Mennonite or Mennonite-related backgrounds (“Goshen College,” 2008). The educational mission statement at Goshen College is based on the intent to “create a community of faith and learning built on five core values: Christ-centeredness, passionate learning, servant leadership, compassionate peacemaking and global citizenship” (“Goshen College,” 2008).

### **Bluffton University.**

Bluffton University was founded in 1899 in Bluffton, OH. It received national recognition when the college was listed in the 2008 *U.S. News and World Reports'* America's Best Colleges and placed in a top tier of Best Baccalaureate Colleges in the Midwest (“Bluffton University,” 2008). Students at Bluffton can choose from 39 majors and more than 20 minors; adults can enroll in an adult degree completion programs in human resource management and organizational management; graduate students can obtain master's degrees in education, organizational management and business

administration. Bluffton students come from 20 states and 12 countries. The school's mission statement stated,

Shaped by the historic peace church tradition and nourished by a desire for excellence in all phases of its programs, Bluffton University seeks to prepare students of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation, for responsible citizenship, for service to all peoples and, ultimately, for the purposes of God's universal kingdom ("Bluffton University," 2008).

### **Hesston College.**

Founded in 1909, Hesston College is a two-year college located in Hesston, KS, and is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools ("Hesston College," 2008). Academically, Hesston offers more than 50 academic majors and five pre-professional programs and reported enrolling approximately 500 students from more than 25 religious affiliations, 30 states, and 15 countries. In 2008, it was noted that one-third of the student population were from backgrounds other than Mennonite, 12% were considered a North American minority, and that Kansas natives made up approximately 53% of the school's enrollment ("Hesston College," 2008). The Hesston College mission was "to educate and nurture each student within Christ-centered community, integrating thought, life, and faith for service to others in the church and the world" ("Hesston College," 2008).

### **Eastern Mennonite University.**

Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) was founded in 1917 and is located in Harrisonburg, VA. It enrolled approximately 1600 students in fall 2008. EMU had 37

majors, 35 minors, two pre-professional programs, four teacher education programs/licensures, five graduate programs, and four associate degrees ("Eastern Mennonite University," 2008). EMU stated that in 2008, 17% of all full-time students were from diverse racial, ethnic or international backgrounds and noted Mennonites accounted for 53% of undergraduates. Regarding its mission,

EMU educates students to serve and lead in a global context. Our Christian community challenges students to pursue their life calling through scholarly inquiry, artistic creation, guided practice, and life-changing cross-cultural encounter. We invite each person to follow Christ's call to bear witness to faith, serve with compassion, and walk boldly in the way of nonviolence and peace ("Eastern Mennonite University," 2008).

### **Mennonite Church USA**

In 2006, it was estimated that there are approximately 1.5 million Mennonites worldwide ("Anabaptist," 2008). Currently, it is suggested that there are more than 280,000 Mennonites in the United States (Mulhauser, 2001), which includes members of the Old Order whose teachings focus on the concept of plain living. The Mennonite Church (MC) USA is the United States' largest "Anabaptist Christian denomination with more than 109,000 members in 44 states" ("About Mennonite Church USA," 2008). Data from the MC USA 2007-2008 youth census, stated approximately 6,284 youth were affiliated with the MC USA ("Mennonite education annual reports fall 2008," 2008, p. 77). Although education has been a historically debatable topic within the Mennonite community, the MC USA provided exceptional resources regarding Mennonite

education. This was an indicator that education within the Mennonite denomination is becoming increasingly more important for MC USA.

The MC USA was formed in February 2002 after the merger of two Mennonite denominations: The Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church ("About Mennonite Church USA," 2008). Various opinions exist regarding when the merger occurred. This researcher determined that the merger occurred in 2002 based on the public information released by MC USA. Regardless of when the merger occurred, the two church branches that unified into MC USA have distinct histories that currently impact the Mennonite faith and Mennonite higher education.

### **The “Old” Mennonite Church**

The Mennonite Church is commonly referred to as the “Old” Mennonite Church by the denomination and was created in 1898 as a formal group to connect Swiss Mennonites “who had come to the United States beginning in the early eighteenth century” (Jacobsen & Trollinger, 1998, p. 224). According to Jacobsen & Trollinger, by the 1920s the organization had strict ordained leadership that was intentionally structured to “preserve their religious and cultural identity, which now seemed threatened from the outside” (p. 225). “In the 1930’s and 1940’s, Harold Bender (1897-1962) became the key agent for a new reconstruction of Mennonite identity” (Jacobsen & Trollinger, p. 228). Bender believed that three principles were essential concepts to Anabaptist living: Discipleship, voluntary adult baptism and a commitment to holy living, and a practice of love and nonresistance in “all human relationships” including refusal to participate in war (Jacobsen & Trollinger, p. 228). Prior to his death, Bender became an administrator at

Goshen College and worked in numerous leadership roles within the Mennonite Church. It is significant to note that the Mennonite Church's Board of Education managed Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, Hesston in Kansas, and Goshen in Indiana prior to the merger in 2002. The Mennonite Board of Education was recognized within the Mennonite community for keeping meticulous student data and records of enrollment at the Mennonite schools.

### **The General Conference Mennonite Church**

Prior to the merger, Bethel and Bluffton in Kansas and Ohio were affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC). The General Conference Mennonite Church formed in 1860 and included North American Mennonite congregations. Without a clear, organized guidance, Edmund G. Kaufman (1891-1980) emerged as the leader of the General Conference Mennonite Church. "Although he was at times accused of being liberal or modernist, Kaufman considered himself to be part of the constructive, progressive, denominational mainstream" (Jacobsen & Trollinger, 1998, p. 216). "Three distinct poles of Mennonite practice and opinion emerged among General Conference Mennonites as they responded to American society in the years after World War I" (Jacobsen & Trollinger, p. 216) during Kaufman's leadership: traditionalist opinion, conservative evangelicals, and progressive opinion. He maintained communication with all three groups and was of the opinion that most of the General Conference Mennonites were located somewhere in the middle of the three poles.

## **The Merger**

This researcher will be using the term “merger” to describe the formation of the MC USA, though note that it is common vernacular within some Mennonite communities refer to the move as the “integration”. The merger had been discussed for more than a decade before the official merger occurred in 2002. The possibility of a merger had been discussed since 1989. It was supposed to take place in 1999, but there was ambiguity about the Church’s stance on homosexuality (Trollinger, 2001). Trollinger reported that in 1999,

The discussion of membership guidelines for the proposed church resulted in confused and heated discussions over homosexuality, particularly regarding the handful of ‘dually affiliated’ churches that had been disciplined by one (but not the other) denomination for their liberal stance on this issue (para. 2).

Membership guidelines created in 2002 for congregations stated that homosexuality was a sin, “that the church is ‘to be in dialogue with those who hold differing views’” and that regional conferences had the ability to decide how to apply these guidelines (Trollinger, 2001, para. 8).

After the membership guidelines were created in 2002, the two groups were able to successfully merge into the Mennonite Church (MC) USA, which is identified as an Anabaptist Christian denomination. MC USA has more than 109,000 members in 44 states and is the umbrella organization for many Mennonite congregations (“FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency,” 2008), although some congregations still choose not to

affiliate with MC USA because of the church's ambiguous position on homosexuality, particularly sects that identify as Old Order.

In addition to unifying the two groups, it is presumed that the merger within MC USA intended to create leaders who were capable of moving Mennonites into the future. In regard to transitioning and defining the future, Kriss (2009) noted, "We've often chosen leaders who speak well of our past rather than have a vision for our future" (para. 12). Kriss recognized that new leadership within MC USA was necessary to identify what was significant within Mennonite history while "moving us toward compelling visions of new possibilities through difficult-to-navigate times" (para. 13). This information indicates that the future of the Mennonite community is prioritized by MC USA.

### **Mennonite Education Agency**

Within MC USA exists the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA), an agency that is responsible for all of the educational initiatives within MC USA. Not only did it take over initiatives of the former Mennonite Board of Education, but it created a new identity and now collects data for all Mennonite educational institutions that affiliate with MC USA. It was stated, "Since the merger, the MEA is not just a new version of the Mennonite Board of Education. I am under the impression that the MEA is not as definite as the Mennonite Board of Education was about the percentage of Mennonite students that are enrolled in Mennonite higher ed" (personal communication).

According to the MEA, "Currently, more than 40 elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities and seminaries are part of MEA. Altogether, these

educational institutions serve more than 13,400 full-time students in their elementary, post secondary schools and within higher education” (“FAQS about Mennonite Education Agency,” 2008). Within higher education, the MEA reported 4,568 students were enrolled with Mennonite IHE in 2008 (“Mennonite education annual reports fall 2008,” 2008). The MEA annual report contains detailed records of the youth that identify with the church and makes the information public.

The MC USA is affiliated with all of the Mennonite IHE. Mulhauser (2001) stated that Bluffton University and Bethel College were previously affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church. The Mennonite Church governed the three remaining institutions: Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College, and Hesston College. After the merger, all of the Mennonite colleges reported data to the MEA. In addition, MC USA has the ability to appoint board members at each of the colleges. When a board member is appointed, it is likely that the member is somehow affiliated with MC USA though not mandatory. Overall MC USA collaborates with Mennonite IHE to provide a religious education to all students. “The colleges/universities of Mennonite Church USA believe a truly comprehensive liberal arts education requires students to engage in spiritual discernment, something public schools and nonreligious private schools by conviction or law do not provide” (“Why choose a Mennonite college/university?,” 2008).

Although the 2002 merger has allowed a separate arrangement with each of the five Mennonite colleges regarding the church involvement and oversight, the increased church control initially concerned some administrators at the Mennonite colleges (Mulhauser, 2001). The concern about the increased control was due to the fact that prior

to the merger Bluffton University and Bethel College functioned rather independently of the church and the church did not oversee the day-to-day operations of the two institutions. Regarding the increased church control since the merger, the former President of Bethel College, Douglas Penner, stated, “Our agreement is to consult in good faith about the major decisions that affect the direction of the institution, like the appointment of the president or a change in the bylaws” (Mulhauser, 2001, p. 1).

### **The Gideon Project**

Prior to the merger, the Mennonite Board of Education directed a research initiative for Mennonite higher education called the Gideon Project. Note that the Mennonite Board of Education fell under the Mennonite Church, which managed Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, Goshen College in Indiana, and Hesston College in Kansas. The Gideon Project explored attitudes between congregations, Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College, and Hesston College between 1995 and 1996. “Gideon is all about building church-related colleges and college-related churches” (Advocates, n.d., p. 16).

Ultimately, Gideon recognized that Mennonite higher education was struggling before the merger occurred. One Mennonite stated, “Gideon helped interested parties, both on the college side and the church side. It was how Mennonites were related to enrollment. There were a whole host of things going on; some factors that were changeable. Gideon was about highlighting things that could have been changed” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). The Gideon Project informed congregations of distinctive features of Mennonite IHE, dispelled myths about the cost of

private schools, and promoted the academic integrity of Mennonite higher education. The information was disseminated to congregations by the MEA and also through Congregational Student Advocates.

Congregational Student Advocates were a byproduct of the Gideon Project research, which identified a need to reach out proactively to youth in Mennonite congregations regarding the advantages of Mennonite higher education. The Congregational Student Advocate was identified as a voluntary congregational member who served to provide and disseminate information on Mennonite higher education to Mennonite youth. The role of advocate was to encourage Mennonite higher education without bias or preference to a specific institution. This role was created in efforts to funnel Mennonite youth to Mennonite higher education.

After the merger, the Gideon Project dissolved because it was under the direction of the Mennonite Board of Education. There was speculation that some members of the Church assumed Gideon would have been biased since it was an initiative prior to the merger. One Mennonite posited,

I think a few people from General Conference side said, ‘For this merger to work, we have to wipe the slate clean. We have to wipe out these projects that are going on here in a former time because it’s going to be better for us, as a new denomination, to think new. We have too many leftovers going on, in the larger scheme in the direction of the church. We hate to pull the plug, but in the big picture we had better line this up.’ No one ever said that this effort was not worthwhile or that the approach was wrong or that the efforts were not right.

Some thought that because of the merger that it needed to continue because it would help the two new groups. Overall, I think it was just a victim of circumstances (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

### **Growth of Christian Colleges**

Hertsgaard (2002) suggested the role of religion in America was not currently represented in mainstream life, but that its pervasive influence was at the heart of American attitudes. He stated, “A remarkable 94 percent of Americans believe in God” (p. 125) and then maintained 85 percent are Christians. Of the later percentage, half identify themselves as born-again Christians. In the USA, enrollment is thriving at evangelical Christian colleges.

Muntz and Crabtree (2006) posited that Christian colleges have distinct characteristics that separate them from their secular counterparts. “There is a shared commitment to the integration of faith, learning and living, with an intentional emphasis on development of the ‘whole person’” (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006, p. 18). Integrating faith with academics are key factors in a Christian education. Reisberg stated in regard to enrollment Christian colleges, “Enrollments have surged in the last decade, dramatically outpacing the average increase at secular institutions” (para. 6). Reisberg reported:

From 1990 to 1996 undergraduate enrollment increased by only 5 percent at private colleges and 4 percent at public colleges, compared with 24 percent increase at the 90 US evangelical institutions that are members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. (para. 7)

Christian IHE that identify as evangelical in nature are particularly prospering. In 2008, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) reported an association with “180 intentionally Christ-centered institutions around the world” (Badge, 2008, p. para. 8). The article touted that CCCU campuses had high rankings in the 2009 edition of the college rankings by US News and World Reports (Badge, 2008). US News rankings are based on numerous factors including peer evaluation, graduation and retention rates, faculty accomplishments, student selectivity financial resources, alumni giving and graduation rate performance. The CCCU President was quoted, “It is exciting and gratifying to see our institutions recognized for their outstanding educational opportunities” (Badge, 2008, para. 2). Although the Mennonite’s identify as Anabaptist-Christians, only three of the five Mennonite colleges are affiliated with the CCCU: Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Goshen College. Rather all five Mennonite IHE are associated with the MC USA and subsequently the MEA.

Even though the surge in enrollment in Christian colleges may be linked to academic excellence, it may also be connected to a conservative shift in societal value systems. After the 2008 Presidential elections, Krattenmaker (2009) suggested that Christians have “enjoyed such outsized influence over American culture and politics through most of the decade” (p. A11, para. 1). Tellefsen (2009) stated, “At Christian schools, students and staff must adhere to a code of conduct that falls in line with biblical teaching...and students wouldn't have it any other way” (para. 5).

When state colleges reported binge drinking as problematic, mainstream Christians started to view denominational institutions for higher education as safe havens that instilled morals and values in their students (Reisberg, 1999). The assumption is that

Christian students engage less in alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviors. Poulson et al. (1998) research found that there is a strong correlation to a student's religious views and their likelihood to binge drink. Authors stated, "College students who reported that participating in religious activity was not at all important to them had a significantly higher likelihood of binge drinking than students for whom religion was somewhat important in their lives" (p. 2). Poulson et al. found that for males there was little correlation between religion and their engagement in risky sexual behaviors. For females, "Women with stronger religious convictions tended to consume less alcohol and were less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior" (p. 5). The study was completed at a public university and authors suggested that the data was important because it could help educate religious college students about the consequences of risky behaviors.

In support of Poulson et al. (1998), research from Hopkins et al. (2004) reiterated that substance abuse at faith-based campuses is significantly lower than at secular IHE. Hopkins et al noted that although substance abuse is lower for Christian students, data from faith-based campuses indicated use of "just under 46 percent of the students for alcohol, 28.5 percent for tobacco, and just under 20 percent for marijuana" (p. 36). In regard to dealing with judicial aspects of substance using students, Hopkins et al. encouraged faith-based campuses to veer away from zero tolerance policies and supported Christian IHE adopting a comprehensive educational approach. Authors stated that it was the responsibility of a faith-based IHE to communicate expectations and positions to students because, "Relying solely on church position and tradition is not sufficient" (p. 37).

Reisberg (1999) claimed that Christian colleges were doing more to increase their recruitment efforts of Christian students. Muntz and Crabtree (2006) helped high school guidance counselors navigate the realm of Christian colleges so they could better assist faith seeking students. Muntz and Crabtree's research noted that nearly one quarter of surveyed freshman considered themselves "born-again Christians." This statistic indicated an increasing need to be aware of students' spirituality. In the United States, 900 institutions of higher education are identified as "'religiously-affiliated' based on their historical relationships or self descriptions" (p. 17). It was posited that Christian colleges had a more predominate conservative viewpoint on campus and that they took a holistic approach to education that focused on character development.

One study about the "evangelical Christian religious community on a university campus" (Bryant, 2006) revealed that one reason that evangelical students may be interested in Christian colleges is their support and construct of traditional gender roles. Bryant (2006) found that the Christian students, namely women, supported separate roles for men and women. There were distinct roles in leadership, modesty, and dating/marriage. The females of this study discussed the notion of equality but contradictorily desired the male to fulfill the spiritual and literal head of the household role. Bryant suggested that evangelical Christians may find themselves in the minority at a public school and may be able to better identify with students at a denominational college.

As CCCU colleges increase in popularity, it is important to ask if Mennonite colleges have congruent increases. It should be questioned how the 2002 merge impacted enrollment at the five Mennonite institutions.

## **Mennonite Youth and Higher Education**

Research conducted by Suzuki (1974) indicated that there were little differences between the self-concepts of Mennonite high school seniors and public school high school seniors. The study used a self-descriptive inventory to survey 25 high school seniors from a public school and 25 high school seniors from a Mennonite School. Significant items in the study noted that public school students were more socially oriented than their Mennonite peers; Mennonite students stressed religion more than their public school peers; and public school students had a desire to be well-rounded and “All American” whereas their Mennonite peers did not conform to mainstream society (Suzuki). Regarding educational goals, it was often assumed that Mennonites prefer professional occupations. Suzuki’s research indicated that 84 percent of Mennonite adolescents planned to attend college after graduation. “Thus, one can infer that the Mennonite adolescents do have as much ambition towards obtaining a higher education as do the public school adolescence” (Suzuki, p. 14). Interestingly, it was noted in the study that the majority of Mennonites planned to attend a private Mennonite college despite the fact that many had attended public high schools.

As Mennonite youth are increasingly interested in institutions of higher education, Keim (2002) suggested that Mennonite higher education needed to question the essentially Mennonite aspects of Mennonite colleges and universities, to what extent can the Mennonite church and IHE function in conformity with our ethic of community, and how do they define their mission in today’s changing society. Keim summarized that thinking about the future of the higher education was the greatest challenge within the Anabaptist-Mennonite community.

Schrag (2009) stated that the Mennonite Church (MC) USA Executive board members believe they must “change or die”. Since 2003, membership within MC USA has declined and the church has recognized it needs to make radical changes to attract youth. It was stated,

To be a strong church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the denomination needs to do a better job of proving its relevance to young adults, of using the gifts of racial/ethnic (non-white) members, of focusing its energy on the disciple-making mission Christ gave his followers, and of building an Anabaptist/Mennonite identity distinct from the surrounding culture. (p. 1)

Schrag’s article reinforced research from other authors that the Mennonite community struggles with higher education, but Schrag indicated that the community struggles as a whole.

### **Mennonite Youth’s Growing Interest in Higher Education**

The Mennonite community recognizes that Mennonite youth are increasingly interested in continuing education and being active participants in a global economy. In April 2008, popular news network CNN did an expose about first time voters. CNN correspondent Rick Sanchez traveled to five colleges to interview enthusiastic, first time voters about their thoughts on the 2008 presidential campaigns and candidates (Thomas, 2008). Thomas reported that one of the colleges, Goshen College in Goshen, IN was founded on Anabaptist-Mennonite principles. Goshen’s Mennonite students answered questions about what it means to be Mennonite, their views on the Iraq war, immigration issues and social issues such as abortion and homosexuality. According to Thomas, the

students prioritized being a “global citizen”; and the group was predominately left-leaning liberal with six of the eleven students supporting a Democratic Party candidate.

The following month, the *Chicago Tribune* published a similar piece about young, Mennonite voters at Goshen College (Thomas, 2008). Anabaptists historically are non-voters because they believe in a strict separation between church and state and identify as pacifists, which relates to military service and issues surrounding war. The author posited students at Goshen College were outspoken about politics unlike previous generations of Mennonites and revealed many new generation Mennonite students had a new political fervor that some, tongue-in-cheek, are calling “Mennonite mania” (Leroux, 2008a). According to Goshen College President James Brenneman, the change is because of the latitude allowed by the church; “Students feel free to express themselves emotionally today, and there’s emotional involvement in this election” (Leroux, 2008a).

### **Summary**

Literature indicated that higher education and the Mennonite community have a contentious history, but that the Mennonite community is making great strides in emphasizing Mennonite education. There are many challenges within the Mennonite community including finding a way to engage youth in the Mennonite identity and culture. Currently the “elders” of the Mennonite community are optimistic about the contributions that young people and racial minorities are making within the church (Schrag, 2009) . According to Schrag, “These groups hold tremendous potential for revitalizing MC USA if older members of European descent are willing to accept the departures from tradition that come with cultural and generational differences” (para. 8).

To have a better understanding about the possible direction of the Mennonite faith, more research is needed regarding the enrollment in Mennonite IHE.

## Chapter 3: Methods and Design

### **Methods**

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), “A research methodology is a broad approach to scientific inquiry specifying how research questions should be asked and answered” (p. 21). The research methodology used by this researcher is a mixed method with a parallel design. By definition, mixed methods is defined as a type of research that uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches “in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, and/or inferences” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, p. 7). As the term implies, parallel design can occur when both the qualitative and quantitative strands of the study can transpire either simultaneously or with some time lapse (Teddlie & Tashakkori). A parallel mixed design method was appropriate for the anticipated timeline of the study and this researcher had understanding of the process of a mixed methods study on thesis completion.

### **Paradigm**

A pragmatic paradigm that consists of both quantitative and qualitative data was used for this study. Note that when using a pragmatic paradigm, “Pragmatists decide what they want to study based on what is important within their personal value system” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For this study, this researcher used a pragmatic paradigm

because there was a need to support the statistical data analysis with qualitative data provided by interviewing enrollment administrators at Mennonite IHE.

This researcher selected mixed methods research with a pragmatic paradigm to strengthen the validity of the data and provide the researcher with dual perspectives. Creswell (2007) posited that individuals using a pragmatic approach “will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ both quantitative and qualitative sources of data collection, while focus on the practical implications of the research...” (p. 23). For this research a quantitative analysis was used to determine the outcome of research questions, whereas the qualitative interviews effectively provided a rich understanding of the research questions. This researcher’s pragmatic paradigm embraced “superordinate ideas gleaned through consideration of perspectives from both sides of the paradigms debate in interaction with the research question and real-world circumstances” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 73).

### **Setting and Environment**

The setting for this study was the five undergraduate, four year liberal arts’ Mennonite IHE in the United States. The schools are as follows: Bethel College located in Kansas, Bluffton University located in Ohio, Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) located in Virginia, Goshen College located in Indiana, and Hesston College located in Kansas.

Four of the Mennonite IHE are located in the mid-west region of the United States. One of the Mennonite IHE is located in the southern region. These colleges are

unique as they all identify as private, liberal arts institutions. Due to their Mennonite affiliation, they are considered Christian colleges and universities, which include a biblical-centered curriculum. Students are also expected to adhere to Christian centered behavioral codes of conduct at their institutions. In addition, all of Mennonite IHE are small in size with fewer than 1,600 students.

### **Population**

The Mennonite IHE are intertwined with the Mennonite faith. The Mennonite denomination is part of the Christian Anabaptist religious sect, meaning that Mennonites commit to Jesus Christ during adolescence and then choose to undergo an adult baptism. There are more than 280,000 Mennonites in the United States (Mulhauser, 2001). In 44 states, 109,000 Mennonites are affiliated with MC USA ("About Mennonite Church USA," 2008). However, MC USA is struggling to attract and keep youth engaged in the denomination because many Mennonites are still loyal to religious tradition and seek guidance from the church regarding decision making (Schrag, 2009).

College is traditionally an environment that is a haven for youth and progressive ideas. Given the dichotomy between an open college environment and the Mennonites emphasis on simple living, Mennonite IHE were selected for this study because of their unique beliefs and connection to the Mennonite Church (MC) USA. One distinctive characteristic of the Mennonite community is that, "American Anabaptists of one persuasion or another have chosen to resist almost every major intellectual and cultural trend of the dominant society" (Pederson, 2002, p. 341). Mennonite IHE are unusual in regards to the fact that the governing board of MC USA assists in the selection and

appointment of the board of trustees at each of the five institutions, though the process is different for each respective school.

### **Sampling Methods**

This researcher made use of snowball or chain sampling techniques to complete the qualitative portion of this study. “Snowball sampling is a well-known purposive sampling technique that involves using informants or participants to identify additional cases who may be included in the study” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 175). It was used for the qualitative data in this mixed methods design. Interview participants were identified through snowball sampling with a key participant. This key participant in the research was the Vice President for Enrollment at one of the Mennonite IHE. A key participant indicated a willingness to provide this researcher with names and contact information for individuals within the enrollment division at each of the Mennonite IHE who may be willing to participate in this study.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Mixed method designs require multiple strategies of data collection. The quantitative data was collected using unobtrusive or nonreactive measures. As noted by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), “These research techniques (unobtrusive measures) allow investigators to examine aspects of a social phenomenon without interfering with or changing that phenomenon” (p. 224). Typically artifacts, public records, or photographs are identified with unobtrusive data collections. Enrollment for the Mennonite IHE is public information and provided by the Mennonite Education Agency, making

unobtrusive data collection the most effective systematic approach to employ for this study.

The analysis procedures included obtaining quantitative data from the MEA annual reports and comparing enrollment data from 2003 with 2008. The target population in this study consisted of undergraduate students who were enrolled in Mennonite IHE during the 2003 and 2008 timeframe. The quantitative data set was pre-existing and was provided by the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA). The data was obtained from the 2008 Mennonite Education Annual Report. The data utilized was from 2003 and 2008. This researcher analyzed 2003 and 2008 data provided by the MEA to determine if there was an increase in enrollment during the identified time frame. This researcher also analyzed the data to determine if changes occurred regarding gender enrollment, minority enrollment, and the religious affiliation of enrollees at Mennonite IHE. The data did not predict enrollment, therefore there is no independent variable.

Descriptive statistics were employed to answer the research questions. “Descriptive statistics involves techniques for describing data in abbreviated, symbolic fashion,” according to Sprinthall (1997). This researcher reported the percentage of change between 2003 and 2008 enrollment at each individual Mennonite IHE. This method was selected because it was best suited for dependant data sets and indicated changes. Teddlie and Tashakkori stated, “Descriptive statistical analysis is the analysis of numeric data for the purpose of obtaining summary indicators that can efficiently describe a group and the relationships among the variables within that group” (2009, p. 24). In chapter four, this researcher separated each research question and for each

research question included results of the quantitative data and a table of the descriptive statistics when applicable.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

“Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative researchers ‘typically focus in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected *purposefully*’” (Kuzel, 1999, p. 33). The qualitative data sample included interview information from enrollment officers at each of the five aforementioned Mennonite IHE. While the data group was small, it is sufficient under Crabtree and Miller’s (1999) conclusion that, “experience has shown that five to eight data sources or sampling units will often suffice for a homogeneous sample” (p. 42).

The qualitative data was collected through standardized open-ended interviews with the enrollment management officers identified through snowball sampling. Prior to the interviews, participants were required to sign consent forms and had the opportunity to view the forms in a private location. The wording and sequence of the interviews was determined in advance and standardized. A script was used on the phone by this researcher to introduce the study. The interview consisted of eight open ended qualitative questions designed by this researcher (see Appendix, Interview Questions for Qualitative Research). Occasionally interview questions were omitted based on the responses from those interviewed. This only occurred when the question was answered during previous question(s). The interviews were conducted via the telephone in a quiet place and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews occurred during the fall of

2009 and were transcribed within six weeks from the date of the interviews. This researcher analyzed the qualitative data using open coding method.

To ensure anonymity, participants in the qualitative interviews received pseudonyms. Identifiers of the Mennonite IHE were not utilized in data collection or analysis to avoid any inadvertent recognition of participants. The methods utilized were consistent with a parallel mixed methods design, as both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized by this researcher. Research between methods occurred simultaneously and both the methods and timelines were selected based on their ability to best address and answer the research questions identified by the researcher.

### **Positioning, Biases, and Ethical Issues**

According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). As a researcher, it is important to disclose personal biases because it reveals the researcher’s personal reality. Researcher’s biases have the potential to impact a study in the sense that they could determine the worldview of the researcher.

This researcher identifies as a spiritual individual and honors the fact that genealogically she is two generations removed from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. However, this researcher does not identify as Mennonite or with any organized religion, which further contributes to the pragmatic paradigm. To some, this may or may not be considered a bias.

For participants, there were no ethical issues involved with the interviews as all questions were related to professional expertise rather than personal opinion. The benefits to the study are intrinsic and could have a profound effect on the Mennonite community in that the information ascertained could aid in recruitment and retention within Mennonite IHE. Very little research has been conducted on the Mennonite educational community and the limited research available has been conducted through Mennonite affiliated individuals or organizations.

### **Pragmatic Paradigm**

Due to the fact that this researcher is not affiliated with the Mennonite faith, this research was conducted from an observer stance, rather than an insider perspective. Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) stated, “Pragmatists believe that values play a large role in conducting research and in drawing conclusions from their studies, but they see no reason to be particularly concerned about it” (p. 90). This researcher’s paradigm contributes to the impartial relationship between this researcher and the setting, population, and participants in this study.

### **Validity**

Validity is the degree to which the researcher works to ensure that the data is correct and that the researcher’s interpretations of the data are accurate and appropriate. It is about making certain that the researcher’s inferences are in context (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). To ensure validity, member checking was implemented in this study. Member checking refers to the process of “recycling interpretation back to key informants” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 81). Prior to coding the transcriptions, hard

copies of the transcriptions were electronically mailed to the interview participants. This ensured that the transcription data was correct. To ensure that this researcher's interpretations were accurate, the participants had the opportunity to review this researcher's conclusions prior to the study's final draft. Participants were able to make clarifications or supplement the data after the interviews were completed.

Peer review was also utilized by this researcher. A 2009 graduate of the Ohio State University Social Work graduate program checked the qualitative data and open coding themes to confirm credibility. This researcher was confident that the individual selected for the peer review is an individual who "keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetic listening to the researcher's feelings" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) A peer review of the overall study also occurred during the quarter of the study defense. Member checking and peer review were selected for implementation in this mixed method design. Creswell (2007) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) posited that prolonged engagement, triangulation, and negative case analysis were generally restricted to pure qualitative research methods.

### **Coding Analysis**

After the data were collected through unobtrusive measures and standardized open-ended interviews, the qualitative data were analyzed utilizing open coding to determine themes within the data. This researcher operated under the open coding process as defined by Strauss and Corbin. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), "During open code the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined,

compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (p. 62). The themes identified through open coding were determined by this researcher. As suggested by Creswell (2007), there were fewer than 10 major themes identified by this researcher. Within the coding process, this researcher operated with the understanding that, “The intent in qualitative research is not to generalize information...but to elucidate the particular, the specific” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126).

### **Summary**

In summary, this researcher utilized a mixed methods design under a pragmatic paradigm. The quantitative data was pre-existing and collected from the MEA; the qualitative data were collected through structured interviews with enrollment employees at Mennonite IHE. Interview participants were identified by a key participant who provided names and contact information. After the interviews were conducted, this researcher identified the themes through open coding. Member checking and peer review were employed to ensure the validity of this study.

## Chapter 4: Results

Chapter Four includes the results of this mixed-methods study and reviews each research question. The research question is followed by both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative data was collected for three out of the five research questions; a table coincides with the quantitative data provided in the research question when appropriate. The tables include enrollment data from 2003, enrollment data from 2008, and the percentage of change of enrollment between 2003 and 2008. The tables also contain a standard deviation (SD). All data is specific to undergraduate students. Note that the data utilized was public information. The data was not collected by this researcher; rather it was self reported by each institution to the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) and subsequently Mennonite Church (MC) USA. Following the introduction and data analysis of research questions one through five, a summary of the data is provided.

Chapter Four discusses “enrollment” and the term can have numerous definitions. For this study, the MEA defined an enrolled student as a full time undergraduate student at the identified institution. A full time undergraduate was classified as a student with a full time academic course load, as defined by the institution. Enrollment did not encompass students enrolled in a part time academic load or students enrolled in exclusive online programs.

As discussed in Chapter Three, interviewees were guaranteed complete anonymity for this study. All interviews were conducted during October and November 2009. It was important for the validity of this study that no risk was involved for interviewees who choose to participate in this study. With this, intentional efforts were made by this researcher to omit institutional identifiers in quotes and to present qualitative data as indiscriminately as possible. All qualitative data was collected through phone interviews, hence it was obtained through personal communication.

Due to the size and closeness of the Mennonite educational community, this researcher did not reference the date that the personal communication occurred for the in text citations. Including the date in the in text citations could potentially risk revealing the interviewees anonymity. This research would not have been possible without willing participation of the interviewees.

The results of this study for each of the five research questions examined are presented in the following pages.

**Research Question One:** What impact did the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA have on gender enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The MEA reported the gender breakdown for 2008, but did not present data from years prior ("Mennonite education annual reports fall 2008," 2008). Therefore, this researcher was unable to obtain the 2003 data necessary to breakdown enrollment by

gender. Attempts were made by this researcher to gather the 2003 data through institutional contacts, however it was not possible to obtain quantitative data from each institution. Due to the fact that this study examined the Mennonite IHE as a collective group of institutions, rather than individual entities, it was not prudent to analyze an incomplete data set. It was not possible for this researcher to conduct a quantitative data analysis for this research question.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The common theme for this research question was obvious during qualitative data analysis; specific strategies were not being employed to increase enrollment according to gender at Mennonite IHE. Data revealed no enrollment or recruiting strategies were being employed to increase enrollment for female or male students. The majority of interviewees reported that a female dominated student population was the “campus norm” at their institution. Examples of statements that illustrate these findings follow:

Our population there is not hurting. It really hasn't been a focus of ours at this point. It seems like we have a pretty good balance here. A lot of schools are a little more top heavy gals instead of guys going to college. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

My first-year class coming in this year was heavily female. And we haven't had that in the past. In the past, we've been fairly split. 55% female; 45% male. This year we're leaning more towards, I think, 63% female. So, right now we are not

employing any strategies to increase female students. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

One interviewee indicated that specific student activities were being implemented and presumed that they would attract women. It was stated, "...we are looking at starting softball, dance, and cheering and that would primarily attract women. Softball, obviously that would be women. You could have men for dance and cheer, but that would probably be thought of as more female..." (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). None of the interviewees discussed male recruitment strategies.

**Research Question Two:** What impact did the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA have on religious affiliation of enrollees at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Data indicated there was a decrease in Mennonite student enrollment after the merger. As shown in Table 2, four out of the five Mennonite IHE experienced a decrease in Mennonite undergraduate student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. Bethel College, Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Hesston College all experienced a decrease in Mennonite undergraduate student enrollment. The average number of Mennonite undergraduate student decrease at the four Mennonite IHE between 2003 and 2008 was 24.75. The standard deviation of Mennonite undergraduate student enrollment was 11.32 for the four institutions that declined in Mennonite enrollment.

Table 2 also shows the percentage of change at all five of the Mennonite IHE. The percentage of change at the four institutions with decreased Mennonite enrollment ranged from 6.15% decrease at Bethel College to a 16.27% decrease at Bluffton University. Goshen College was the only Mennonite IHE that experienced an increase in Mennonite undergraduate student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. Mennonite undergraduate students at Goshen College increased by 29.64% between 2003 and 2008.

Table 2

*Undergraduate Mennonite Enrollment by Institution*

<u>Mennonite IHE</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>Percentage of Change</u>
Bethel College	195	183	-6.15%
Bluffton University 16.27%	166	139	-
Eastern Mennonite University	495	456	-7.88%
Goshen College 29.69%	388	503	
Hesston College	244	223	-8.60%

*Note.* \*SD=11.32

\*This is the standard deviation of the Mennonite IHE that had a decrease in enrollment.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative interviews mirrored the quantitative data. Both data indicated that attracting Mennonite youth to Mennonite IHE has been a challenge since 2002, though it cannot be said that the decline in Mennonite student enrollment was a direct result of the 2002 merger. This research question encompassed several components and could not

properly be addressed without recognizing the larger problem, the lack of Mennonite youth for IHE to attract. Each of the interviewees acknowledged that there was a decline in Mennonite youth attending Mennonite IHE and that this factor was an enormous enrollment challenge. Whether the question was addressed with humor, factual information, or by associating the question to concerns about Mennonite leadership, the topic of declining Mennonite youth was addressed in one way or another. Interviewees discussed this issue in depth and explained:

As the denomination shrinks, it hurts the high school population that we're considering recruiting for traditional studies (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

If graduating Mennonite high school graduates went to, even half of them, went to Mennonite colleges, we would all be bursting at the seams. Wouldn't that be a nice problem? (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

We are feeling like we're losing ground with Mennonite students, as a group. The Mennonite population is small to begin with and the number of high school graduates is relatively small, well, that are Mennonites. Then the percentage of them that choose to go on to Mennonite higher education appears to be declining. So, the trend is that we are struggling and working harder and harder to attract a shrinking pool of Mennonite students to our institutions. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

One change at our institution is that we have had a decline in the number of Mennonite students between 2003 in 2008, in raw number and percentage.

(personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

If we have a declining number of Mennonite students using Mennonite higher education, for whatever reason, we believe that long-term it will lead to a smaller number of people available for leadership positions within the denomination.

From a purely practical standpoint, we need to work together to increase the number of Mennonite student choosing one of our fine institutions. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

I see a trend that is one of diminishing Mennonite students, as I said before. One, because there are less students to recruit and, two, because families coming through the Mennonite churches may not be ‘ethnic’ and they look at view higher education differently than someone who may be Mennonite from ethnic or for a number of generations. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

The traditional Mennonite Church is shrinking and that means there’s not the number of Mennonite youth to run high schools. Everything I am seeing in that transition is that, families coming up through the church are not as staunch, maybe, as choosing a Mennonite higher education option. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

In addition to emphasizing the decline in Mennonite youth, interviewees compared their Mennonite student enrollment with Mennonite student enrollment at their sister colleges. Comparing Mennonite enrollment with sister Mennonite IHE served as a way to internally benchmark their institutional enrollment progress or status. In this process, it was customary for Goshen College to serve as the exemplar or the ideal for Mennonite student enrollment. Interviewees often benchmarked their own institutional Mennonite enrollment with Goshen College. An example of this benchmarking follows:

There is a broad range of what it means to be a Mennonite institution, across the board, with Bluffton having maybe 20% Mennonite and Eastern Mennonite and Goshen having closer to 50 or 60% (Mennonite student enrollment). So, I think that it has a different culture on campus. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

It is not surprising that Goshen was considered the exemplar because, based on the quantitative data, Goshen College was the only institution that had a significant increase in Mennonite student enrollment. It was also noted by several interviewees that Goshen had an advantage with Mennonite students because geographically it is in close proximity to densely populated Mennonite communities. One interviewee attributed Goshen's high number of Mennonite student enrollment to its location and simply stated, "Goshen was founded because geographically, it's in the middle of a fairly large Mennonite population" (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

Whereas Goshen had an increase in enrollment, an underlying theme to this question was an element of competition between the Mennonite IHE and other national

institutions, both private and public institutions. Overall, it was acknowledged that Mennonite IHE vied for students. Interviewees explained:

I see the colleges competing with each other some, but really more competing with other state and public universities, as well as other private Christian colleges, and denominations other than Mennonite. I think that is a challenge. That's something that, I think, that is an issue that's larger than just the colleges. But, the Church is going to have to figure out what the colleges are for. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

What we need to understand is that we work together and that we are trying to further and benefit the Mennonite Church, but also some of the schools compete against one another. For instance, we overlap with applications. There are students who are looking at all of our schools... (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

The final theme to emerge for this research question was that institutional Mennonite student recruitment strategies were independent of the collective group. Interviewees described enrollment strategies to recruit and attract Mennonite students to their individual institutions. The qualitative data indicated Mennonite IHE did not collaborate as a whole on strategies to attract Mennonite youth to Mennonite IHE, rather each institution felt that it was important to market its unique identity and engaged in separate enrollment strategies. Strategies included increasing alumni involvement for recruiting, extending campus invitations to Mennonite youth groups, collaborating with

an outside image consultant, Mennonite student grants, and an increased presence at the national denominational convention.

Again, Goshen College was seen as the exemplar in terms of Mennonite student population because of its increase in Mennonite student enrollment. However interviewees did not indicate that their Mennonite IHE planned to replicate strategies employed by Goshen to increase enrollment. Although the notion of working together, collaboration, and cross-institutional knowledge was emphasized by interviewees, no themes emerged regarding shared or common enrollment strategies for any of the student populations.

**Research Question Three:** What impact did the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA have on enrollment for students of color at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

All of the Mennonite IHE experienced an increase in undergraduate racial/minority student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. This data is shown in Table 3. The average number of students who identified as a person of color was 26.6 at each institution between 2003 and 2008. The standard deviation of undergraduate students of color was 24.31 at Mennonite IHE.

As shown in Table 3, the percentage of change for racial/ethnic enrollment between 2003 and 2008 ranged from an increase of 1.54% to 266.67%. Bethel College

experienced the least change with an increase of 1.54%; Hesston College experienced the most significant growth with a reported increase of 266.67%.

Table 3

*Undergraduate Racial/Ethnic Enrollment by Institution*

<u>Mennonite IHE</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>Percentage of Change</u>
Bethel College	65	66	1.54%
Bluffton University	56	58	3.57%
Eastern Mennonite University	72	127	73.39%
Goshen College	67	110	197.30%
Hesston College	12	44	266.67%

*Note.* SD= 24.31

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

For this research question, the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) used the term “racial/ ethnic” enrollment. It was presumed by this researcher that the term identified by the MEA included students of a non-Caucasian ethnicity. Some interviewees clarified that racial/ethnic minorities included Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans; others utilized the term “American minority”. This researcher utilized the term students of color and “racial/ethnic” minorities interchangeably. Qualitative data analysis revealed racial/ethnic minorities did not include the international students attending Mennonite IHE.

The common qualitative data analysis theme for increasing enrollment for students of color was an improved financial aid package. Mennonite IHE are private institutions; data indicated that the cost of tuition at Mennonite IHE was significantly higher than their public institution counterparts. Interviewees stressed they struggle to attract diverse populations because of the expensive private institution price tag. Regarding initiatives to attract students of color, one interviewee stated, “We do scholarships. We have a grant for minority students, actually, not really a grant. It is need-based and if they show need, then their overall financial aid package is slightly higher” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). Another interviewee concurred:

(In regards to targeting enrollment demographics) Another was American minority students and trying to treat them a little bit differently in the aid process to try to attract more students. And this year we had some success with that... I would say on the recruitment side, we primarily focused on the area of financial aid on increasing the number of minority students. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

Through interviews, it was clear to this researcher that all of Mennonite IHE actively sought out federal grants and increased financial aid packages for students of color. Whereas each institution increased their students of color, each Mennonite IHE incorporated an individualized institutional strategy to accomplish enrollment goals for students of color. A collective financial aid or financial grant tactic was not implemented by all Mennonite IHE.

Hesston College experienced the largest percentage of change in enrollment for students of color. Hesston College is the only two-year Mennonite IHE, while all others identify as four-year institutions. The qualitative data indicated that Hesston was not engaged in any recruitment efforts that differed from its Mennonite IHE counterparts. Other than an increased financial aid package, it is important to note that Hesston College was not engaged in an active recruiting strategy for students of color; Hesston College did not have specific admission strategies or marketing strategies to enroll students of color. Although Hesston College recruits nationally, in recent years the institution focused its recruiting efforts at a state and regional level with the belief that college students were willing to stay closer to home.

**Research Question Four:** What impact did the 2002 merger and formation of the Mennonite Church USA have on overall enrollment at Mennonite undergraduate institutions in the United States?

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

As shown in Table 4, Bethel College and Goshen College experienced growth in enrollment between 2003 and 2008. Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Hesston College experienced a decline in enrollment during 2003 and 2008. Regarding overall enrollment, Bethel College and Goshen College had an average increase of 38 students annually. Their standard deviation was 11.31. The Mennonite IHE that experienced a reduction in enrollment between 2003 and 2008 had a mean of 29.33, with a standard deviation of 15.82.

The percentage of change at these institutions varied, but deviated no more than 7% positively or negatively. Bethel College and Goshen College had an increase in their percentage of change. Bethel College had the most significant percentage of change with an enrollment increase of 6.38%. Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Hesston College all had a decreased percentage of change. Data from Bluffton University showed the institution had a decrease of 4.53% in undergraduate enrollment between 2003 and 2008. The data for overall enrollment is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Undergraduate Enrollment by Institution*

<u>Mennonite IHE</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>Percentage of Change</u>
Bethel College	470	500	6.38%
Bluffton University	949	906	-4.53%
Eastern Mennonite University	917	884	-3.60%
Goshen College	840	886	5.48%
Hesston College	437	425	-2.76%

*Note.* \*SD=15.82

\*This is the standard deviation of the Mennonite IHE that had a decrease in enrollment.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Three of the five Mennonite IHE experienced a decrease in total undergraduate enrollment between 2003 and 2008: Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Hesston College. The two Mennonite IHE that experienced growth, Bethel College and Goshen College, had less than 7% enrollment growth. Data indicated that the

collective group simply strives to maintain student enrollment to operate effectively. Enrollment initiatives aside, the bottom line is that Mennonite IHE struggle to attract undergraduate students, whether they are Mennonite or other than Mennonite. Data revealed that shifts in the Mennonite community, tuition costs, and competition with other intuitions of higher education were factors that negatively impacted Mennonite IHE enrollment. When asked about the enrollment challenges facing Mennonite IHE, interviewees responded:

We continue to struggle, especially since the merger happened. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

Besides shrinking high school population, it's also the rising tuition costs. Students in the area totally not writing off private schools and giving them a chance to see what aid may be available to them. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

Our concern more broadly is just being able to attract the number of students that we need in order to operate our program (institution). I would say overall numbers would be the biggest challenge, but that the biggest subgroup challenge would be the Mennonite students. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

Mennonite Church USA is going through lots of different identity changes. I'm not sure what the future holds and that filters down to the schools. ...The schools need to find another primary and secondary market for student populations

because the Church is not as solid as it once was. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

We are competing for students. We need to be able to understand the other institutions that students might be interested in. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

Interviewees expressed that Mennonite IHE were constantly working to attract students by improving or increasing campus activities, academic programs, and/or programs for athletes.

**Research Question Five:** Which enrollment population experienced the most change after the 2002 merger and formation of the MC USA?

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

After reviewing the data, it was clear that students of color or racial/ethnic students were the population that experienced the most growth. Each Mennonite institution experienced an increase in this area of student enrollment (see Table 3). It was the only student demographic that experienced positive growth across the board.

Not only did each institution experience an increase of racial/ethnic enrollment, but Goshen College and Hesston College encountered exponential growth in students of color between 2003 and 2008. Goshen College increased enrollment with students of color by 197.30%; Hesston College increased enrollment with students of color by

266.67%. Bethel College experienced the least amount of growth with an increase of 1.54% in students of color.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data supports the quantitative data that institutional efforts were made to increase enrollment of students of color. Strategies were detailed in interviews and data showed each institution offered students of color a competitive financial aid packet. One interviewee stated, “Our first year class was 14% American minority. And so, I would say on the recruitment side, we primarily focused on the area of financial aid on increasing the number of minority students” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). Another interviewee posited, “Statistics show that the population of high school students, that the minority population is increasing and the students are also more needy financially or will have a higher need level. ...We are seeing a change in demographics.” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

Interviewees were cognizant of the fact that attracting underrepresented groups to Mennonite IHE was beneficial to enrollment because it added to the campus climate. Financial resources for students of color was credited as the biggest factor in the enrollment strategy for students of color.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, analysis of the data provided several findings related to the research questions. The data from 2003 and 2008 indicated that there was no general trend to changes in enrollment before or after the merger. Undergraduate Mennonite

student enrollment decreased at all of the Mennonite IHE, with the exception of Goshen College (see Table 2). Qualitative data garnered explicitly indicated that decline of Mennonite youth was a concern in regard to attracting undergraduate Mennonite students to Mennonite IHE. Overall, quantitative and qualitative data indicated the decline of denominational loyalty presented enrollment challenges for Mennonite IHE.

The majority of Mennonite IHE experienced a decline in overall undergraduate enrollment between 2003 and 2008; Bluffton University, Eastern Mennonite University, and Hesston College all experienced a decrease of undergraduate student enrollment (see Table 4). Qualitative data revealed that the cost of tuition at Mennonite IHE and competition with other institutions of higher education affected enrollment.

Data revealed that students of color or racial/ethnic students were the only student population between 2003 and 2008 that experienced an increase in enrollment at all Mennonite IHE (see Table 3). Furthermore, qualitative data indicated that Mennonite IHE had strategically improved financial packages for students of color to increase enrollment for that targeted demographic. It was implied that Mennonite IHE made efforts in recent years to market and recruit to a wider high school population to obtain enrollment goals. It was stated, “We recruit from the little Mennonite communities around the country, but for general enrollment, you recruit 50 to 100 miles to the people who know the most about your school already. We are doing more with population bases” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). This shift in strategy combined with efforts to increase financial aid options may be linked with the increase of enrollment for students of color.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Reflection

This chapter begins with a summary of the data analysis and then proceeds to a discussion of the results. Implications for student affairs, practice, and research are included in this chapter. As encouraged for any thorough assessment, a personal reflection is also provided by this researcher.

### **Summary of Results**

The original intent of this study was to explore changes in enrollment at the five Mennonite IHE after the merger. To recap the results of this study, quantitative data from the MEA indicated there was an overall decline in undergraduate enrollment between 2003 and 2008. Three out of the five schools experienced a decrease in enrollment post the 2002 merger of MC USA. Interviewees attributed the enrollment challenges to an acculturation of the Mennonite community, competition between other IHE, and the cost of tuition at a private institution. Gender, race, and Mennonite religious affiliation were explored in relation to enrollment at Mennonite IHE.

In regard to identified demographics, no specific strategies existed to enroll female students. It was a population that Mennonite IHE were comfortable sustaining. Qualitative data indicated that enrollment at the institution was somewhat evenly divided by gender.

The only demographic population that increased at each Mennonite IHE were students of color. Hesston College experienced the most growth of students of color on campus with a 266.67% increase between 2003 and 2008. Mennonite IHE worked to obtain grants or financial initiatives to offer students of color to increase the attractiveness of financial aid packages.

Data indicated that Mennonite IHE, with the exception of Goshen College, were not successful in increasing Mennonite undergraduate students between 2003 and 2008. In regard to Mennonite student enrollment, Goshen College was the only Mennonite IHE with an increase of Mennonite student enrollment between 2003 and 2008. All other Mennonite IHE experienced a decrease in Mennonite student enrollment after the 2002 merger. Attracting Mennonites youth to Mennonite IHE is the biggest struggle and enrollment professionals acknowledge the Mennonite community is acculturating. The acculturation of the community impacts Mennonite youth's decision to attend college, in that there are more options for higher education. Additionally, the college selection process is becoming increasingly competitive.

The primary theme that emerged from the quantitative data was a concern in the overall decline in denominational loyalty and the lack of Mennonite youth to recruit to Mennonite IHE. One interviewee stated, "The percent of Mennonite students is declining slightly. I would say that it's probably the one thing that receives the most communication and discussion here at this school, in terms of the type of students" (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). The lack of Mennonite

students to enroll in Mennonite IHE was clearly a concern and on the agenda of enrollment administrators at all Mennonite IHE.

In connection with the primary theme, the notion of growth was an underlying theme in the research and the understanding that Mennonite IHE needed to expand beyond the Mennonite scope was addressed by every interviewee, sometimes subtly, but usually explicitly. It was acknowledged that Mennonite youth is a decreasing demographic. This in turn, created a new element of competition with sister Mennonite IHE and other IHE to obtain Mennonite students.

### **Discussion of Results**

A wise woman once told me that the secret to good research is to uncover what is not being said by others. In this discussion of results, it is this researcher's goal to address the results that were hidden beneath the surface. Even though the original purpose of the study was to explore enrollment at Mennonite IHE after the 2002 merger, this research garnered an array of information that related to Mennonite higher education.

As very little secular research has been conducted on Mennonite IHE, this was not a research topic that lent itself to an abundance of raw data and resources. Rather, a significant amount of data collected by this researcher was contingent on what was not spoken, but implied. However, due to the uniqueness of the research questions and topic, strong arguments can be made to support the inclusion of results that impact Mennonite higher education and, in turn, Mennonite enrollment.

## **Mennonite Community**

What is a Mennonite? Are they the ones with the long beards? Is there campus parking for horse and buggies? This researcher recently overheard Mennonites referred to as “religious zealots”, meaning that Mennonites were fanatical about the faith, working to convert non-believers to the religion. Needless to say, the Mennonite faith is not well understood by the average person. It is hard to imagine what stereotypes the typical high school student possesses in regard to Mennonites. Mennonites’ message about faith, belief systems, and identity is likely difficult to convey on a campus brochure when the average high school student equates Mennonites with a conservative sect. The uncertainty and unfamiliarity of the Mennonite faith is likely a challenge with recruiting or enrolling of non-Mennonite students.

This researcher has learned that Mennonites, as a community, embody a vast spectrum of thought regarding what it means to be Mennonite. Whereas there are Mennonite members who subscribe to plain living, like those in the Old Order sects, the majority of Mennonites are progressive. Whereas there are Old Order members who live lives without the advances of technology, there are Mennonites who work as institutional administrators who embrace modern day living by actively utilizing vehicles, computers, and technology. It is important to understand that Mennonites, themselves, do not always operate under the same set of principles and beliefs. Like many religions, Christianity for example, there is a vast spectrum of what it means to practice a faith.

## **Mennonite History and Acculturation**

I would be negligent not to address two key factors within the Mennonite community that impact Mennonite IHE: history and acculturation. History and acculturation are twofold, in regard to this research. It would have been impossible to include all of the historical nuances that were related to this research because Mennonite history is vast; it is also, rightfully so, incredibly valued and stressed within the Mennonite community. Because the sample size was small, only five institutions, it was imperative that this researcher had an understanding of the history of, not just Mennonite IHE, but of the Mennonite peoples.

Most importantly, this researcher acknowledged that being Mennonite is not just a faith, it is a culture; a way of life. It embodies dress, art, occupation, language, music, food, and family rituals, in addition to religious tenants. Identifying as Mennonite is so much more than religious tenants. As a group of peoples that have struggled for centuries in the United States, Mennonites identify as a minority population and it is impossible to address the research questions without giving tribute to the history of Mennonite IHE. While crediting the history, enrollment issues were often linked to the decline in Mennonite youth.

The history of the denomination and Mennonite IHE were addressed by interviewees. Interviewees with years of professional experience at Mennonite IHE were able to provide a historical perspective of the progression of enrollment at Mennonite IHE. In conversations, it was not uncommon to hear statements like, “The five schools were started by their denomination at different times. At that time, Mennonites were a

captive audience. You automatically went to a Mennonite school. Bluffton has a unique history, but the other four have always had a high percentage of Mennos. For them, Mennos were a captive audience and high percentage of their students were Menno” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

The aforementioned statement addresses history within Mennonite IHE, but also implies acculturation of Mennonite youth. Paired with the history of the Mennonite faith, concerns with enrollment at Mennonite IHE boiled down to acculturation within the Mennonite population. For example, the name “Yoder” is a legacy Mennonite family name. Historically, if the Yoders opened a business, then there was automatic loyalty and support towards the Yoder family business from the Mennonite community. It was understood that the Yoders were part of the Mennonite community, or family, if you will. In the present, the Yoder family is not the only business option. The Yoders may not have the most competitive price, may not be the most convenient, or may not even identify as a Mennonite. Previously, it was assumed that Mennonites were exclusively loyal to Mennonite affiliated businesses, schools, and organizations. However, this is no longer the case and this is reflected in data indicating a decline in Mennonite students enrolled at Mennonite IHE between 2003 and 2008.

Also in relation to acculturation and Mennonite IHE, one interviewee articulated that Mennonite IHE have lost their captive audience. “There’s no automatic support and loyalty; education is not an automatic choice for Menno youth. For good or bad, they are choosing lots of other options. If you move from a captive audience, Mennonite higher education lost their primary market” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity

concerns). As Mennonites acculturate, research indicates that there is a decline in Mennonite youth interested in attending Mennonite IHE. The Mennonite community is assimilating to the dominant culture, which one could argue is a culture of consumerism.

Acculturation of the Mennonite community is related to Mennonite IHE. Being Mennonite means having options. Mennonite youth considering higher education may take a variety of factors into their college selection. Mennonite youth are not exclusively considering a Mennonite higher education. One interviewee summarized,

There are pockets of conservative Mennonites and there are more liberal Mennonites and so for instance, making that decision, and they have perception sometimes that the colleges may be more liberal and so they think, if they are conservative, that they will choose not to attend the school. I don't think that they even see the value in attending a Mennonite education and how it helps them understand the faith, and grow in their faith, and the importance of them taking that back to the Mennonite Church. (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns)

For Mennonites on the conservative end of the spectrum, evangelical Christian IHE may be attractive options. Others may choose a public institution because of the more affordable tuition. Mennonite IHE are competing with a variety of IHE for Mennonite youth. Overall, data reflected the Mennonite population is struggling denominationally and Mennonite youth are not viewing Mennonite IHE as exclusive options for higher education.

## **Goshen College in Relation to Mennonite Higher Education**

While overall there is a decline in Mennonite student enrollment, Goshen College must be recognized as the exception. It is the only Mennonite IHE that experienced growth post-merger. Between 2003 and 2008, Goshen increased Mennonite student enrollment by 29.67% while four of the five Mennonite IHE had a decrease in Mennonite student enrollment. However, it is important to note that historically Goshen College has always been viewed as the “Mennonite school”, and within the past two decades, it had percentages of Mennonite students as high as 70%. Additionally, it is geographically positioned in a highly populated Mennonite area.

Another factor that likely contributes to Goshen’s success with Mennonite students is financial resources. It was stated, “Goshen is the most well endowed school, by far. Goshen has about as much endowment as all of the other four schools combined. It has financial strength and may have been able to avoid cutting programs in recent years” (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns). Goshen College has always had a strong reputation for academic excellence in the Mennonite community. During a change in leadership, having resources, a solid reputation, and established finances may have positively impacted Goshen’s admissions process and, in turn, influenced enrollment.

Each of the Mennonite IHE have an unwritten reputation within the Mennonite community that falls on a conservative scale; what is most surprising about Goshen College is that it is seen as the most liberal of the Mennonite IHE. Although Goshen College maintains a dry campus and asks students to commit by signing a lifestyle

agreement, Goshen is perceived as the most progressive Mennonite IHE by Mennonite community standards. One individual stated that Bluffton and Eastern Mennonite University identified as conservative Mennonite IHE and that Goshen was perceived as the most liberal (personal communication, n.d. due to anonymity concerns).

Furthermore, the level of conservative scale was based on tolerance towards homosexual lifestyles at the Mennonite IHE. This makes it clear that Goshen has a niche with Mennonite youth and suggests that Mennonite youth attending Mennonite IHE are more tolerant of homosexuality than their Mennonite peers who may choose to attend an evangelical Christian IHE that does not support homosexuality.

### **Enrollment for Students of Color**

Data indicated that students of color are increasing at Mennonite IHE. Data also indicated that Mennonite IHE provided increased financial opportunity to enhance minority enrollment. Hesston College, the only two year Mennonite IHE, had significant growth in regard to minority enrollment. However, Hesston College was not offering scholarships or recruiting any differently than the other Mennonite IHE. This researcher speculates that the percentage of change for minority enrollment at Hesston College may be linked to a growing national trend of accessibility to community colleges, rather than an enhanced financial package for minority students at Hesston College.

### **Relationship of Results to Organizational Theory**

This research explored the merger and enrollment at Mennonite IHE. The merger was clearly a restructuring of leadership and impacted the organizational structure within Mennonite community. Hence, there is a correlation to organizational theory.

Organizational theory draws from an eclectic array of fields: sociology, social psychology, anthropology, philosophy, cybernetics, and the study of sense-making, chaos, and complexity (as cited in Kuh, 2003). Kuh posits,

Identifying the actors, the actors' roles, and the relationships between the actors and organizational actions is difficult, as institutions of higher education are increasingly vulnerable to such external influences as changing economic conditions and the agendas of legislations, corporate and philanthropic foundations, accrediting bodies, and the state education commissions. (p. 269)

This researcher suggests that institutional leadership and the agenda of MC USA were all factors considered prior to the merger in 2002 of the Mennonite governance bodies. In turn, the organizational restructuring impacted Mennonite higher education but, in truth, was not likely to have a significantly negative impact on Mennonite IHE. In fact, the merged structure could be perceived as a proactive move by the Church because, after all, the only thing that is constant is change.

The merger is identified as a conventional organizational approach. It is considered conventional because it emphasizes hierarchical structures and controls; clear communication channels and; stability, reliability, and predictability (Kuh, 2003). Furthermore, it can be linked to the conventional political view.

The conventional political view organizational theory best identifies the 2002 merger because it acknowledges that the power within the organizational structure is not always evenly dispersed. Within a political view structure, there are generally powerful

stakeholders. In this research, the MEA is a prime example of stakeholders who are influential in decision and policy making. The political view is often associated with conflict management and Kuh (2003) stated,

As resources become scarcer and the number of special interest groups increases, colleges and universities will experience more, not less, competition...Faculty and student affairs staff who expect their institution to be a community of equals may reject or feel threatened by the political view. (p. 275)

Data unmistakably echoed these sentiments. Competition between institutions was relatively common qualitatively. Interviewees did not explicitly divulge that feelings of rejection existed, but stressed that there were numerous challenges within Mennonite IHE.

### **Relationship to Theories in the Field of Student Affairs**

#### **Enrollment Management**

It was not sound to associate the research questions in this study directly with student development theory, as enrollment management embraces specific theories related to strategic initiatives implemented by individual institutions. In addition to strategies being implemented by an institution's enrollment or admissions office, external entities exist nationwide to develop customized enrollment plans for institutions. For example, Noel Levitz is a higher education enrollment consulting firm that customizes a strategic enrollment management plan with contracted institutions. Market research, administrative structures, and student data must be considered at each institution to

effectively assess an enrollment management system. Whereas enrollment management can be connected to strategy, this research indicated that Mennonite IHE did not collaboratively utilize an enrollment management strategy.

### **Spiritual Development Theory**

A valuable component of this research is the decline in Mennonite youth enrolled in Mennonite IHE. Because of the interesting data results, it would be ideal to directly correlate Mennonite student enrollment to an existing Student Affairs theory or theorist that emphasized faith based student development. Research indicated that significant strides have been made in recent years to incorporate spiritual development theories in the student affairs classroom. Over the past decade there has been student affairs theories received criticism because the vast majority of theories are cognitive based; religion and spirituality were unexplored areas within student development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Love and Talbot (1999) stated, “Spirituality and spiritual development have been conspicuously absent from student development theories and ignored by many student affairs professionals” (p. 361). It was concluded that historically, “Public higher education in the past century has been reluctant to address the spiritual and faith development of students” (as cited in Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Although recently research in higher education suggested that there was an increasing interest in the concepts of spirituality (as cited in Evans, et al., 2010). One could speculate that the lack of spiritual based student affairs theories is a representation of a larger cultural norm and indicative that religion is still considered a taboo topic.

## **Sharon Daloz Parks' Theory of Faith Development for the College Years.**

The two leading theorists on spiritual development are James W. Fowler and Sharon Daloz Parks. Parks' theory actually draws on Fowler's theory and is considered the more elaborative model, as it also incorporates work from "Piaget, Erickson, Perry, Levinson, Kegan, Gilligan, and Belenky" (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 58). Both theories have stages, as neither theory is linear in design.

Parks suggests that spiritual development for students occurs in four stages: Adolescent faith, young adult faith, tested adult faith, and mature adult faith. The premise of her theory is that young adults move from authority telling them about faith, to constructing meaning about faith with others, to internally focusing on understanding one's own faith, to finally an possessing an openness to other faiths (Chickering, et al., 2006). Being surrounded by other Mennonite youth in college, may prompt Mennonites to have a greater understanding and appreciation of their own faith. Parks theory can be directly linked to the fact that Mennonite youth who attend a Mennonite IHE are more likely to remain in the Mennonite faith. If students who identify as Mennonite have the opportunity to dialogue during the formative college years about their practice and faith, it is likely to confirm their own identity.

### **Implications for Student Affairs**

There are many implications for student affairs in this research. First, let us recognize the role that religion plays in private universities. Many private higher education institutions were founded for religious reasons and continually grapple to meet enrollment expectations. For example, Urbana University in Urbana, OH was founded in

1850 by the Swedenborg faith which blends science and theology. In some cases where IHE were founded for religious purposes, like at Urbana University, the religion may no longer be considered relevant or part of popular culture. However, this does not mean that these institutions should simply stop operating. Rather, there needs to be a level of reinvention and evolution to the institution. Often times, organizational change is necessary to maintain a thriving campus.

Secondly, Christianity is clearly today's mainstream religion in the United States and there are numerous functional Christian IHE that exist nationwide. Even though Christianity is America's guiding principle, a homogeneous belief system in America is unlikely for the future. There will always be a variety of faith based higher education options. After all, freedom of religion is the *founding* principle of the United States. Religious freedom or Christian popularity aside, the Anabaptist Mennonite faith struggles to attract members to the denomination (Schrag, 2009). Religions institutions, like Mennonite IHE, must relate their belief system to youth in a way that makes the institution marketable.

### **Implications for Practice**

Often times complacent staff and stagnant systems plague higher education. Students may want change, but there is administrative resistance because there is a fear of change, a fear of the unknown, and perhaps a fear of the work it may take to implement something new. At institutions, especially at historical institutions rich with tradition, practitioners must ask if systems are effective.

Let us take a favorite reality television show and present an analogy. American Idol is a talent competition that challenges contestants to perform a song that has already been recorded by another artist. The song is performed in front of a panel of esteemed judges and then the audience, the American television viewer, is permitted to vote for the individual deemed to be the favorite artist. Often times, a candidate performs a classic song. Say, Marvin Gaye's *What's Goin' On* or Phil Collins' *Against All Odds*. In the volatile moments after an American Idol performance, it is not uncommon for the judges to give harsh criticism to the candidate for trying to imitate the original artist. However, in rare instances, an artist makes the song uniquely their own and is glorified for the ability to rebirth a classic and redefine lyrical relevance.

Like the American Idol contestants, Mennonite IHE need to redefine and express what it means to be uniquely Mennonite. Peace, pacifism, and community are tenants of the Mennonite faith that resonate with today's youth; the average Mennonite is no longer associated with extreme plain living. In terms of enrollment, high school youth are asking, "What are those 'tenants' going to *get* me in the long run?" From a student affairs perspective, Mennonite IHE must find their niche with the mainstream high school student to garner market appeal. And, let us face it, there are many IHE that were founded on a religious premise that could be made more relevant to today's youth. This researcher makes the argument that college selection is no longer about a belief system, but that students are taking a consumerism approach and asking themselves, "Is this place going to give me the most bang for the buck?" There are multiple factors that impact college selection, but Mennonite IHE must ask is their identity or marketing effective or is it just the way that it has always been done.

On a larger scale, arguments could be made for the academy of higher education to do a better job of incorporating spiritual development into the classroom, not just at Mennonite IHE. After conducting facilitated opportunities to discuss spirituality in a classroom setting, Small (2009) concluded that offering students the opportunity to talk about their religious views with likeminded students was beneficial to identity development and learning. Small posited that the existing literature fails to examine how religious affiliation impacts identity formation. In regard to religious affiliation, it is stated, “For those who are from marginalized religions in this country, effects may include an early understanding that one’s group of membership is a minority, which leads to an ambiguous identity...” (Small, 2009, p. 13). In practice, by facilitating opportunities to discuss religion in a higher education setting, students establish their own spiritual identity.

Additionally, practitioners in the field are often encouraged to articulate or discuss their own development, but faith is generally an omitted topic. Our own spiritual identity is often not addressed or explored. Love’s (2001) research encouraged student affairs professionals to have an awareness of their own spiritual development. “If spirituality and spiritual development are inherent in all people, then we need to consider this developmental process in our own lives” (Love, 2001, p. 14). A particular religion cannot be deemed superior in an academic setting and it is not feasible to completely separate our own spirituality from a student affairs job.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

This research has been conducted on a small scale and this researcher recognizes that there is significant room for further research on the topic of Mennonite higher education. It would be interesting to further explore perceptions of the conservative spectrum that exist within Mennonite IHE. Specifically, a qualitative study conducted with students to explore the conservative or liberal identity at each institution would be valuable to Mennonite IHE that could possibly be utilized to develop niches within the Mennonite higher education community. Also, this research found that generational differences in Mennonite education existed and more research could be conducted in this realm to gauge what is attracting Mennonite youth to Mennonite IHE. Qualitative research with Mennonite students who choose not to attend a Mennonite IHE is another area for further research that could determine what areas for improvement exist in regard to enrollment strategies.

The premise of higher education and student affairs is to develop students holistically. Religious IHE especially work to develop students, but the effectiveness of these efforts could be assessed. Those that are effective at faith development could serve as models in the higher education community. Love (2001) suggested mentoring communities and through the student code of conduct system; implementing a reflection component to enhance spiritual development when students were encouraged to reflect on their actions through the disciplinary process. Interestingly, Love connected student leaders with spiritual development and stated, “Students’ involvement in social, volunteer, leadership, and community service activity may be a manifestation of their

spiritual development and quest for meaning” (p. 14). In the Mennonite realm, further research could be conducted to learn what key areas of student affairs compliment the core Mennonite tenants.

### **Personal Reflection**

Are *you* Mennonite? Do you want to *be* a Mennonite? How did you find *that* research topic? What’s *your* interest in Mennonite institutions? These are the precariously asked questions received during this research journey; as the journey progresses, the answers evolve. Each step of this research has been a delightful investigative surprise and the research has unfolded like a well coordinated television crime show. The ultimate truth is that this topic was terribly interesting because it was incorporated with personal appeal. The Mennonite culture was a rich part of my own heritage that I was excited to interweave research with my adoration for learning and writing.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter Three, this researcher is two generations removed from the Mennonite community. My maternal grandmother was a Sauder, a typically ethnic Swiss-Mennonite family name. More specifically, in the mid-1940s my grandmother and all three of her sisters left a conservative Mennonite community to enter into higher education. The result was that the Sauders experienced a very dramatic shunning over the issue of higher education, which was compounded by the issue of women’s higher education at a time when women were expected to marry young and not work outside of the home. After the shunning, the Sauders choose to leave the Mennonite living community but still identified with the Mennonite faith. Whispered

stories about the shunning between my grandmother and the aunts were inevitable during Sauder family gatherings and the Mennonite legacy has been imprinted in my memory.

It would be dishonest to say that preconceived notions and biases about the Mennonite community did not preclude this research. Without having much exposure to the Mennonite community, it was my assumption that the majority of Mennonites were anti-modern living. It was assumed they were peoples who did not embrace technology, limited conversation to theology, and only existed in small sects. Armed with these notions, natural curiosity about Mennonite IHE fueled this research because, logistically, this researcher felt it would be difficult to successfully operate a modern day university in such a conservative fashion.

In this reflection, it is cathartic to address the preconceived notions formerly possessed by this researcher. Through research, the opportunity to engage and collaborate with numerous Mennonites has surfaced and what has been discovered is that there is not a “typical Mennonite” experience. It was quickly learned through personal communication and literature reviews that there is a wide spectrum of what it means to be a Mennonite, just like there is a wide array of Christian identities and practices. Individuals, like myself, with limited experience with Mennonites commonly mistake Mennonites for their Amish cousins, who visibly are distinguishable because of their plain clothing. As time progressed during this research, I found myself almost defensively educating others about the Mennonite community, which vastly differs from the Amish, because I came to have such an appreciation for the Mennonite belief system.

Common beliefs among Mennonites were the separation between church and state, pacifism, peacefulness, and a commitment to the Mennonite Church. These beliefs were much more prevalent than a commitment to simple living. This research afforded interaction with Mennonites in various professions who were outspoken about the struggles within the Mennonite community and in Mennonite IHE. Overall, the higher education community was welcoming to the research and motivated by the desire to benefit Mennonite higher education. Personal experiences allow the opportunity to share that Mennonites desire to increase positive perceptions of their faith.

### **Conclusion**

The merger in 2002 was a controversial move for the Mennonite community. Mennonite Church USA attempted to strategically integrate two similar, yet historically different, churches into one unit under the premise of unifying and strengthening the whole. In fact, there were some sects that were so opposed to the merger that they choose not to affiliate with the Mennonite Church USA and remain separate. Others thrive under the “new management”.

With that, even though there was not growth all the way across the board, Mennonite IHE in some ways has seen significant growth between 2003 and 2008. The increase of students of color at all of the Mennonite IHE is an accomplishment and three out of the five Mennonite IHE have experienced positive growth in enrollment. Goshen College is the only school with an increase in their Mennonite student enrollment; which indicates Goshen clearly has a niche within the Mennonite community.

In many ways, this research is about relevance. It is about having limited resources and figuring out ways to allocate resources, whether that be time, energy, or finances, in a way that is practical and effective. The model under the MC USA has streamlined higher education efforts and data indicates that, although there is still anxiety about the merger, there were differences in enrollment before and after the merger. Furthermore, the Mennonite higher education community has certainly implemented an organizational model that could be emulated in other denominations.

Change is inevitable. To quote the lyrics of rock star David Bowie, “Changes; turn and face the change. Don’t wanna be a richer man; just wanna be a different man; time may change me; but I can’t trace time” (Bowie, 1971, track 1). Higher education is a historical presence in the fabric of American society; higher education is an evolving entity. And this researcher uses “entity” intentionally because of the term’s distinct, separate existence. Higher education as an entity has been successful because of its constant evolution, continual reevaluation, and repositioning. Mennonite higher education has mirrored this success and is making an effort to provide quality education while serving students.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. What can you tell me about Mennonite higher education?
2. What influence does the Mennonite Church USA have over the operations of Mennonite universities?
3. What does someone in your position need to know about the five Mennonite institutions of higher education in the United States?
4. How would you explain the differences between the Mennonite institutions?
5. How has enrollment changed at your university between 2003 and 2008?
6. What trends do you see in enrollment at Mennonite institutions
7. Regarding enrollment, what is the biggest challenge your institution faces?
8. What strategies are being employed to increase enrollment?
  - a. Female students?
  - b. Minority students?
  - c. Mennonite students?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding enrollment at Mennonite institutions?