



ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT 2018

What Does Community Mean to Students of the
Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on an ethnographic exploration and summary on the students of Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry, a state-wide collegiate ministry organization that is funded by local Baptist churches. This report sets out to summarize and gain understanding of the significance surrounding Baptist Collegiate Ministry student community and what this community means specifically to those students. With the intention of understanding students' perception of the BCM, the entirety of the Kennesaw State Marietta campus community was observed for research before shifting focus toward two student leaders of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry.

Objectives for this exploratory ethnographic study included:

1. To explore and define the significance of community to the students of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry.
2. To explore and understand the social climate and its environment for students provided by the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry.
3. To understand and define the personal significance behind student involvement in the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry and its role in their personal and academic lives.

Specific questions were derived for the study:

1. *What* caused students to join the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry?
2. *What* are the experiences and responses of students who attend the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry gatherings on a regular basis?
3. *How* do Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry students develop trust within the organization?
4. *How* has the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry impacted personal student success?
5. *What* opportunities does/has the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry provide students to engage with them and the greater Kennesaw State University campus community?
6. *How* does the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry ensure personal growth for its students?

Our ethnographic study and analysis lead us to an emerging understanding and key principles in how the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry achieves its culture and define community:

- How students establish and endorse the attitudes, values and norms that create a culture within the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry.
- Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry establishes a purpose behind its practices that give students responsibility and drive behind their interactions with one another.

- Each individual developed a need to build connections with and through others from the establishment, assembly, and solidarity of the student-based community.
- Students of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry are unified and clear in their understanding of each individual and their need for personal growth.

In conclusion, this examination and ethnographic study identified that although Christianity and being a Kennesaw State University student plays a role in students' involvement in the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry, purposeful actions and human connection based in the need of personal student development is at the core of the campus community. In order for student development to take place, initial outreach and connection must be established to create a reality in which a student can feel a drive or want to improve themselves and therefore the community itself. Each student observed for this study has found significance and a driven role within the student community and use their drive to impact others.

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INTRODUCTION

The Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry is an organization based on the Marietta campus of Kennesaw State University. Its mission is to empower students by providing a place of community, opportunity for growth, and transparency during their time at the university. This paper concerns how students generally take up and respond to the key factors that make up and establish their culture. Knowing this, we revolved our research around the question of: What does community mean to the students of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry?

A deep, broad understanding of behavior and purpose reveals how students of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) connect in common yet have distinctive interactions in the group where they knowingly affect other people within their community. Understanding the BCM's social climate and perspective of students provided us with an important understanding that social groups and community become a part of identity and provide individuals with the skills and confidence that help them in life. As connections between people are valued within any assembly, we decided to analyze what those connections mean to the students of the Kennesaw State BCM, to understand their experiences while interacting with other people, and to comprehend how those interactions affect trust, behavior and the Marietta Baptist Collegiate Ministry community at large.

“Community” has many different definitions in a multitude of contexts in the modern age. Taking into consideration individual and social context when searching for meaning, this study focuses on a process that searches for relevance within a specific community and observes individual and group behavior to define it. To better comprehend what community means to these students we decided to focus our study on the interactions between individuals at the Marietta Campus Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry and the meaning behind them.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, research was conducted through observations, jottings and field notes (both handwritten and typed), audio recordings, and face-to-face interviews with participants of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry community. Following each interview session, jottings and field notes were compiled into data cards to further analyze the session and perceptions of the wider student community and filtered into a takeaway behind the observation/interview session. Through the collection of these notes, analyses, observations, interviews and data cards, patterns and key findings were understood and thus structured the outcome of this report.

Observations

Our study began on Thursday, November 1st, 2018 with observations. Each week the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry holds student-curated events that vary on type and location depending on the day of the week. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are

particularly busy for the students of the Kennesaw State BCM, and thus we decided to begin our study by initially observing the interactions between the group as a whole before moving on to individualized interactions between single participants. As a part of our analysis, constant contact and access to the community-held events were imperative to understand the outcomes, behaviors, and patterns further that define the strategy for conducting student services. By observing this specific group of students and gathering information, this provided our research with a connection in understanding the meaning of community within the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry.

Observations were divided into two separate dates during separate functions to witness and understand the various perspectives of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry coming together, and how the community handles each gathering. All observations were taken on the Marietta Campus of KSU. Our subjects of focus became: people (the group as a whole, and individual participants later), the surrounding environment, actions and interactions between individual students. These observations took place during a Men's Bible Study on Thursday, November 1st, and a worship session on Tuesday, November 6th.

During each observation, researchers individually recorded jottings and field notes on and about everything they witnessed during the observation period. The deeper significance of each action and interaction recorded was considered later in the analysis process, although some interactions were initially deemed significant. The first observation provided insight into how the students of this on-campus community gather, socialize, and behave in a small Bible study group that focuses primarily on fellowship, discussion, and discipleship

within the community. The second observation offered us some insight into how the BCM gathers formally for a weekday service, and we were able to discover the meaning behind each gathering through these observations. Naturally, we found some students within each gathering who stood out amongst their peers for their leadership abilities and natural engagement with the people around them. Our team decided to choose two such students as our interview participants.

Participants

Our participants for our study differed in a variety of ways when it comes to the *how* they discovered and joined the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry. However, each participant was and is an enrolled student at Kennesaw State University and participated and served within the student community of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry for at least 3 to 4 years.

Participant 1

Chase

Chase is a male in his 20s, a Senior Mechanical Engineering Student and the men's small group discipleship leader on the Marietta Campus of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry. Chase began being involved in the on-campus group shortly after his Sophomore year when a classmate asked him to attend a few events before he developed a bond with the

people of the community and became a member (and eventual student leader) in the organization.

Participant 2

Megan

Megan is a female in her 20s and a part-time campus minister and leader on the Marietta Campus of the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry. She began her studies at Kennesaw State University in 2011, when former roommates extended her an invitation to attend, before eventually joining the on-campus ministry in the following semester. Megan stayed as a member of BCM until she graduated in Spring 2016 and came back to work as a part-time campus leader in Fall 2017 after she returned from an international mission trip.

Interviews

A set of questions derived out of the sense of better understanding the deeper personal connections students have with one another within the organization were asked during each interview session. Rather than understanding the community in a logistical or technical definitive sense, open-ended questions were asked to give the participants a chance to relay past or present experiences that helped develop their connection with the Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry. These types of questions helped the participants' answers to the interviewer to be understood in a way that was natural and unbiased.

Interviews took place on the Marietta Campus of the Baptist Collegiate Ministry during the week of the 11th of November 2018, following the initial observations. Each interview took place within a space the participants noted that they felt the most comfortable in and ultimately locations were left up to them.

Timing and scheduling for these interviews were also a top priority, factoring in the knowledge that our participants were working students and leaders in their community. Interviews were set up through one-on-one conversation with our participants after our second observation. Participants were given an in-depth background of the ethnographic study before consenting to perform the interview. During each interview session, jottings, audio recordings, and detailed participant responses were recorded alongside any questions that occurred during the sitting. Interviews between each participant took place between 45 minutes to an hour.

Interview 1

The initial interview took place on November 12th, 2018 with Chase, at the Marietta Campus BCM. At the beginning of the interview, Chase seemed a little nervous and was conscious of the fact that we were taking notes on what he said; as the interview progressed, however, he got more comfortable and was able to talk to us more naturally. From the very beginning, he pointed out the importance of community in the BCM and how much everyone there enjoyed being somewhere that they felt free to be who they were. This fact was apparent in the earlier observations by how open people were about what their life had been

like before they had “found Christ,” particularly regarding the struggles they had endured.

What Chase valued most about BCM was not only the community aspect of it all, but also the transparency.

Chase went on to explain that they felt free to be completely open with each other.

When we talked more on how conflicts at the BCM are handled, he said that only the people who are genuinely affected by those conflicts are involved, other than instances in which other authorities must be alerted. This a testament to how much they value the privacy of their members even though it is a close-knit group. Due to the small nature of their group he mentioned that conflicts among the group rarely cause bad blood. Usually, relationships can return to normal in about a month.

Following this, we discussed his involvement in the BCM. Chase has been a part of the community for three years and a discipleship leader in for 2 of those years. He mentioned that he had started going because of a girl that he liked, which illustrated that the BCM has a way of inviting people in and allowing them to become a part of the community. When talking about the social atmosphere at the BCM he said it was “pretty dorky”, in that they like to have silly discussions and play video games quite often. The distinction from other groups is that although the group is competitive, they still put a lot of importance in good sportsmanship. Overall, they try to be there for each other and encourage one another in whatever they do. They try to emphasize the importance of caring for others and not focusing on themselves so much.

Another factor Chase discussed is the importance of outreach. To be able to get more people involved and learn about the BCM, the ministry exposes the current members to other people outside of the community. Although a lot of those members like thinking of the BCM as a safe space and a hangout spot, they also recognize the importance of being exposed to different places and people. In his interview, Chase cited these outreach events as some of his fondest memories, because they allowed the BCM students to become friends with people who had not found their own social group yet, and some of those same people went on to become more involved with the BCM.

Interview 2

Our second interview took place on the 15th of November. During our second observation session, we'd taken note of Megan, who seemed to have some sort of leadership role in the BCM. After the worship night was over, we reached out to her asking if she'd be interested in interviewing with us, to which she responded agreeably. A few questions in on the day of our interview, we discovered that Megan was actually a graduate of Kennesaw State University; she had been a member of BCM during her college years and had returned in 2017 to work as a part-time minister there. We were interested to see what her perspective on the BCM's community was.

Right from the interview's start, Megan spoke about investment and support from the BCM. When asked to define the BCM, she stated that the ministry's purpose was to invest in students, teach them how to be an adult, and to serve and support students. She went on to

say that the BCM is welcoming and accepting to everyone who needs community and struggled with finding a place on campus to fit in. Throughout our interview with Megan, it was evident that she has a full heart for the students and community of the BCM. She expressed that it's the desire of people at the BCM to make every student who walks in the door feel "known" and to be intentional in engaging with them.

Megan touched a lot on the BCM's outreach to international students. Having a drive herself for international missions and the international students on campus, she spoke into how the BCM makes an effort to focus on those students. They seek out international students because it's been made apparent to the BCM community that those students are some of the loneliest on campus.

One concept that kept surfacing in our conversation with her was transformation. "When we see students come and join, we see that change. They find a place where they can be themselves and they start to grow fast as individuals and come out of their shells." Megan expressed that students come into the BCM, are poured into and encouraged, and then learn how to turn around and do that for other people. She has seen personal growth in many friends in the community, and it's something she is proud of. When asked what her favorite memory from her time there was, she responded that it was an event where many of the males in BCM put on a pageant to raise money for missions. Their transformation stood out to her, she said; some of the guys were shy about participating, but were encouraged by the others until they joined in. "I was very proud of the guys afterwards...I was able to see a transformation in these students."

ANALYSIS

After the general observations and interview sessions, the next steps became creating an expanded notion of what is meant by “community” and sorting our findings and data into a list of key points to assist in answering our research question: What does community mean to the students of the Kennesaw State BCM? Our research focused primarily on trying to understand the social practices at macro (group observations) and micro-levels (individual interviews and observations) and how people produce value from everyday practices which demonstrate the capacity to respond to one another with social intent and purpose.

The Kennesaw State Baptist Collegiate Ministry thrives on its capacity to provide a community within a community for its students. We formed an understanding of solidarity and culture from the observations and responses from current active students. Personal development and socialization with intent are vital aspects behind the culture and foundation of this organization. Whether through productive notions, creative practices, or shared experiences, the students of the Kennesaw State BCM become key tools for adaption, social bonding, human connections, and personal development.

Key Points

Providing a Safe Social Environment

From our observations of the BCM community and participants Megan and Chase, we discovered that comfort within a social group requires a level of trust, connection, and

similarities to be established. Human beings are inherently social creatures and having a social group to thrive with means opening up to others and actively listening to those around you.

When discussing morality and personal beliefs, the conversation can easily get intense. The BCM shows itself to be a community open for criticism and a healthy space for different opinions. Through research at the site, we found distinct similarities between our interviewees and their placed value in the Baptist College Ministry for providing a place of acceptance. During fieldwork, we observed the men's Bible study group, which consisted of nine young men. Before we started our observation, Chase asked if the other attendees were comfortable with the presence of observers, especially since they were women. His consideration highlights the ministry's belief in providing a comfortable, safe space for students by giving them the opportunity to decide what makes comfortable. The separation of genders during the Thursday Bible studies seeks to provide students with a circle of individuals they can relate to and confide in without feeling pressure or embarrassment.

Social Belonging

The BCM invests in its students, providing hospitable company and community that allows students to make friends and get to know people. The doors are always open, both literally and figuratively. Students disclose that they feel "seen" at the BCM. Consisting largely of engineering and computer science students, the BCM is a place where people can meet and make friends, play video games, attend organized events such as the weekly

worship nights, and find refuge. During an interview with our participant Megan, she made it clear that “people who seek out community, but perhaps can’t find it elsewhere, will fit in at the BCM” because the ministry is accepting of everyone from all walks of life.

There’s a clear need for belonging and community on the Marietta Campus.

“Students are hungry for it,” Megan says. During our conversation, she recalled a past holiday break, when she learned that many international students were planning on spending the week alone in their dormitories due to having no friends. She stated that her “heart just broke for them.” Megan shares in the BCM’s mission of providing a place for students to seek refuge and community and enjoy a sense of being needed.

Transparency and Personal Growth

The BCM desires to help its students grow and transform. The message communicated is that this is a place that provides hospitality and invests in the student’s growth while teaching them how to develop as adults and grow their faith. The BCM’s openness and ability to foster genuine social interaction encourages an environment that supports the personal growth of its students. “We see the change,” Megan says, regarding other students of the BCM. Both she and Chase express that BCM members often discover a place where they can be themselves, and they develop as individuals, resulting in many students “coming out of their shells.”

Students who become regular attendees quickly find purpose and a community that is thriving, open, and wants to teach and encourage each other as well as people outside the

BCM. This community gives students a drive to start finding ways to contribute to the community. Megan noted how fellow members of the BCM helped her transition into adulthood during her time there. She believes that without the BCM and their influence she would have gone down a “very wild path.” She recalls the “true friends” that she found at the BCM, who kept her accountable and cared about her and her growth as a person while she gained a sense of responsibility. She also feels that she learned how to handle and be aware of others. “I definitely matured here,” she comments, and it’s clear she isn’t the only one.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the key factors identified in our analysis define the core principles behind the Kennesaw State BCM and thoroughly expresses their meaning of community. In this study, we recognized that the BCM is committed to ‘socializing with intent’ by giving each interaction with every student a purpose, which is at the core of their community and transcends the factors of background, gender, and religion. Community is further defined by simple connections with the intent of making an impact, as Chase and Megan demonstrated in their interviews. These students were clearly affected by their time in the ministry. The BCM provides students with a place to feel and make connections with their peers, leading to enriching experiences. Feeling connected socially is more important than ever, and the BCM excels at bringing students together.