Assessing Spiritual Growth in Retreats: 2015-2016
Craig Zimmer and Brittany Hall

Goals
After participating in a Campus Ministry program, students will:

Articulate how the experience impacted their spiritual life and relationship with God.

Express how faith and spirituality impact daily life.

Our Retreats
Campus Ministry offers a variety of retreats throughout the year, from a retreat to start the year just for freshman, to one that ends the year just for seniors. We offer an outdoor retreat with hiking, biking, and camping, as well as a silent retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. We also have a retreat focused on discernment as well as our very popular Encounter with Christ Retreat.

Method
We asked 260 students across the retreat program the following questions and rated them based on this rubric:

Level 1: Student does not express any growth.

Level 2: Student expresses growth in a generalized way.

Level 3: Student expresses growth in more detail or depth, in a way that shows critical reflection.

Findings
During this retreat, how did you grow in your spiritual life and relationship with God?

What ideas, insights, or experiences from this retreat will you be able to take back to your everyday life in a meaningful way?

Level 3 Examples
“I am going to be more observant when I walk around on campus: to the beauty, to the people, and to God’s presence. I am also going to try to make time for people in a way that I would have dismissed before, going beyond the superficial and actually setting aside time to get together with people and grow together, talk about what is going on with them, and how they are feeling.”

“I grew in understanding God’s unconditional love for me no matter what mistakes I make.”

“I am making an effort to do small tasks each day to show the love of God. I am also making an effort to tell people that I am grateful for them and explain why.”

Takeaways
A large majority of retreat participants express spiritual growth and a desire to carry their retreat experience into everyday life. Many of those expressions are generalized, however, so we can encourage deeper reflection on specific ways to translate retreat experiences into everyday life.

It also should be noted that these findings are aspirational and not directly observable. This is the nature of working with subjective data from a one-time program that lasts for one weekend, rather than a semester or a year.