

Reaching the Campus Tribes

(an opening inquiry)

Benson Hines

mobile version
part one: chapters one and two

Dedication

*To the 300 who gave of their
time, space, wisdom, and resources.
The firstfruits are in this book.*

&

*To Steven H. & Audrey M. T.
who first helped me
become a minister to the campus tribes
& were there in this most recent adventure.*

Reaching the Campus Tribes by Benson Hines

www.reachingthecampustribes.com

This version was originally made for mobile users. All the original text has been “remastered” for smaller dimensions, with smaller pictures. Visit the site above for the primary version, other resources, or for ways to join in the cause. Important information and interesting tidbits can also be found on [the back pages](#).

©2009 Benson Hines. You are *encouraged* to email, blog, post, copy, print, or otherwise share this book. Just don't change the contents or charge for them.

REASONS TO SHARE REACHING THE CAMPUS TRIBES

1. It's free!
2. It can get Christians talking about a really important issue.
3. It's got some great pictures.
4. A lot of people won't read something unless it's recommended by multiple pals, right?
5. This whole ebook trend could be really useful for Christian ministry...
6. This book impacts best only if it spreads beyond the campus tribes to other Christian leaders.
7. It's free!

Contents

1. [Look to the Fields](#)
introducing the campus tribes
2. [Exploring the Campus Tribes](#)
how i ended up on a yearlong journey to 181 campus tribes, and what i experienced
3. **White unto Harvest**
why our present work isn't enough
4. **Reaching the Campus Tribes**
a new outlook to improve our efforts
5. **The Harvest is Plentiful**
why reaching the campus tribes could change everything, and other reasons this matters
6. **Practical Concerns**
why greater work among the campus tribes is practical in light of the difficulties

Orienting (A Conclusion and Vision Trip)

Into the Harvest: A Road Map Forward from a Road Trip's Findings / specific steps forward for reaching the campus tribes

[Back Pages \(info about the book and more\)](#)

1

look to the fields

This is a book about missions.

In 1792, during an era of particularly long book titles, William Carey published *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Many Christians believed that missionary activity was not especially necessary, since God could accomplish salvation without their “help.” As Carey’s title implies, his book argued that Christians should *use means* – should carry out purposeful activity – to reach unsaved people throughout the world.

In the centuries since, Carey's words have taken hold within Christendom – to say the least! Today, it's hard to imagine *not* “using means for the conversion of the heathens.” Churches, denominations, and thousands of individual Christians have been gripped by a call to international missions, and this effort is now one of Evangelicals' most significant investments. The entire world is different because Christians decided to “use means” to reach it, despite the difficulties and costs involved. And we continue to look for even better ways to reach more and more people, laboring in missions until Christ returns.

one hundred and eighty-one mission fields

Recently, I had the marvelous opportunity to visit *one hundred and eighty-one* separate mission fields in a single year. I walked among the natives, examined the Christian work (if any) being accomplished, and prayed for God's wisdom for better reaching

these tribes.



The Griffin tribe, located in the northwest corner of its nation, is known for its hedonistic Renn Fayre festival and for revering communism, atheism, and "free love." The tribe also contains some of its country's most intelligent and creative people. Christian ministry among the Griffins remains limited.

This was an eclectic group of tribes, with differences in size, history, economic prosperity, regional prominence, culture, and traditions. But these particular tribes share one thing: They may have more potential to influence the entire world than *any other* single kind of tribe. While we can never judge the overall importance of reaching

one group of people over another, missiologists recognize the strategic value of reaching groups that serve as gateways to greater impact. And without a doubt, these 181 tribes (and the few thousand tribes like them) provide an immense opportunity for impacting not only their regions but the entire world.

Yet the sad truth is that we have reached these people for Christ far less than we can or should. Despite the ease of accessing most of these tribes, despite the relationship American churches *already* have with many of the tribes' members, and despite these tribes' clear potential to influence the world, mission work among these *millions* of people is given very low priority by most Christians. This is true even among Christians who otherwise exhibit a true passion for missions.

But as in Carey's day, Christians are waking

up to the necessity of greater missions efforts among these key tribes.

We call these tribes college campuses, and we desperately need to use greater means to reach them.



The Hawkeye tribe of Iowa experienced massive, harmful flooding in the month after this May 2008 visit. The tribe is still rebuilding.

an enormous exploration

After ministering to college students directly for several years, in August 2007 I be-

gan a yearlong quest to explore college campuses throughout the nation and to research Christian work in these mission fields.

I had become increasingly familiar with college ministry in my state and even on the national landscape. Yet I knew there was much more to learn. I also knew that few people had a clear “on the ground” view of the state of college ministry nationwide. So my goal for this research was to gain as broad a view of Evangelical college ministry as possible and to come back with knowledge to share. This book provides the initial findings from that trip.

After the trip, I have continued to connect with college ministry leaders and to visit college ministries throughout the country. I have also been able to share about my trip and its results – not only with college ministers, but also with pastors, parents, college

students, seminary students, seminary faculty, denominational leaders, and others.

I share with them what I share in this book: better ways to think about college ministry and reasons we should make greater efforts to reach these tribes.

new attention

God continues to grip college students in this key stage of life. I have been so fortunate to see college students from across the U.S. meeting God personally, learning His truths, spreading His Kingdom, and finding their place in His plan.

College ministries are often the primary catalysts for this spiritual growth, and there are many of these ministries making exciting inroads with students and their campuses. Strong college ministry work can be found in the expected places – like large churches, Christian colleges, and major

public schools. But it can also be found in unexpected places: community colleges, urban centers, churches far away from any college, and more.

But even though some Christians have risen to the task, college ministry is far from a high priority within American Christianity as a whole. This has led to a lack of needed attention, investment, training, and the like. As a result, our present ministry to college students often lacks needed depth and breadth, while many students remain untouched by college ministry at all.

However, American Christians have started focusing anew on reaching these students. Denominations, networks, seminaries, churches, pastors, and other Christians are asking how we might better reach people in their late teen years and beyond. Some are finding answers to these questions, and new ministries and other efforts are being

planned and started all over the country. In fact, those Christian groups and churches which are not focusing on reaching the “campus tribes” may soon find themselves lagging behind thousands of ministries that are welcoming them with open arms.

As college ministry is becoming a greater priority for American Christianity, my hope is to fan that flame by every means I can.

a better approach

Making college ministry a priority is not enough, however. A greater zeal for reaching students must be paired with wisdom about how this work will best proceed.

Many Christians view college ministry as simply one area of Christian Education, comparable to our work with children, senior adults, youth, or single people. But ultimately, every experience I’ve had observing and participating in college ministry has clarified a better way of approaching minis-

try to college students. This idea has the potential to change the way we value and practice college ministry, and it's something I've hinted at already.

What is that idea?

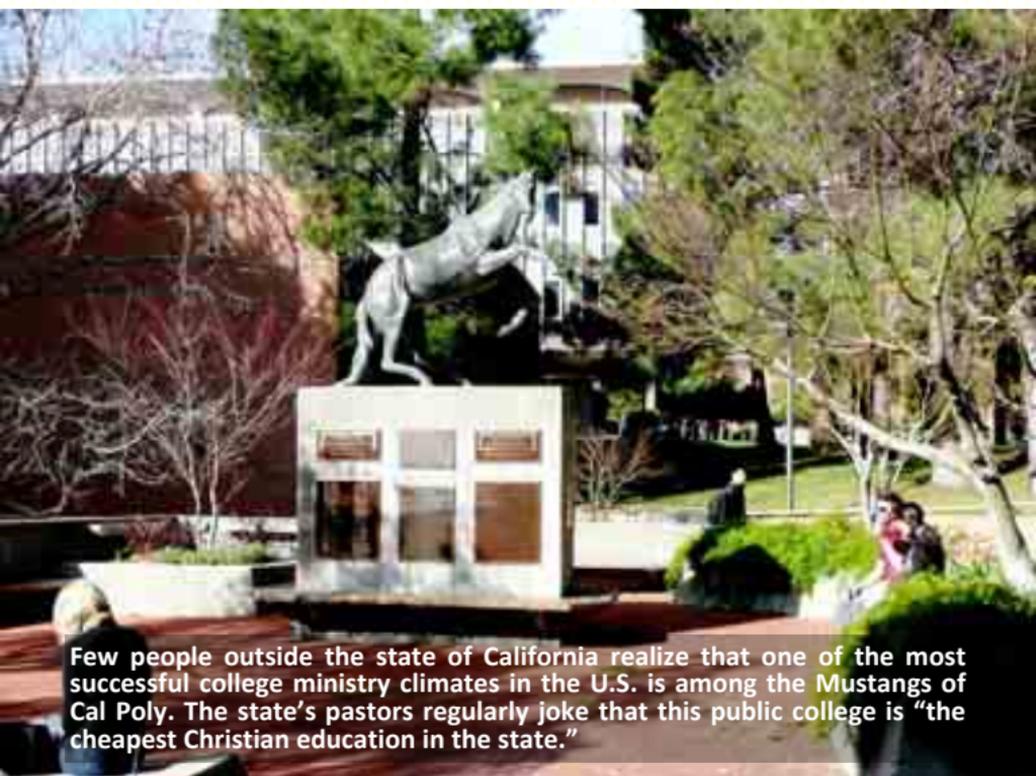
The practice of college ministry is far more like Missions than like Christian Education.

So ministering to a college campus is in many ways

more like Missions in Mozambique than it is even like Youth Ministry.

Obviously, that's not the way most Christian pastors, church members, parents, or opinion leaders think about college ministry yet. Even college ministers themselves don't always realize that their work really is a form of *missions*. But in some places this

idea – of *missiological* college ministry – is already clarifying and fueling college ministry practice. Hopefully this book can spread the idea even further.



Few people outside the state of California realize that one of the most successful college ministry climates in the U.S. is among the Mustangs of Cal Poly. The state's pastors regularly joke that this public college is "the cheapest Christian education in the state."

this book

Just as William Carey shared his ideas about international missions through a pamphlet so long ago, my goal here is to share these first thoughts about college ministry in a

format as accessible as possible for the many who need to hear this message.

So this short book is more proclamation than primer, more megaphone than microscope, an “opening inquiry” rather than any final word. It may seem to have too few illustrations, too few evidences, and even too few pages. But I hope this book raises questions and drives people to find out more. And if this book does fuel an interest in college ministry, then I and countless others will have many opportunities to share examples, spiritual insights, facts, arguments, and “best practices” for this field.

For now, this book is the urgent message I would share with Christian leaders over coffee, not the ultimate “how-to” for this vital area. I have focused here on the big picture, which means I don’t get to discuss all the specific skills, methods, and spiritual needs involved.

But the big picture still gives us bold ideas to consider. For example, I will discuss:

- ⊕ How ministry to college students is quite different from both young adult ministry and youth ministry.
- ⊕ How college campuses are a lot like *tribes*.
- ⊕ What commonalities are shared by the three “branches” of college ministry.
- ⊕ How strategic student discipleship is lacking in many Christian colleges.
- ⊕ Why a large, city-wide worship service for college students is often a *terrible* way to jump-start a college ministry.
- ⊕ Why better college ministry will lead to better youth ministry, better young adult ministry, and better missions work.
- ⊕ Why college ministry is “R&D” for Christianity.
- ⊕ Why churches with no plan for college students should help their high school

kids find another church – and what it actually means for a church to have a College Student Plan.

- ⊕ How Christians can approach college ministry in many ways beyond the “classic” forms.
- ⊕ Why impacting college students is a far more practical undertaking than many people assume.
- ⊕ And many other important ideas.

If this book gives you food for thought, I urge every reader to share it with others. [Dialogue with me](#) and with others in this field. [Read my blog](#), where I daily discuss what I’ve learned. Ask questions, and give feedback. Join the cause, however you’re able – even in your own area by helping reach your own local, beautiful campuses. As we use means to reach the campus tribes, we’re all in this together.

from here to there

For those who appreciate knowing where a book is headed, here's the plan:

- ⊕ [Chapter 2](#) will briefly look at how I ended up on an amazing yearlong road trip and summarize what I experienced.
- ⊕ Chapter 3 reveals what I discovered about the present state of college ministry (and why our present efforts to reach students aren't enough).
- ⊕ Chapter 4 is the heart of the book; it discusses what it means to see college ministry as missions.
- ⊕ Chapter 5 looks at *why* we should use means for college ministry, followed by addressing some frequent concerns in Chapter 6.
- ⊕ Two special chapters bring the book to a close. "Orienting" provides a conclusion to the main book and a vision for why this is so important. Then the

lengthy Epilogue provides a road map forward, with specific next steps for reaching the campus tribes better.

The unique buildings of the Engineers of MIT (main picture), the geometric fountain of the Boilermakers of Purdue (left), and the “binary bridge” erected at Georgia Tech each point to the unique cultures of these technologically-minded tribes.



While there may be plenty of content in this book, none of my research or ideas mean much if they don't translate into better ministry on actual college campuses. So although I need to speak in broad, big-picture terms for much of this book, I en-

courage every reader to think *specifically*. Compare these thoughts to college ministry at your own nearby schools and in your own church. Think about your own experiences in college, as well as the college experience of people you know – like your friends, your children, and the high school graduates who grew up in your church.

As you do, consider whether we should indeed use greater means to reach collegians.



William Carey University commemorates the missions pioneer. Included on campus is a museum celebrating Carey's contributions not only to classic missions theory but also to social justice, Bible translation, science, and other fields. (The swan in the foreground is one of many scattered throughout Hattiesburg, Mississippi.)

2

exploring the campus tribes

In June 2007, I was contemplating what God was calling me to *next*.

I had just spent a year as the full-time college minister of a large church. When I had entered the church as its fourth college minister in four years, we had a small group of students, poor reputation on the campuses, and some behind-the-scenes ministry problems that students knew little about. I knew my work was cut out for me, and I knew I needed lots of God's brilliance and the support of His people.

During that year, we began to draw new students who were interested in taking ownership of this latest version of the church's ministry. We also reconnected with many students who had grown up in the church but had avoided the college ministry after high school. At the same time, we naturally lost some students who preferred the old ways, and we saw quite a few older students graduate – students who had somehow stayed connected since the last attendance surge a few years earlier.

I am very sure there are things we (and I) could have done better during that year. But we were fortunate enough to begin develop-



This road sign at the Navigators national headquarters highlights the broad field before us.

ing strong connections to local campuses, to find a core of committed students, and to begin student leadership training and student ministry teams. Meanwhile, the long-term vision for our ministry was being hashed out as quickly as possible, while I also attended to the weekly demands of

teaching, administration, and the duties that come with working on a church staff.

But even though we drew dozens of new students that year, the loss of other stu-

dents meant our closely watched Sunday School numbers appeared to be stagnant – or worse. Our church was also between pastors, and finances were tight. And like most church college ministries that aren't in college towns, ours wasn't exactly at the top of the priority list for the congregation.

So when church leaders decided to defund the College Minister position at the end of that school year, I was not too surprised. Although I recognized the advances we had made and saw a bright future for our ministry if we would continue to push forward, it was hard to blame the leaders for their decision. Who had trained them in the unique nuances of college ministry? What books or leaders proclaimed its importance? Then why would they evaluate college ministry any differently than youth ministry or the other Christian Education ministries in our church?



This protest over worker wages, held at the University of California Santa Cruz, was one of a few I encountered during the year. Others included a sit-in at the University of North Carolina and a tree-sitter at the University of California Berkeley. Social action of this kind has long been one unique aspect of the campus mission fields.

what came next

After years of ministering to college students and connecting with other ministry leaders, I already knew how unappreciated and misunderstood college ministry is among American Christians. This newest experience simply made the issues even more real to me, because I too had felt the sting of these problems.

I began to ask God if there might be some-

thing I could do right then, as a 28-year-old single guy, to help college ministry grow stronger as an entire “field of ministry.” I had noticed that Christians’ interest in college ministry seemed to be growing; could I somehow help stoke that fire?

It was my friend Steven who first threw out the idea of taking a road trip to see college ministry in action across the nation. I scoffed a bit at first, but the truth is, that suggestion wasn’t as out-of-the-blue as it might seem. My first solo, multi-state road trip had come a few years earlier after buying a large number of theology books on eBay. During that trek to California, I visited a few college campuses and thoroughly enjoyed my time on those mission fields. Ultimately, other road trips came up for a variety of reasons, and I began to fall in love with campuses across the country – and with the nationwide efforts to reach them.

Meanwhile, through both work as a correspondent for various Christian newspapers and attendance at numerous college ministry conferences, I had already interviewed and collaborated with college ministers in several different states. I knew that interviewing these ministers on a national scale could provide the field of college ministry with an enormous amount of wisdom.

So even though I first laughed off my friend's suggestion, I began to pray about taking a yearlong trek. I knew that Rick and Kay Warren had originally used a map to pray about where to plant a church; that seemed like a good idea as I prayed about my own next step. Soon that U.S. map on the wall of my apartment was dotted with all sorts of possible college ministry explorations... and through *lots* of prayer and thought and counsel, ultimately I did indeed believe God was leading me to take this trip.

Specific ministries to women and to men are two of the most common niche ministries within larger college ministries. Here, students at California Baptist University attend a special Women's Chapel; my (authorized) attendance was one of many unique moments on the yearlong road trip.



Knowing this was now a matter of obedience, I took out loans, packed up my stuff, and left Dallas in time for the fall semester – only three weeks after deciding to take the trip. I counted on God's provision for His call, and He certainly confirmed that call throughout the year. (At this point, generous Christians have helped with some of the cost, but a huge number of others helped through their hospitality along the

way. This included dozens of cups of coffee, meals in all kinds of local joints, and numerous beds, couches, and other sleeping spots!)



Hockey is a proud tradition for many campus tribes, but clearly this is a regional difference between colleges. Here, fans and cheerleaders root on the Huskies of Northeastern against the Catamount tribe from Vermont.

exploring college ministry

Across 370 days, I explored 181 campuses and visited 44 states, Washington, D.C., Canada, and Mexico.

As I made my way throughout the U.S., in some cases I spent several days or even weeks in a region, diving deeply into the college ministry situation at the various local campuses. Other times, I was in one location for only a short time. Though I entered the trip knowing some ministries and campuses I hoped to explore, I deliberately kept my plans open to adjust to new discoveries along the way. This made way for God's amazing Providence, and He indeed brought great surprises all year.

The most important activity during those twelve months was discussing college ministry with around 300 people. These men and women included traditional college ministers from all three "branches" of college ministry: campus-based ministry, church-based ministry, and Christian college chaplaincy. But I also got to meet with regional and national college ministry leaders, seminary professors of collegiate minis-

try, church leaders, Christian college personnel, student leaders, and many others who connect to this field of ministry. I encountered people from many Evangelical denominations, as well as plenty of non-denominational leaders and some leaders from outside Evangelical streams.

Incredibly, most of those meetings involved an hour-long (or longer) interview. I sought to learn about each of these ministers' contexts and the wisdom they have for the field of college ministry. Though I asked about several key issues on a regular basis, I had decided against confining my research to a standard set of topics. Instead, I wanted to "follow the story," allowing the unique nature of each college ministry to help guide my questions.

Besides those interviews, I also visited numerous college ministry activities during the year. I also attended several college min-

istry-related conferences and training events, visited 172 church worship services, and had many other adventures.

And of course, I spent lots of time on the campuses themselves, where college students live and work and play and learn. (Much can be learned in any “vision trip” to a campus mission field.)

a fruitful adventure

As you might imagine, I found myself in a wide variety of college ministry environments – including a beachside Bible study in Jacksonville, a college student conference in Vermont, and a college ministry service held in a former Wal-Mart in Ruston, Louisiana. I explored the various branches of college ministry by attending such activities as the large group meeting of Chi Alpha in snowy Fargo, a “Cereal Slosh” event in the college ministry of North Point Community Church, and New Student Orientation ac-

tivities at Moody Bible Institute. I also stumbled into several providential, unplanned adventures, like attending a Ravi Zacharias forum about finding purpose in the midst of tragedy at Virginia Tech, eating pizza and discussing ministry with the Orthodox Christian Fellowship of Ohio State, viewing the graduation ceremony of Focus on the Family Institute, driving several vanloads of local students around Amherst, Massachusetts, and describing the national college ministry scene in a staff meeting at Minneapolis's Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Those are just a few of the many experiences I had on the trip, but they provide a good picture of the breadth of this opportunity. For a complete list of every interview, ministry visit and other "exploration" from the trip, visit exploringcollegeministry.com/itinerary. And as I stated in the first chapter, I hope to share much more about this trip as God provides the opportunity.

But for now, in the chapters that follow, I present the key things I learned from this far-reaching experience.



The Quarter System, which splits the academic calendar into four sections (instead of the usual two semesters and summer) has been adopted by some colleges, including Louisiana Tech. The shortened timeframe and greater number of “start-up” and “wind-down” periods affect the college ministries in these contexts.

Thanks for reading the beginning of *Reaching the Campus Tribes*!

As the book continues, I describe what I found during my yearlong road trip...

To continue reading the book, go to reachingthecampustribes.com/mobile.

The next pages contain important info from the back pages of the full book.

The Back Pages

About the author. Benson Hines started serving college students in 1999, while attending Texas A&M University, and he has been involved in college ministry ever since. Following the research trip (August 2007 to August 2008), he continues to research college ministry, meets regularly with college ministry leaders, speaks to college ministers and college students, and blogs daily about college ministry at www.exploringcollegeministry.com. Ben received his M.A. in Theology from seminary.

The book site. Updates, new versions, corrections, and other goodies are located at the book site: www.reachingthecampustribes.com.

Acknowledgments. This trip could not have been accomplished without the hundreds of amazing people who gave their time, hospitality, finances, and wisdom during the trip. A special thanks also goes to the several “editors” who gave great suggestions and helped this book become much better. And I praise the God who gave me an amazing adventure and the opportunity to see my heroes in action as they labor among the beautiful campus

tribes.

Provision. I took the yearlong research trip believing God was calling me to it, and that call has been confirmed as I've seen the impact this kind of exploration has for college ministers and for college ministry as a field. But I'm still watching to see how God wants to provide the money the trip required. Finances will also help me continue to serve college ministers in other ways. If this book or my research is helpful to you, donations are always appreciated! Or, if you know someone who might like to invest in the future of college ministry in this way, please consider passing on this need. (All my contact information can be [found here](#).)

Why an ebook? Why did I put this in a free ebook rather than talking to publishers about a standard book? Three considerations were key: availability, time, and creativity. I wanted this book to be as widely available as possible, so if cost might be a barrier to it spreading among Christians... then free is better! Also, I wanted to pass along these findings as soon as possible, and a self-published format allowed for that. Finally, I loved the opportunity to present pictures and

other contents that might not make it into a traditional, “formal” book.

I do hope to publish (in standard book form) other findings and adventures. If you’d like to help that happen, one of the best things you can do is share this ebook with others! As more people value college ministry and want to learn about it (especially those outside of college ministry – like pastors and other Christian leaders), we’ll *all* have more chances to share our ideas.

Joining the cause. The best way to receive updates is to join the “[Exploring College Ministry with Benson](#)” Facebook Group. If you need to receive updates via email instead, let me know and I’ll add you to the list! Either way, I won’t spam you... you’ll get *occasional* updates as this project continues, as I take more trips, and when there are ways you might be able to join in! We’re all in this together, and we really can change the world as we help college ministry become better valued and better practiced.

Specific help. Let me know if there’s any way I can help as you think about college ministry in your context. I’m always glad to answer questions

or point people to resources. Be sure to check out my daily blog about college ministry, too, at exploringcollegeministry.com. Certainly, I'm also open to paid opportunities; if you'd like to ask about speaking, consulting, ministry work, or other jobs, all my contact information can be [found here](#).

The lurking X. At nearly every campus, I took a picture of a red "X" (as in, "X marks the spot.") A few of those pictures ended up in this book, and the particularly observant might find them! Through the year, the X also got filled with stickers from the various campuses, so be sure to check it out sometime. It's pretty neat.

The facts. Clearly, college ministries and campuses themselves can change rapidly. All facts in this book are included as reported to me during the trip (between August 2007 and August 2008). Please let me know about any inaccuracies. All photos were taken by Benson Hines on the year-long trip. A complete itinerary of the trip's activities can be found at www.exploringcollegeministry.com/itinerary.

The cover and final page tribal photos. The

cover pictures are from the following tribes, beginning with the top left: Row 1—University of Wyoming, Stanford University, Judson University, University of Oregon; Row 2—Saint Louis University, Furman University (larger middle picture), Houston Baptist University; Row 3—Vanderbilt University, University of California Berkeley; Row 4—University of Kentucky, Connecticut College, Multnomah University, University of California Santa Cruz.

The pictures on the final page, beginning at top left: Row 1—University of Illinois, Oral Robert University, New Mexico State University, University of Colorado; Row 2—Reed College, Colorado School of Mines, Indiana University, Pepperdine University; Row 3—University of Nebraska, University of Louisville, Minnesota State University Moorhead, California Baptist University; Row 4—George Washington University, Furman University, University of Arizona, Baylor University.