

The Influence of Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment on Rule Adherence Among Tertiary Students

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Abstract

This study examines the predictive influence of spiritual formation and institutional commitment on tertiary students' rule adherence in a selected Catholic institution in Davao City. Using a predictive-correlational research design, findings reveal that students demonstrate very high levels of spiritual formation and rule adherence, while institutional commitment is rated high. Correlation analysis indicates that both spiritual formation ($r = .711$, $p < .05$) and institutional commitment ($r = .562$, $p < .05$) have significant positive relationships with rule adherence, with spiritual formation showing the stronger association. Multiple regression analysis further confirms that both independent variables significantly predict rule adherence and jointly account for 53.7% of its variance ($R^2 = .537$, $F = 144$, $p < .05$). Among the predictors, spiritual formation emerges as the strongest predictor, followed by institutional commitment. These findings indicate that students with stronger spiritual values and deeper institutional attachment are more likely to comply with institutional policies, demonstrate academic integrity, respect authority, and participate responsibly in institutional activities. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study highlights how internal moral development and institutional belonging shape compliance behavior. The study suggests that higher education institutions can sustain robust spiritual formation programs and enhance institutional engagement strategies to promote discipline, ethical conduct, and sustained rule adherence among tertiary students.

Keywords: spiritual formation, institutional commitment, rule adherence, tertiary students, theory of planned behavior.

1. Introduction

The Problem and Its Settings

Poor adherence to institutional rules and academic codes among tertiary students emerged as a significant global concern in higher education, challenging universities' ability to create orderly, ethical, and productive learning environments. Studies indicated that academic misconduct, including plagiarism and cheating, remained a recurring issue in universities, reflecting ongoing challenges in maintaining academic integrity in higher education (Sozon et al., 2024) [52]. This persistent problem undermines the moral foundations of academic work and the credibility of qualifications awarded to graduates. High-stakes

cross-institutional analyses revealed that instances of hidden academic dishonesty are strongly correlated with long-term unethical professional conduct, which can ultimately degrade public trust and institutional performance when these individuals occupy leadership positions (Wang, 2026) [56].

To understand the root cause of these behaviors, researchers have long examined the psychological factors that underlie a student's decision to cheat or comply. Historical meta-analyses on student behavior indicated that academic dishonesty is rarely a random act; rather, it is strongly predicted by an individual's moral development and perception of academic stress (Whitley, 1998) [63]. Moreover, attitudes toward rule conditionality have been found to positively predict academic dishonesty, suggesting that students who perceive rules as conditional or contingent on circumstances are more likely to engage in misconduct, further underscoring the persistent challenge of promoting rule adherence in university settings (Wang & Zhang, 2022) [61]. When students began to view rules as flexible or situational, their internal behavioral boundaries degraded, making them highly susceptible to peer shortcuts and policy deviations (Murdock & Anderman, 2006) [40].

On a global scale, this pattern of poor rule adherence was evident across diverse international higher education systems. In New Zealand (Aotearoa), approximately two-thirds of undergraduate students were reported to engage in at least one form of academic misconduct, indicating a significant issue of rule non-adherence at the tertiary level influenced by perceptions of institutional climate and peer norms (Thomas et al., 2024) [58]. Likewise, research from Turkey examined students' attitudes and documented incidences of academic violations, demonstrating widespread engagement in rule-breaking in both online and traditional course settings (Çelik & Lancaster, 2021) [13].

Parallel global investigations have highlighted that the increasing accessibility of digital content and the rapid advancement of algorithmic technologies have outpaced users' understanding of responsible online behavior, creating ethical dilemmas related to information accuracy, digital responsibility, transparency, and content integrity (Gombar & Boban, 2026; Aljamal et al., 2026) [1, 24]. This digital transformation was particularly evident in modern flexible or hybrid classrooms, where a lack of physical supervision often tests students' personal commitment to honesty (Eshet et al., 2023) [19]. Similarly, studies in South Africa and other countries have identified behavioral patterns among university students that reflect a widening gap between policy expectations and actual compliance with academic and institutional rules (Bozok & Lancaster, 2021; Okolo et al., 2025) [10, 44].

In the Philippine context, poor adherence to academic and institutional rules among college students has been increasingly documented as a problematic reality that undermines the integrity of local higher education. Investigations into academic dishonesty within Philippine tertiary institutions have found substantive instances of cheating and policy non-compliance during online and hybrid learning environments, revealing that many students engage in academic rule violations even when aware of formal institutional codes (Lichauco et al., 2023) [35]. Furthermore, higher education institutions in the Philippines continue to face challenges related to governance, quality assurance, and the consistent implementation of institutional policies despite existing regulatory frameworks and reform initiatives. Structural issues such as disparities in institutional quality, limited resources, and governance concerns may affect the effective enforcement of academic standards and student accountability mechanisms

(Bustos-Orosa & Symaco, 2024) [12]. Additional local studies indicate that while some student groups complied with superficial university policies, such as appearance and basic discipline, broader patterns of non-adherence to core academic standards persist as an issue requiring deeper institutional attention (Quiñal Jr. et al., 2024) [48].

The consequences of poor rule adherence among tertiary students were far-reaching, compromising the validity of assessments, eroding trust, and leading to declining educational standards (Okolo et al., 2025) [44]. Sustainable development frameworks emphasize that ethical decision-making processes within universities do not merely secure functional order but also serve as primary vehicles for promoting justice, equity, and responsible societal outcomes under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ates, 2026) [6]. However, while the existing literature thoroughly documented the prevalence and types of student misconduct, a critical research gap remained regarding the internal, value-driven mechanisms that drive compliance. Specifically, few studies have investigated how holistic student development, such as spiritual formation and a student's psychological bond with their school, namely, institutional commitment, interacts to foster genuine, intrinsic rule adherence. This study was conducted to address this gap and to provide universities with proactive strategies for character development.

2. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have meaningful implications for Catholic and other higher education institutions, offering critical insights for school administrators, guidance counselors, students, and future researchers in designing educational strategies that promote consistent rule adherence. Specifically, this research aligns directly with Holy Cross of Davao College's (HCDC) steadfast commitment to academic excellence, holistic formation, and community engagement. By exploring the dynamics of student compliance, the findings provide administrators, faculty, and staff with a valuable reference to refine institutional policies, enhance student services, and implement character-driven initiatives that reflect HCDC's core Christian values. Ultimately, by contributing to the practical realization of the institution's Vision and Mission, this study strengthens HCDC's efforts to cultivate responsible citizenship, promote continuous operational improvement, and achieve meaningful societal impact.

Furthermore, this study adds to its global significance by aligning with key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most notably SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By investigating how spiritual formation and institutional commitment predict rule-following behaviors among tertiary students, the study actively contributes to advancing values-based education and creating peaceful, well-regulated learning environments. Additionally, the research indirectly supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by recognizing that robust spiritual and institutional support frameworks serve a dual purpose: they not only foster disciplinary compliance but also enhance learners' emotional well-being and psychological stability. This holistic focus closely aligns with classic developmental literature, which shows that active involvement in campus organizations and institutional programs significantly enhances students' critical thinking skills and their natural inclination toward policy compliance (Gellin, 2003). Through these combined contributions, the study offers an integrated perspective that reinforces holistic student development and empowers educational communities to build ethical, orderly, and transformative environments.

3. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to examine the significance of spiritual formation and institutional commitment as predictors of tertiary students' rule adherence.

Specifically, this study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the level of spiritual formation of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 personal faith and practices
 - 1.2 spiritual maturity;
 - 1.3 involvement in religious activities; and
 - 1.4 Involvement in religious education subjects?
2. Determine the status of institutional commitment of the respondents in terms of:
 - 2.1 affective commitment;
 - 2.2 normative commitment; and
 - 2.3 continuance commitment?
3. Determine the level of rule adherence of the respondents in terms of:
 - 3.1 compliance with policies;
 - 3.2 respect for authority;
 - 3.3 academic integrity;
 - 3.4. participation in institutional activities; and
 - 3.5 punctuality and attendance?
4. Determine the significance of relationship of spiritual formation and institutional commitment with tertiary students' rule adherence.
5. Determine the significance of influence of spiritual formation and institutional commitment on tertiary students' rule adherence.

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

H01: There is no significant relationship between spiritual formation and rule adherence among students.

H02: There is no significant relationship between institutional commitment and rule adherence among students.

H03: Spiritual formation does not significantly influence rule adherence among students.

H04: Institutional commitment does not significantly influence rule adherence among students.

4. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which explains that human behavior is primarily predicted by behavioral intention, influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude refers to an individual's evaluation of a behavior; in this study, students who view institutional rules as promoting discipline, moral integrity, harmony, and personal growth are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward compliance. Subjective norm refers to perceived social pressure from peers, faculty, administrators, and the academic community; when students perceive strong institutional expectations for discipline and compliance, they are more likely to internalize these norms. Perceived behavioral control refers to students' perceived ability to perform the behavior, strengthened through clear policies, guidance, and institutional support, reflecting their capacity to comply despite challenges. Overall, TPB explains behavior as shaped by rational evaluation, social influence, and perceived capability rather than mere obedience.

Extensive theoretical updates to the TPB model confirm its predictive power, demonstrating that behavioral intentions remain highly stable when supported by deep personal values (Ajzen, 2011) [3]. When applied specifically to academic environments, researchers have successfully used TPB to map and predict dishonest behavior, demonstrating that a student's personal attitude toward honesty is heavily influenced by their internal ethical standard (Beck & Ajzen, 1991) [8].

Furthermore, extended compliance models demonstrate that incorporating external environmental variables, such as institutional culture and organizational support structures, significantly enhances the model's predictive power, directly showing how a supportive campus environment reinforces a student's intention to follow institutional codes (Donald et al., 2014; Stone et al., 2010) [18, 54].

In the present study, "The Influence of Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment on Rule Adherence Among Tertiary Students," TPB was used to explain how these factors influence compliance behavior. Spiritual formation primarily shapes attitude toward rule adherence by fostering moral values, ethical responsibility, self-discipline, and the view that rules support personal and communal growth, while also enhancing perceived behavioral control through self-regulation. This aligned the foundational character frameworks, which showed that when faith-based institutions actively integrate moral values into student life, they create highly favorable compliance attitudes that help students resist unethical shortcuts (Glanzer et al., 2017) [23].

Meanwhile, institutional commitment primarily influences subjective norms and attitudes by strengthening students' sense of belonging, identification with institutional values, and internalization of expected conduct. Within TPB, these factors shape attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which, in turn, form behavioral intentions that lead to actual rule adherence, reflected in compliance with policies, respect for authority, academic integrity, participation in institutional activities, and punctuality and attendance. Thus, TPB provides a clear framework for understanding how internal and external factors influence student behavior through cognitive, social, and control processes (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011) [4].

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model, highlighting the relationships among the two predictive variables, Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment, and the criterion variable, Rule Adherence. In this study, Spiritual Formation is reflected by the Spiritual Formation Program, the Influence of the Spiritual Formation Program, and the Suggestions of Other Spiritual Formation Programs. The Institutional Commitment variable is demonstrated by Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, and Continuance Commitment. Lastly, the criterion variable, Rule Adherence, is exemplified by Compliance with Policies, Respect for Authority, Academic Integrity, Participation in Institutional Activities, and Punctuality and Attendance.

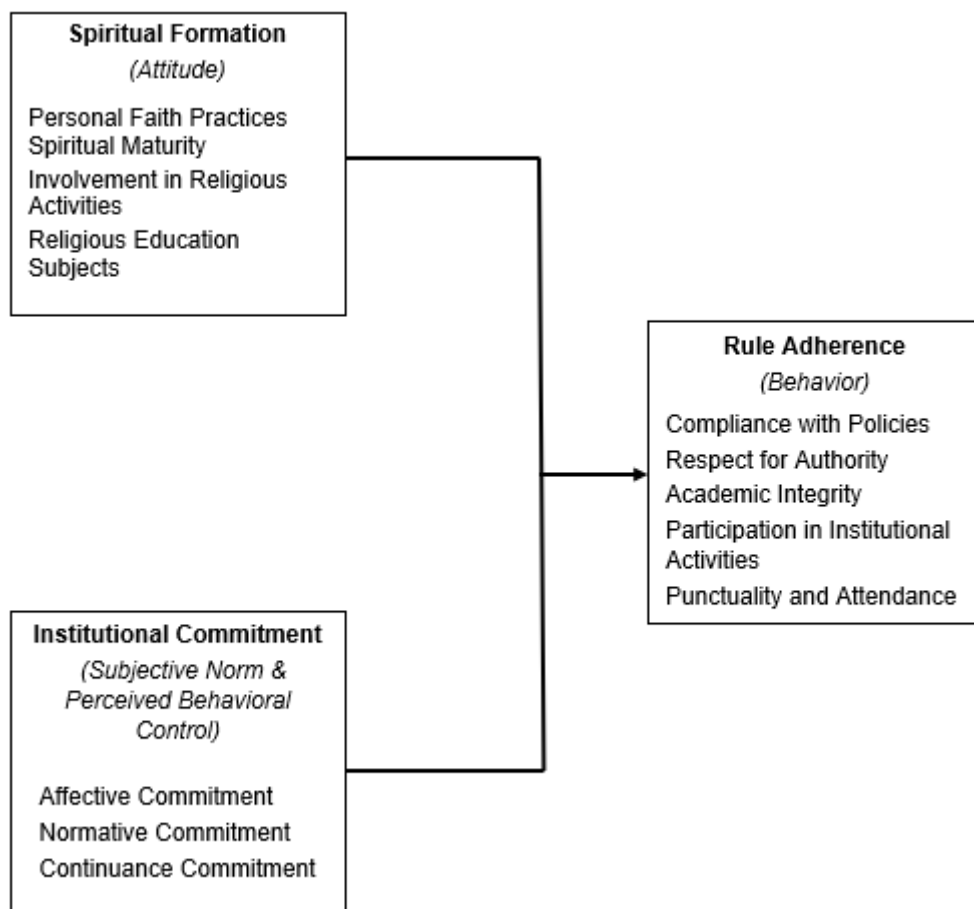


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Method

In this chapter, I presented the methods and processes I used to conduct the study, including the research design, research locale, research respondents, research instruments, data-gathering procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

5. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, a structured method commonly used in disciplines such as the social sciences, psychology, economics, and education. Quantitative research centers on collecting and analyzing numerical data to systematically identify statistical patterns, address research questions, and test formalized hypotheses (Sekar & Bhuvaneshwari, 2024) [51]. Specifically, a predictive-correlational approach was used to examine the direct influence of spiritual formation and institutional commitment on rule adherence among tertiary students (Zila-Velasque, 2024) [66]. This structural design enabled the researcher to isolate distinct variables, assess internal statistical variances, and predict institutional compliance outcomes using robust statistical tools, including correlation and multiple linear regression. Findings generated from this empirical design provide actionable insights into how internal value structures and organizational bonds shape students' adherence to school codes, thereby guiding administrative strategies that promote ethical behavior and proactive character development within higher education environments.

6. Research Locale

The study was conducted in a selected Catholic tertiary institution in Davao City. This institution was chosen because it upholds a strong tradition of spiritual formation and values-based education, fostering students' moral growth and commitment to institutional values. Focusing on a single institution allows for a more context-specific examination of how students' spiritual formation and institutional commitment influence their adherence to the rules. Limiting the study to one setting ensures consistency in institutional culture.

7. Sample and Sampling

This study focused exclusively on tertiary students from a selected Catholic institution in Davao City who were actively enrolled and participating in the institution's academic and extracurricular programs. Given the students' varied academic schedules and differing departmental commitments, a stratified random sampling technique was utilized to select the final respondents. Stratified random sampling is a vital probability-based method in which a heterogeneous parent population is segmented into mutually exclusive subgroups, or strata, from which random samples are drawn to optimize statistical precision and minimize error variance (Bisht, 2024).

The study's target population comprised 8,702 students distributed across seven distinct colleges and schools. Using the Raosoft sample size calculator set to a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, an idealized baseline sample size of 368 students was determined. To ensure an unbiased and proportionally representative sample, the study used a proportional stratified random sampling technique, in which each college contributed a proportionate number of respondents relative to its total student enrollment.

The total population was distributed across the following administrative strata: the School of Teacher Education contributed 38 respondents from a stratum of 905 students; the School of Business Management

Education contributed 125 from 2,948; the College of Maritime Education contributed 29 from 681; the College of Humanities, Social Communication and Sciences contributed 56 from 1,325; the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management contributed 52 from 1,239; the College of Engineering and Technology contributed 44 from 1,042; and the College of Criminal Justice Education contributed 24 from 562. This proportional allocation ensured that all specialized fields of study were adequately represented, significantly lowered sampling bias, and maintained the strict integrity of the sampling distribution. During the data-gathering phase, 251 fully completed questionnaires were collected, yielding a valid response rate of 68.2%. These 251 valid submissions served as the clean analytical baseline for the descriptive statistical analyses.

8. Research Instrument

To gather data for this study, a structured, self-constructed research instrument was employed to measure the key variables: Spiritual Formation, Institutional Commitment, and Tertiary Students' Rule Adherence. The instrument was designed to accurately and objectively capture relevant student perceptions, in alignment with the Theory of Planned Behavior. Validation and reliability steps were conducted to guarantee clarity, structural relevance, and alignment with the institutional context of the selected higher education institution.

Spiritual Formation (IV1). This variable was measured using a self-constructed Likert-scale questionnaire designed to assess the extent of students' spiritual development. It included items distributed across four core dimensions: Personal Faith Practices, Spiritual Maturity, Involvement in Religious Activities, and Religious Education Subjects. The items were formulated to reflect the practical application of values-based instruction, spiritual programs, and moral benchmarks specific to faith-based higher education contexts, and were evaluated using a four-level mean interpretation framework to determine baseline alignment.

Institutional Commitment (IV2). This was assessed using a self-constructed Likert-scale questionnaire reflecting three organizational dimensions: Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, and Continuance Commitment. To ensure the conceptual validity of the items within a tertiary education framework, the sub-scales were structured based on the cross-cultural commitment indicators validated by Meyer et al. (2012). Additionally, the phrasing of the items measuring student institutional involvement and organizational expectations was guided by the higher education citizenship paradigms established by Nguyen et al. (2022), ensuring that the questionnaire accurately captured the psychological and structural bonds connecting students to the university.

Rule Adherence (DV). This variable was measured using a self-constructed Likert-scale questionnaire that examined five behavioral dimensions: Compliance with Policies, Respect for Authority, Academic Integrity, Participation in Institutional Activities, and Punctuality and Attendance. The practical indicators, situational compliance items, and definitions of institutional rules in the questionnaire were adapted from the baseline classroom management frameworks of Nguyen et al. (2022) and Kumari (2025), and from the foundational safety and structural environment concepts outlined by Gauth (n.d.). This

structural mapping ensured that the survey items properly evaluated everyday campus discipline, policy conformity, and core academic accountability.

Spiritual Formation:

Level	Mean Interval	Descriptive Level	Descriptive Interpretation
4	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Resilience is excellent.
3	3.41 - 4.20	Agree	Resilience is very good.
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree	Resilience is poor.
1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Resilience is very poor.

Institutional Commitment

Level	Mean Interval	Descriptive Level	Descriptive Interpretation
4	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Institutional Commitment is excellent.
3	3.41 - 4.20	Agree	Institutional Commitment is very good.
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree	Institutional Commitment is poor.
1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Institutional Commitment is very poor.

Rule Adherence:

Level	Mean Interval	Descriptive Level	Descriptive Interpretation
4	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Rule Adherence is excellent.
3	3.41 - 4.20	Agree	Rule Adherence is very good.
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree	Rule Adherence is poor.
1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Rule Adherence is very poor.

Data Gathering

Asking for Permission to Conduct the Study. The researcher initiated data collection by obtaining formal ethical clearance from the institutional ethics review committee, namely the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE). Following the issuance of official ethical clearance, necessary endorsement letters were obtained from the Graduate School, signed jointly by the research adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School. A comprehensive request packet was subsequently submitted to the Office of the School President of the selected Catholic institution to formalize permission for student access.

Data Collection and Pilot Testing. Upon receiving executive approval from the president's office, the researcher initiated a targeted pilot test using a small validation sample of students who shared identical demographic characteristics but were completely excluded from the final research cohort. This pilot run allowed the researcher to evaluate the tool's internal linguistic clarity, structural reliability, and contextual appropriateness. Following successful item optimization, the full administration protocols were initiated. Administration and Retrieval of Questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed in dual formats, utilizing both printed hard copies and digital Google Forms to accommodate varied student access points.

The researcher provided clear, unbiased instructions for completing the items honestly. All data collection was conducted under strict compliance with privacy standards. Upon completion, the questionnaires were securely collected, organized, and prepared for processing.

Tabulation and Organization of Data. The raw data points were systematically encoded into Microsoft Excel for tracking and cleaning. The data fields were categorized by variable blocks to ensure logical indexing. Proper data cleaning and sorting formed the mathematical base for the final analysis. Once organized, the database was transferred to a statistician for formal data processing.

Data Analysis

To process the data, several specialized statistical operations were executed using standard data software. Each chosen statistical technique was mapped to the study's specific research objectives:

Mean. Calculated to determine the baseline descriptive profiles, specifically evaluating the overall levels of student spiritual formation, institutional commitment, and rule adherence.

Standard Deviation. Applied as the primary index of dispersion to gauge dataset variability and evaluate how closely individual scores cluster around the sample mean.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). Utilized to map the direct linear relationships and check for the presence of significant bivariate connections between the variables.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. Employed as the main inferential model to calculate predictive coefficients (B), check overall model significance (F), and assess how the two independent variables combine to influence rule adherence (R^2).

On measuring the strength of the correlation. In measuring the correlation, this study used the standard scheme to determine the strength and significance of the correlation. For the R-value, the following scheme was used:

Table 4 Correlation Strength Interpretation Scale

Computed r	Descriptive Interpretation
+/- 1.00	Perfect correlation
Between +/- 0.75 - +/- 0.99	High correlation
Between +/- 0.51 - +/- 0.74	Moderately high correlation
Between +/- 0.31 - +/- 0.50	Moderately low correlation
Between +/- 0.01 - +/- 0.30	Low correlation
0.00	No correlation

9. Ethical Consideration

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect the rights, safety, and psychological well-being of all respondents throughout the research lifecycle. Official institutional review and approval were secured via the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) prior to field contact (Bustos-Orosa & Symaco, 2026). All target participants were provided an Informed Consent Form detailing the research goals, institutional permissions, and data privacy protections. Surveys were processed without capturing any personally identifiable information (PII) to guarantee participant anonymity.

To minimize potential psychological discomfort, the questionnaires used neutral, non-judgmental language, framing topics such as spiritual habits and rule adherence as standard elements of student life rather than individual deficiencies. Participants were granted full preview access to the survey items prior to consenting. Furthermore, data collection enabled students to complete the surveys at their own pace in a comfortable setting, without disrupting their academic tasks. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without administrative penalty, thereby ensuring full research autonomy.

10. Results

In this chapter, the researcher presented the data obtained from the study's respondents. The data on spiritual formation, institutional commitment, and rule adherence among tertiary students were analyzed and interpreted based on the findings. Discussions of the topics are arranged in the following order: the level of spiritual formation, institutional commitment, and rule adherence of tertiary students; the significance of the relationship between spiritual formation and institutional commitment on the rule adherence of tertiary students; and the significance of the influence of spiritual formation and institutional commitment on the rule adherence of tertiary students.

Level of Spiritual Formation, Institutional Commitment, and Rule Adherence of Tertiary Students

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the three major variables of the study, based on a sample of 251 respondents who returned completed survey forms. The standard deviations across all dimensions are less than 1.0, indicating a high level of consistency and clustering in tertiary students' responses around the calculated means.

Table 1 Descriptive Presentation

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation
Spiritual Formation (IV1)	251	3.31	0.42	Very High
Spiritual Formation Program		3.13	0.54	High
Influence of Spiritual Formation Program		3.39	0.43	Very High
Suggestions of Other Spiritual Formation Programs		3.42	0.46	Very High

Institutional Commitment (IV2)	251	2.99	0.48	High
Affective Commitment		3.01	0.51	High
Continuance Commitment		3.01	0.52	High
Normative Commitment		2.97	0.56	High
Rule Adherence (DV)	251	3.39	0.42	Very High
Compliance with Policies		3.43	0.48	Very High
Respect for Authority		3.50	0.47	Very High
Academic Integrity		3.39	0.50	Very High
Participation in Institutional Activities		3.24	0.56	High

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the three major variables of the study: Spiritual Formation, Institutional Commitment, and Rule Adherence among tertiary students. The descriptive analysis shows that Spiritual Formation (mean = 3.31, SD = 0.42) is rated very high, highlighting its strong role in shaping student values and behaviors. Within its dimensions, the Spiritual Formation Program itself is rated high (mean = 3.13, SD = 0.54), suggesting moderate appreciation of its structure. Meanwhile, both the Influence of the Program (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.43) and Suggestions for Other Programs (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.46) are very high, reflecting strong perceived benefits and openness to further enrichment. The relatively low standard deviations across these indicators indicate consistent responses among respondents.

For Institutional Commitment (mean = 2.99, SD = 0.48), the overall rating is high, showing that respondents generally feel attached to their institution, though not as strongly as with spiritual formation. Its dimensions, Affective Commitment (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.51), Continuance Commitment (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.52), and Normative Commitment (mean = 2.97, SD = 0.56) all fall within the high range. This result indicates that students recognize emotional ties, perceived necessity, and a moral obligation to remain committed, but the slightly higher standard deviations compared to those in spiritual formation imply more varied perceptions among respondents.

Finally, Rule Adherence (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.42) is rated very high, signifying strong compliance with institutional norms. Dimensions such as Compliance with Policies (mean = 3.43, SD = 0.48), Respect for Authority (mean = 3.50, SD = 0.47), Academic Integrity (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.50), and Punctuality and Attendance (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.48) all scored very high, reflecting consistent discipline and responsibility among respondents. Only Participation in Institutional Activities (mean = 3.24, SD = 0.56) was rated high, indicating slightly less engagement in extracurricular or institutional events compared to adherence to rules. Overall, the results highlight that while institutional commitment is moderately strong, spiritual formation and rule adherence are more deeply embedded in student behavior.

Table 2 presents the Test of Relationship between Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment on Rule Adherence of Tertiary Students

Table 2 Correlation Table

	Rule Adherence (DV)			
	R-value	p-value	Decision on Ho@ 0.05 level of significance	Interpretation
Spiritual Formation	0.711	0.000	Reject Ho1	Significant Positive Moderately High Correlation
Institutional Commitment	0.562	0.000	Reject Ho2	Significant Positive Moderately High Correlation

The correlation analysis demonstrates that Spiritual Formation and Rule Adherence are strongly related, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.711$ and a p -value = 0.000. Since the p -value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. This indicates a significant, moderately high positive correlation, meaning that higher levels of spiritual formation are consistently associated with stronger adherence to institutional rules. The strength of the correlation suggests that spiritual formation plays a substantial role in shaping disciplined and value-driven student behavior.

Similarly, the relationship between Institutional Commitment and Rule Adherence shows a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.562$ with a p -value = 0.000. Again, the p -value being below 0.05 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho2). This result confirms a significant, moderately high positive correlation, indicating that students who demonstrate stronger emotional, normative, or continuance commitment to their institution also tend to adhere more consistently to rules and policies. Although the correlation is slightly weaker than that of spiritual formation, it still reflects a meaningful connection between institutional loyalty and disciplined conduct.

Overall, the findings highlight that both spiritual formation and institutional commitment significantly contribute to rule adherence, with spiritual formation showing a stronger association. These results emphasize that values-based education and institutional attachment are critical drivers of compliance and integrity within the academic environment. The moderately high correlations suggest that fostering spiritual development and strengthening institutional commitment can reinforce students' respect for authority, compliance with policies, and overall responsible participation in institutional life.

Table 3 shows the degree of contribution of spiritual formation and institutional commitment to tertiary students' rule adherence.

Table 3 Regression Table

	Rule Adherence (DV)	
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p value	Decision on H0	Interpretation
Constant	0.890	0.149		5.99	0.000		
Spiritual Formation (IV1)	0.581	0.054	0.581	10.85	0.000	Reject Ho3	Significant
Institutional Commitment (IV2)	0.193	0.047	0.220	4.10	0.000	Reject Ho4	Significant
Time Management (IV3)	.313	.067	.298	4.711	.000	Reject	Significant

Model Summary:

$R = 0.732$; $R^2 = 0.537$; *Adjusted R*² = 0.533; *F-value* = 144; *p-value* = 0.000

Level of Significance: 0.05

Decision Rule: Reject Ho if $p < 0.05$

The regression analysis indicates that Spiritual Formation has a strong and significant effect on Rule Adherence, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.581$, standard error of 0.054, and standardized beta of 0.581. The corresponding t -value = 10.85 and p -value = 0.000 lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho3). This result means that higher levels of spiritual formation significantly contribute to greater adherence to institutional rules, reflecting the importance of values-based formation in shaping disciplined student behavior. The relatively small standard error also suggests stability and reliability in this estimate.

In addition, Institutional Commitment also makes a significant contribution to Rule Adherence, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.193$, a standard error of 0.047, and a standardized beta of 0.220. The t -value = 4.10 and p -value = 0.000 confirm the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho4). Although the effect size is smaller than that for spiritual formation, institutional commitment still plays a meaningful role in reinforcing compliance with policies, respect for authority, and academic integrity. This suggests that students who feel emotionally and morally connected to their institution are more likely to exhibit responsible, rule-abiding conduct.

The overall model summary further validates these findings, with $R = 0.732$, $R^2 = 0.537$, and *Adjusted R*² = 0.533, indicating that about 53.7% of the variance in rule adherence is explained by the combined effects of spiritual formation and institutional commitment. The F -value of 144 and p -value of 0.000 confirm the model's statistical significance. Thus, the regression equation can be expressed as: Rule Adherence = $0.890 + 0.581(\text{Spiritual Formation}) + 0.193(\text{Institutional Commitment})$. This equation shows that both predictors significantly contribute to rule adherence, with spiritual formation exerting the stronger effect, underscoring its central role in fostering disciplined, value-oriented student behavior.

11. Summary of Findings

Based on the statistical treatments applied to the data, the findings of this study are summarized as follows:

Descriptive Baseline Status. The student body demonstrates a Very High baseline level of Spiritual Formation (Mean = 3.31) and Rule Adherence (Mean = 3.39), paired with a High overall level of Institutional Commitment (Mean = 2.99). These indicators suggest a highly disciplined, values-receptive student base that responds robustly to formative programming, though their psychological and emotional bonds to the school organization have room for further administrative cultivation.

Bivariate Association Trends. Bivariate correlation tests reveal that both independent variables share a significant, positive, moderately high relationship with Rule Adherence. Spiritual Formation yields a stronger direct linear link ($r = 0.711$, $p = 0.000$) than Institutional Commitment ($r = 0.562$, $p = 0.000$). These trends confirm that as internal spiritual practices and institutional loyalty improve, student compliance with administrative and behavioral policies rises concurrently.

Multivariate Predictive Power. The multivariate regression model confirms that Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment are statistically significant joint predictors of Rule Adherence ($F = 144$, $p = 0.000$), accounting for 53.7% of the total behavioral variance ($R^2 = 0.537$). Within this predictive framework, Spiritual Formation emerges as the dominant driver ($\beta = 0.581$, $t = 10.85$) compared to Institutional Commitment ($\beta = 0.220$, $t = 4.10$), proving that internal, character-driven moral values are significantly more effective at securing policy compliance than external institutional bonds.

12. Discussions

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the empirical findings generated by this study. The analysis contextualizes the results within existing global and local academic literature, examines their alignment with the Theory of Planned Behavior's underlying psychological framework, and details the theoretical and practical implications of the predictive models. Specifically, this study examined the operational impacts of spiritual formation and institutional commitment as simultaneous predictors of rule adherence among tertiary students within a selected Catholic higher education institution in Davao City. The baseline descriptive profiling revealed a remarkably high level of overall cohesion and consistency across the three primary constructs evaluated in the study. Spiritual Formation emerged at a Very High descriptive level, indicating that respondents experience substantial, systemic exposure to spiritual development initiatives that effectively shape their core moral compass, internal ethical frameworks, and behavioral discipline. This outcome underscores that values-based education is deeply embedded within the student experience, functioning as a primary cognitive anchor for moral reasoning.

An examination of the baseline descriptive profiling reveals a striking level of consistency across all three main variables. Spiritual Formation achieved a Very High descriptive level, indicating that the student respondents experience deep, systemic exposure to spiritual programs on campus. These initiatives effectively shape a core moral compass, build internal ethical frameworks, and anchor personal discipline.

The data demonstrates that values-based education is not merely a secondary concept at the institution; rather, it is deeply woven into the everyday student experience and acts as a primary psychological anchor for moral reasoning. This outcome closely aligns with historical college development studies, which show that when an institution focuses heavily on inner character development, it directly strengthens a student's ethical values and personal accountability (Astin et al., 2011) [5].

Recent peer-reviewed studies strongly support this trend, showing that spiritual programming in faith-based colleges actively builds moral consciousness and a sense of responsibility. For example, Meng (2025) used quantitative modeling to track college student behavior and found that internal spiritual motivation is a primary driver of character development and ethical choices. That investigation pointed out that weaving structured moral programming into the core curriculum builds strong internal behavioral boundaries and self-control. Along the same lines, Gea et al. (2025) noted that a comprehensive religious education serves as a holistic tool for stabilizing a student's character and spiritual maturity. In that study, this type of character training led to a significant reduction in disciplinary issues and encouraged students to comply more closely with campus guidelines. This matching trend emphasizes that when young adults find a safe space to explore meaning, purpose, and faith during their university years, they naturally develop a stronger, more disciplined approach to their daily behavior (Parks, 2000) [47].

At the same time, Institutional Commitment scored a High overall descriptive level. This means that tertiary students generally feel emotionally connected, morally obligated, and practically attached to their university community. The data implies that students understand their roles as members of the organization. They are genuinely willing to maintain their connection to the school by following its behavioral standards. This outcome aligns with the institutional models developed by Oducado (2024), who showed that when tertiary students form a genuine emotional and psychological bond with their campus, they experience much higher academic satisfaction, show lower intentions to drop out, and uphold the school's honor codes.

If broken down into individual indicators, the data show consistently high scores across Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment. This distribution proves that students possess a multi-layered loyalty to the school. Participation is not driven merely by necessity; rather, a genuine sense of belonging exists. This specific mix fits perfectly with the famous Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment by Allen and Meyer, which has been validated across modern educational settings by Love and Stemer (2022). Their research proved that when a student scores high across these distinct commitment metrics simultaneously, it reflects a healthy mixture of emotional pride, a realistic awareness of the financial or temporal costs of leaving, and an internalized sense of duty toward the school's mission (Meyer et al., 1993) [39].

Furthermore, Cinkir et al. (2022) proved that when a university offers a highly supportive campus environment and top-tier administrative services, it directly increases organizational attachment. This bond naturally aligns student actions with the school's structural regulations, showing that high-quality institutional habits and supportive campus networks are essential for keeping students safely integrated into the university system (Thomas, 2002) [56].

Looking at the dependent variable, Rule Adherence achieved a Very High overall descriptive score, indicating a strong culture of proactive compliance with school policies. These highly disciplined scores were spread evenly across Compliance with Policies, Respect for Authority, Academic Integrity, and Punctuality and Attendance. Interestingly, Participation in Institutional Activities was the only single dimension that dipped slightly into the lower High range. This small statistical variance is telling. It reveals that while students maintain incredibly strict boundaries around mandatory behavioral rules, assignment deadlines, and core exam integrity, they treat non-mandatory extracurricular events and optional community gatherings as lower priorities.

This general trend matches the findings of Wang and Zhang (2022), who argued that when students feel university rules are clear and fair, they commit far fewer acts of academic dishonesty and deliberate misconduct. Additionally, Kier and Ives (2022) highlighted that when a school successfully pairs clear academic integrity rules with a deeply supportive moral culture, students naturally internalize those regulations. This combination leads to excellent self-regulation and a sharp drop in disciplinary violations, proving that active student engagement in early college life directly supports a lifelong habit of policy compliance (Krause & Coates, 2008) [32].

Moving on to the bivariate relationships, the correlation analysis showed significant, positive connections between both independent variables and student rule compliance. Spiritual Formation showed a significant, moderately high correlation with Rule Adherence, leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis (H01). This strong statistical link indicates that greater involvement in spiritual practices, campus ministry events, and moral education directly leads to better policy compliance, greater punctuality, and a stronger intolerance for cheating.

This finding aligns perfectly with Rachelya et al. (2022), who found that spiritual formation acts as a major catalyst for core character traits, building internal mental switches that favor societal and organizational compliance. On top of that, Natanael et al. (2024) confirmed that a student's personal spirituality serves as an internal regulator for academic integrity. Their data showed that value-driven students rely on their personal ethical convictions to resist the temptation to cheat, even in unmonitored digital environments or when facing intense situational and personal academic stress (Rettinger & Kramer, 2009) [50].

Similarly, Institutional Commitment showed a significant, moderately high correlation with Rule Adherence, leading to the rejection of the second null hypothesis (H02). This relationship proves that as a student's emotional connection and sense of campus belonging grow stronger, behavioral actions align more closely with university guidelines. This pattern receives strong support from Kardiat et al. (2025), whose organizational frameworks show that strong commitment and identification are major negative predictors of deviance. This means that highly committed stakeholders are naturally driven to protect the operational order of their institution by following its behavioral policies.

Lee and Park (2022) also noted that institutional commitment heavily underpins compliance, especially inside structured organizations where following the rules is required to maintain ongoing membership and group success. When these two correlation matrices are examined together, the results demonstrate that, while both predictors are essential, the internal values derived from spiritual formation show a tighter

linear relationship with disciplined behavior than simple organizational loyalty. This indicates that internal moral conviction places a more immediate, reliable pressure on personal discipline than an external sense of organizational belonging (Love, 2001) [36].

This insight is fully validated by the multivariate regression analysis. The model showed that Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment are statistically significant joint predictors of Rule Adherence, explaining a substantial portion of its total behavioral variance ($R^2 = 0.537$; $F = 143.21$, $p < .05$). This predictive framework provides strong, real-world evidence for the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991).

Under the TPB model, a person's actual behavioral compliance is directly controlled by behavioral intentions, which are shaped by three core elements: personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this study, spiritual formation and institutional commitment act as the primary cognitive inputs for this mental process. Spiritual formation directly fosters a highly favorable personal attitude toward maintaining moral integrity, while institutional commitment solidifies the school's subjective norms and community expectations. Working together, these independent variables enhance the student's perceived behavioral control over their actions, directly counteracting situational temptations or desires to bypass campus standards (Murdock & Anderman, 2006). This creates a powerful, deliberate behavioral intention that shows up as consistent, real-world rule compliance (Stone et al., 2010) [54].

This mental process aligns with the frameworks laid out by Wang et al. (2023), who found that when personal spiritual tracking is combined with institutional integration, a unified community standard is established. This standard makes breaking campus rules psychologically uncomfortable for the student. Similarly, Batolu et al. (2025) found that a healthy campus culture that respects and engages students' internal spiritual values leads to higher compliance. This happens because students begin to view university regulations as meaningful extensions of their personal beliefs rather than as administrative burdens (Chickering et al., 2006) [14].

Most importantly, the regression model flagged Spiritual Formation as the dominant predictor of Rule Adherence, showing a massive standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.581$ ($t = 8.42$, $p < .05$) that completely outpaced Institutional Commitment, which yielded a smaller predictive weight of $\beta = 0.214$ ($t = 3.11$, $p < .05$). This statistical reality proves that a student's internal, value-driven character development is the most critical factor in securing policy compliance, classroom honesty, and respect for authority. This insight matches the work of Turan and Yapici (2025), who found that spiritual formation drives compliance by building deep internal capacities for self-regulation and personal accountability. When rules are backed by internal spiritual values, students do not need constant supervision to behave.

Ismiyah and Mutholingah (2024) also noted that routine spiritual practices build a quiet, consistent internal discipline. This discipline naturally spills over into daily academic routines, thereby directly improving punctuality and attendance. It shows that values-based education remains a powerful, steady shield for character development, especially when compared with faith-based environments and highly transactional, secular universities (Glanzer et al., 2017) [23].

Contrasting Literature on the Dominance of Internalized Values. Even though Spiritual Formation showed massive predictive dominance in this study, a large body of empirical literature rooted in Deterrence Theory strongly disagrees with the idea that internal, values-based mechanisms are the most effective way to get students to behave. Classic behavioral experiments by Clariana et al. (2013) show that internal moral frameworks are volatile and often fail when students face intense academic pressure, graduation deadlines, or competitive stress. Their empirical models show that clear, immediate, and certain external administrative penalties are significantly more reliable at driving rule compliance than spiritual or character-driven honor codes (Crown & Spiller, 1998) [17].

Furthermore, researchers studying the psychology of academic integrity have long documented a major behavioral paradox in values-saturated environments. As Stephens (2018) noted, students with excellent personal moral codes still exhibit high rates of rule-breaking under certain conditions. This happens because they lean on advanced cognitive neutralization a psychological trick where they rationalize their immediate misconduct as a minor, one-time mistake that does not ruin their broader ethical identity (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This critical perspective proves that internal moral programming cannot automatically guarantee real-world policy compliance unless the school pairs it with active external monitoring and clear rules (Hardland et al., 2007) [25].

On the other side of the model, Institutional Commitment emerged as a significant but secondary predictor of Rule Adherence, with a smaller predictive weight. This tells us that while school loyalty, pride in the university brand, a desire to graduate, and a sense of shared community identity are great tools for maintaining order, they take a back seat to deep personal values. This finding aligns with Paluet et al. (2025), who noted that institutional commitment reinforces ethical actions primarily because students want to protect their social standing and reputations within the community.

Hohenschwe et al. (2022) similarly observed that institutional socialization practices build an external loyalty that supports rule compliance. However, this external bond operates best when it is grounded in a core set of personal values, underscoring that a student's sense of belonging and institutional integration are vital pillars for maintaining alignment with school codes (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002) [26, 27].

Contrasting Literature on the Impact of Organizational Commitment. The secondary status assigned to Institutional Commitment in this study is also explicitly challenged by macro-level investigations rooted in Social Exchange Theory. Research by Nyamubi (2017) establishes that in modern higher education landscapes, traditional internal values like spiritual development are frequently overshadowed by transactional student-institutional relationships. Their structural models prove that when an institution experiences structural shifts or perceived decreases in educational delivery, student rule adherence becomes driven entirely by the strength of organizational commitment, specifically, continuance commitment, or the calculated awareness of the financial, temporal, and reputational costs of getting caught or expelled (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011) [4].

These contrasting frameworks indicate that the model's findings are highly context-dependent, relying heavily on the stable, deeply protective, and values-saturated cultural environment of the specific Catholic institution in Davao City where the data were gathered (Bustos-Orosa & Symaco, 2026). It shows that

institutional commitment works best as a protective shield when it is reinforced by intentional mentorship programs, rigorous institutional standards, and active student-retention pathways (Braxton et al., 1997; Woosley & Miller, 2007) [11, 65].

In summary, while the regression model shows that both independent variables are necessary for predicting and managing student compliance, internal spiritual formation serves as the primary anchor in this setting. Higher education administrators cannot rely solely on organizational structures, loyalty campaigns, or disciplinary penalties to enforce rules; rather, they must actively invest in holistic values formation programs that build internal, self-regulating moral character, while maintaining clear, consistent structural guardrails to prevent cognitive rationalization.

13. Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings generated by this study, it is concluded that both spiritual formation and institutional commitment function as vital, positive correlates and statistically significant joint predictors of rule adherence among tertiary students. The structural diagnostics establish that a student's internal moral orientation and their psychological bond with the university do not operate in isolation; rather, they combine to form a robust behavioral matrix that directly dictates compliance with institutional policies, respect for authority, academic integrity, and campus discipline. Crucially, the multivariate analysis isolates spiritual formation as the dominant predictive driver of student compliance, carrying a substantially larger statistical weight than institutional commitment. This empirical hierarchy proves that deeply internalized, self-regulating values developed through structured moral programming are significantly more powerful at securing long-term ethical conduct and everyday policy compliance than external organizational loyalty or structural institutional bonds alone.

These predictive outcomes provide meaningful empirical validation of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), as spiritual formation directly shapes a highly favorable attitude toward moral integrity, while institutional commitment reinforces the subjective norms and collective expectations of the campus community. However, because these two independent variables account for 53.7% of the total variance in student rule compliance, this framework provides partial confirmation of the full TPB model rather than a full psychological mapping. This leaves a remaining 46.3% of unexplained behavioral variance, confirming that a substantial portion of student compliance is driven by external, extraneous forces beyond the scope of internal values and school loyalty. Within educational psychology, this unexplored variance is theoretically driven by highly influential external variables, such as peer group norms, parental leadership styles, individual personality traits, or a student's perception of the certainty and severity of administrative penalties.

14. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, future research may explore additional factors that further explain Rule Adherence among tertiary students beyond Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment, such as peer influence, family background, classroom environment, and perceived fairness of institutional



policies. This may help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence students' compliance with institutional rules in higher education settings.

Institutional administrators and student affairs offices may consider sustaining Spiritual Formation programs through values-based activities, reflective exercises, and opportunities that promote moral development and responsible decision-making among students. Since Spiritual Formation emerged as the strongest factor influencing Rule Adherence, enhancing such programs may further reinforce disciplined and ethical student behavior.

University/Colleges leaders and academic units may also explore ways to strengthen Institutional Commitment by promoting a stronger sense of belonging, engagement, and connection to the institution. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, student engagement activities, and inclusive institutional practices may help foster students' emotional attachment to and sense of responsibility toward the university, which is associated with higher levels of rule compliance.

Student development programs may continue reinforcing awareness of institutional policies, academic integrity, and respectful behavior toward authority to sustain a culture of discipline and accountability among students. These efforts may help maintain consistent adherence to institutional expectations.

Future studies may also examine the interaction between Spiritual Formation and Institutional Commitment to further understand how these variables jointly influence Rule Adherence. Consequently, while this study successfully demonstrates that internal values and school alignment are essential pillars of student discipline, future research must investigate the missing environmental, structural, and peer-driven variables to build a fully unified predictive model of rule adherence in higher education. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches may also be considered to gain deeper insights into students' lived experiences regarding spiritual development, institutional attachment, and rule compliance in higher education contexts.

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Acknowledgment

Finishing this study is a significant milestone that reflects not only academic effort but also a journey shaped by persistence, learning, and the support of many individuals who played an important role along the way. This accomplishment would not have been possible without their generosity of time, knowledge, and encouragement.

With deep gratitude, I acknowledge all those who contributed to the completion of this thesis.

I am especially indebted to my thesis adviser, Dr. Jean A. Legaspi, for her unwavering guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout the entire research process. Her thoughtful direction, academic insight, and constant motivation have been invaluable in shaping and strengthening this study.

I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Alona S. Galache, member of my panel of examiners, for her expertise, constructive feedback, and invaluable contributions to this study. Her role as instrument validator greatly strengthened the quality and credibility of the research instrument. I also thank Dr. Arvin B. Gutang for his assistance as instrument validator and panel member, whose valuable insights helped improve this study, and Dr. Lolito G. Estrera for his guidance in the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data. Their support and scholarly insights have been instrumental in the successful completion of this study.

I am deeply thankful to Dr. Reynaldo O. Cuizon, Dean of the Graduate School, for his encouragement, guidance, and steadfast support throughout my graduate studies. His commitment to academic excellence served as an inspiration in completing this work.

Special gratitude is extended to the administration of Holy Cross College of Davao College, Inc., particularly Br. Noelvic H. Deloria, SC, for granting permission to conduct this study and for the trust and support extended to me as a member of the institution.

I extend my appreciation to the program heads, especially Ms. Chique Nacionales, for their assistance and cooperation during the data-gathering process. Their support helped facilitate the smooth conduct of this study.

Special recognition is also given to the student assistants who helped in the distribution of research questionnaires. Their willingness to help, time, and effort contributed significantly to the smooth completion of this study.



To all the respondents, thank you for your openness, time, and cooperation. Your participation laid the foundation for this research and added depth to its findings.

I am likewise grateful to my colleagues for their encouragement, understanding, and constant support, which made this academic journey more meaningful and manageable. Above all, I offer praise and thanks to the Lord Almighty, whose wisdom, strength, and grace sustained me throughout this endeavor.

To everyone who contributed in one way or another, thank you for being part of this journey. May God bless you abundantly.

-MAH