Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: To find out the role religion plays on American college campuses today, Missouri State University's Dr. John Schmalzbauer and his team of co-researchers are exploring the landscape of campus ministries across the country. A three-year grant of more than $981,000 from Lilly Endowment, Inc., has made this project possible. Despite COVID challenges, research work has begun. This project builds on the 2004-2008 National Study of Campus Ministries Schmalzbauer was involved with previously. I'm Emily Yeap.

Schmalzbauer, a religious studies professor, joins me today to share more about the study and its purpose.

J. Schmalzbauer: It's called the Landscape Study of Chaplaincy and Campus Ministry in the United States. And we're trying to really take a snapshot of where campus religious life is, specifically chaplaincy programs, campus ministry programs. So we're trying to figure out what's going on today. What are the challenges that these organizations and these staff people face as they're trying to meet the religious needs of students on campus?

Emily Yeap: The first field research site for the project was the Midwest, but the COVID pandemic prevented in-person observations and information gathering.

J. Schmalzbauer: We had to radically change the way that we're going to reach people. I was going to go to the Twin Cities, which is actually my hometown, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and hang out for 40 days interviewing people, observing campus religious groups. And I was not able to go in person, but I've conducted about a dozen interviews and they've been over Zoom. I have been to Lutheran liturgies that are entirely in Zoom, where they would send us into Zoom breakout rooms, and people would take communion with whatever they had available. All I had available was a diet root beer. And when this kid in a dorm room in Minnesota pronounced the words of institution to me, I thought, "Well, I guess as a good researcher, I'm going to take a swig of my diet root beer," because they have done the same with their tea or their Starbucks coffee. So it's just a very weird way to do research right now, but I think it works out fine.

Emily Yeap: Besides the Midwest, studies will also focus on Los Angeles, the Washington D.C. area, and the Carolinas.

J. Schmalzbauer: We have other researchers at other institutions as part of the team. The folks that are doing Los Angeles, Rebecca Kim, a sociologist at Pepperdine, and D.C., Kathleen Garces-Foley at Marymount University, they're going to be doing their research this spring. Then we're going to have another researcher in the Carolinas, a guy named David Sikkink, a sociologist, and I think he'll be in the field in the spring of 2022. Hopefully by then things will be able to go in person. I would like to travel to Minnesota for the fall of 2022 to do the observations that I wanted to do. Some of it involves just the physical manifestations of religion on campus. The Lutheran College we're studying, they have a chapel. I feel like I've been there because I watch the YouTube chapel services faithfully and take notes on them, but I've never been there. I don't know where the chapel sits in relationship to other buildings. There's no substitution for being there.

Emily Yeap: Schmalzbauer hopes the research will shed light on how campus ministries have evolved in changing times.

J. Schmalzbauer: Well, we want to give people an idea of some of the innovative ways that campus ministries are changing in response to what students are like today. So, how they're dealing with a much more diverse campus landscape in terms of race and ethnicity, and never has that been more palpable than in Minneapolis with the murder of George Floyd, which all of these campus ministries are responding to and trying to figure out how do they talk about race in America? I think another thing is just how campus ministries are puzzling through the rise of students with no religion, the so-called nones, because they say none when asked what their religion is, or dones, I'm done with organized religion. And then also, I think just getting a sense of how are these folks that do this work day in and day out, how are they doing? It seems like a tough time to raise money for all kinds of nonprofits, and that's true of campus religious life too.

Emily Yeap: Some Missouri State campus ministries will be included in this study thanks to the work of graduate assistant Cody Yanez. Another graduate student, Booke Kroger, is helping with archival research of various campus ministries. In addition, the team will send out a survey to campus ministers and chaplains across denominations and religious traditions in fall 2021. Team member and Missouri State sociology associate professor Dr. Catherine Hoegeman will oversee the survey's design, administration and data analysis.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the office of university communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.