



A FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**December 2024
Special Edition Journal**

Select Articles presented at a conference hosted by:

The Foster Center for Responsible Leadership

in

The School of Business at St. Bonaventure University

*“Leadership in Catholic Higher
Education: Knowing Our Past to Guide
Our Future”*

April 19-20, 2024

The AFCU Journal
A FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Special Edition Journal December 2024

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Link to talk: <https://video.ibm.com/recorded/133717274>

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About The AFCU Journal

The AFCU Journal History and Mission

On October 3, 2001, the Board of Directors of the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities approved a proposal for an annual journal to feature the peer reviewed research and writings of faculty and administrators of AFCU institutions.

The purposes of *The AFCU Journal* are

To strengthen the vision of Catholic higher education in the Franciscan tradition.

To connect all the discrete disciplines to a Franciscan philosophy and heritage.

To encourage an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to research and reflection from the Franciscan school of today.

To provide motivation for reflection on the breadth and depth of scholarship emanating from Franciscan institutions of higher learning.

It is hoped that this publication will offer an incentive for faculty and staff to reflect upon the distinct character of a Franciscan institution of higher education.

The publication of *The Journal* is guided by a small editorial board and assisted by contact persons within each of the AFCU institutions. The views expressed in the articles are attributed to the authors and not to the member institutions.

From the Editor

This edition of the AFCU Journal is the second Special Edition of the journal I have had the privilege to edit. The articles are a selected portion of the scholarship presented at a conference at St. Bonaventure University on April 19-20, 2024. The conference was hosted by the Foster Center for Responsible Leadership in the School of Business at St. Bonaventure, and the title of the conference was *Leadership in Catholic Higher Education; Knowing Our Past to Guide Our Future*. The conference explored the ways in which universities can continue to change and be influential in society. We rediscovered the roots and purpose of higher education, and Catholic higher education in particular, as we face the future amidst a rapidly changing college and university landscape.

The keynote address at the conference was given by Dr. Michael Naughton, Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, where he holds the Koch Chair in Catholic Studies. Naughton played a leading role in the creation of the “Vocation of the Business Leader,” a document created to summarize the teachings of Caritas in Veritate (charity and truth), Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical on the Christian’s place in business and thinking in economic life. The “Vocation of the Business Leader” is in the fifth edition now and incorporates several recent teachings from Pope Francis on vocation of business, integral ecology, the technocratic paradigm and the importance of a more just distribution of wealth. Naughton has taught in the College of Business at St. Thomas, for over 20 years. Author, co-author and co-editor of 12 books and monographs and over 60 articles, his most recent book is *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education* (2021).

I am delighted to include an AI generated transcription of Dr. Naughton’s keynote address as the leadoff piece in our journal. I am grateful to Dr. Michael D. Herley from St. John’s University for lending his expertise in this area. I also include a link to an archived video of Naughton’s keynote. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Naughton for traveling to St. Bonaventure and sharing his wisdom with us.

As Director of the Foster Center, I feel particularly privileged to edit this edition of the journal. I am very grateful to the leadership of the AFCU for allowing the publication of a special edition. I am particularly grateful to the peer-reviewers who donated their time to blindly review the selected scholarship submitted for publication. Reviewers should know that I received considerable notes of thanks from authors for very helpful feedback. St. Bonaventure University has hosted this conference on opposite years of the AFCU Symposium starting in 2019. The conference is on AFCU Symposium off years so as not to detract from our main symposium. The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity to present and discuss scholarship and to gather in fellowship and community.

The AFCU is now publishing the Journal only digitally in the hope that more individuals will thereby have access to the Journal. Distribution will be to the campus contact, who will then be free to distribute the volume electronically to the campus community.

Michael J. Gallagher
Foster Center Director
Associate Professor of Finance
St. Bonaventure University
St. Bonaventure, New York

Keynote Address

The following is an AI generated transcription of the keynote address at this year's conference. We were honored to have Michael Naughton, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Catholic Studies University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, kick off our conference with this thought-provoking keynote; "Leadership in Catholic Higher Education: Knowing Our Past to Guide Our Future."

It really is a great honor to be here to talk about this great story. It's a great story we call Catholic education and, in many respects, there's no better place to talk about this story than a university with the name Bonaventure. Bonaventure certainly is one of the great and most brilliant educators in the story. I mean, this is kind of a fact.

There's also no better time to rediscover the roots of the story, especially now, in a time of increasing lack of confidence and trust in university itself.

Many of you probably know this, in 2015, 57% of the populace trusted universities. That has dropped 36% in 2023, and I suspect if we had another survey today, one year later you may even find it to be lower. As with all data points, there's lots to interpret here. We could spend our whole evening just interpreting this data point, but one of the things I think is clear: Universities, and especially Catholic universities are in need of renewal.

We are in a moment of renewal, and I think the key to the institutional renewal of university is to rediscover our story, because I think we have forgotten it. To rediscover this story, the story of Catholic education, and the ability to renew our institutions, we have to recognize that there are three interdependent stories going on.

The first story is a personal story. This is *Our Story*. Whether we're Catholic or not Catholic, we are here at this particular place as faculty, staff, administrators, board members, and students. This is not a story only of the past, but it's still going on today; and we are not passive spectators. We all have work to do. There's a story.

But I will say that this story will be mere navel gazing, Bishop Bearing talked about it being an ego drama, if it is not connected to a larger story, a larger transcendent reality, what we might call a cosmic story. Twentieth century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, speaks about it as a Theo drama.

And here's the most extraordinary claim in this story: That this is God's story. That God has created us and that there is a design and patterns and wonder and deep purpose. That we have sinned and frustrated that purpose through egoism and etiologies that creates injustice, often impacting the poor, and through God's grace, He seeks redemption.

This cosmic story, this Theo drama, is the most controversial part of the story though. It conflicts with the common contemporary story, that everything is a social construction. There is no created order, there is only power. But it also has an institutional story.

The story of Catholic education is the longest continuous institutional story in education. It doesn't go back to the latest fad, it doesn't go back to the 20th century. It doesn't go back to the founding of this country. It goes back 2000 years ago, and even more.

And this is going to be the principal focus of my talk. A lot of focus on this institutional story, and I'm drawing upon a little book that we put together in our center called *The Heart of Culture*, because it's a way of trying to provide the forest. Trying to find the sense of the narrative, because the story, like all stories, is a complicated one.

I want to be clear about a couple of things before I talk about the story.

This is not a story of triumphalism or of traditionalism. There are no pristine moments. The fall of humanity has been shot through this whole story. There's no period that we've got to go back to; but it is a story about time and about the meaning of time.

And one of our challenges. At least I'd say my challenge is that I have a hard time believing that I'm part of this story. I lose sight of it, and there's lots of reasons for this. We are kind of burdened by all sorts of ideology, the secularism, materialism, careerism, the kind of technocratic paradigm in which we're living in; and actually, there's just simply the daily grind. It's the crisis and the problems that overwhelm us in day to day life.

I don't feel appreciated. I don't feel listened to. I hate to say it I sometimes have really bored and unmotivated students. We are dealing with decreasing margins, increasing competition, we have demographic shifts and cliffs, and we just went through a pandemic. These ideologies and grinds can often disconnect us from our origins in our destiny, and we just get stuck in the present. We lose sight of what I would call a spiritual insight of time.

Our story of Catholic education is important because it structures time. It gets back to the question about, where did we come from? What are our origins? Where are we going? What's our destiny? And how does that origin and destiny inform our present moment?

When we can awaken to the spiritual insight of time, and we can only see it partially, we never see it fully; but we can see in the present moment, both our origins and our destiny, both our beginning and our end. We can sense there's something inexhaustible. We sense a deep mystery of profound meaning that surpasses all slogans and acronyms of the day. It is a mystery that opens us up to a new way of thinking, and that has the potential to renew our institution.

Again, there's no golden age to return to, but there is a tradition, which we are beholden to. A tradition that needs to inform us and we need to develop it not merely repeat it. So concretely, what does the story look like?

I want to talk about three moments of the story. I want to get back to the foundations and that's in the Classical Period. I want to talk about when the institutions that we're living in right now were built, and it started in the Middle Ages, but also went into the Renaissance. I also want to talk about some of the ruptures that we're dealing with in the modern age.

So first, foundations, to begin to grasp, the beginning of the story of Catholic education, we have to recognize we have two ideas, two forces, two realities. At this period of time for the church, particularly in that first part of the story in the first 500 years, it was struggling about how to put those two things together. One way to think about it is that the Classical Age was about the integration of two ways of knowing. There was a book by John Leclerc, he's a Benedictine, and it was called *The Love of Learning, and the Desire for God*. These are the two ways of knowing. So first, the love of learning.

The love of learning is what the Greeks called *paideia*, what the Romans called, *humanitas*, and *humanities* is where we get the liberal arts. The key to this is the relationship between love and learning. We have a natural desire to know what is true. We want to have contact with reality, and the more we know something such as math or nature, or history or literature, the more we love things. The more we love something or someone, the more we want to know them. This is true for us in education as well. When it's the same old, same old. We're taking all the same old notes, and we're never kind of knowing more, something's gone wrong; and that's the danger of education.

And so paideia, the humanitas, and what the Greeks and the Romans were attempting to do was to understand that there's something about the human person in terms of its universality that we need to look at. People like Plato and Aristotle and Socrates, they weren't simply about passing on military skills like the Spartans were. The Spartan form of education was passing on a particular skill for dominance. What the Greeks understood is that there's something transcendental. The truth, goodness, beauty, that's what they were going after. That's why they raised to importance math, philosophy, literature, science and art. Why? To see the patterns of the world. To see how they work through things. That was the way that the Greeks and Romans understood education.

When Christianity comes onto the scene, it speaks about the way that we come to know things through this desire of God. Which is not achieved, but received. Received through revelation it is not an accomplishment. It's not grasped at. But it is something of a gift that one has to humbly connect to. At the heart of this understanding of desire of God and Christianity is the incarnation. The incarnation is poetically expressed in the prologue of the Gospel of John. And it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

One of the most extraordinary claims of Christianity is that Christ is the Logos, the Word made flesh. What's really interesting is that Greek word is translated here as "word", but it's also understood as "reason". Why "word"? Logos as word points to the importance of speech to convey truth. In the beginning, in Genesis, God speaks, creation happens. Speech and action are one. It's the power of the word. And then education at the Heart of Education has always been the word. The classical understanding of the liberal arts trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric was about the word; it was the art of the word. Because the word helps us to reveal reality that puts us in contact reality.

One of the most anti word persons was a man named Nietzsche. Nietzsche once said this, "we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar." Because grammar is telling us that there's an order to reality. That order was created by God, and the trivium disciplines us in the precise use of those things. But logos means also reason. That the human mind has this capacity to seeing and at the heart of that, is divine reason.

That divine reason is that faith is not merely an emotion. It's a divine illumination that helps us to see. When I take my glasses off, you are a blur, when I put my glasses on, it helps me to see better. That's what faith is always attempting to do. It's attempting to heal the mind, because sin disorders our sight, and creates all sorts of fixations and rationalizations. Faith is the habit of mind, whereby eternal life begins in us. Faith enables me to see in you not just a physical image, but an invisible image. It helps me to see the back row of my classroom of that student sitting there with a baseball cap on backwards looking at me saying, you can't teach me a thing. But no I am going to teach you, and I'm going to love you, because there's something in you that I need to connect with. That's what faith helps us to do. Mother Teresa is the greatest symbol of this. Calcutta is a very difficult place, but she saw the dignity of the poor. There was faith that helped her to do that.

What's most fascinating from this gospel message from John, is that it's about the Logos. What's interesting for us as academics, our disciplines are about logos. It's where we get the word logos. Biology, the logos of living things, geology and psychology and theology. These are things that tell us something about the world. Einstein captures this most beautifully when

he says “the most incomprehensible thing about the world. Is that it’s comprehensible.” And these are the disciplines that help us to make things comprehensible. They help us to understand reality.

What the church went through in this first foundation, is that the human logos and the Divine Logos, are not separate realities. They are to be related to each other. Because the main metaphor of Catholic education should be yeast.

The word Catholic comes from the Greek word of *katholikos*, which means throughout the whole; it's about integration. The Divine logos animates the human logos. When yeast interacts with dough, it doesn't turn dough into yeast. It makes it nourishing. When faith interacts with reason, it doesn't turn reason into faith, but it makes it order to the transcendentals to truth, goodness and beauty.

Unfortunately, in Catholic education, we often see our Catholic identity not as yeast but as frosting. It's about a kind of a religious layer laid on a secular cake. We might have mass and sacraments and theology, but faith never interacts with a deep reality of education. And in this foundation, we begin to see a very important insight. The Catholic Church did not create simply Bible schools or seminaries, they built schools, they built universities, and it's to this building that I want to get to, because it's in the Middle Ages where the building starts to occur.

The classical period comes to a gradual end, largely around fifth century AD. What you see here is a couple of things. One is external invasions coming from the Huns the Frank's, the vandals, the Saxons, the Visigoths, the Saracens; things from the outside are invading it, but there's also internal corruptions going on in the cities suffering from wealth and luxury and power and self-absorption. In fact, there's an American historian and philosopher Will Durant and he once said, “a great civilization is not conquered from without, until it is destroyed itself from within.”

At the time of the fifth or sixth century, Rome was about 100,000, around the time of Christ it was about a million, and soon after they say it dwindled down to 30,000. The invasions and the internal corruption, devastated the establishment of Roman rule, and weakened education. With that came was the demise of literacy, loss of skill, loss of building, loss of markets and trade, and this is when we get the Dark Ages.

What happens so often is, out of destruction, things get born.

The fruits grow in the valleys, not in the mountaintops. What happened was a lot of fruit came in through institutions that start to get built in the Middle Ages. I want to highlight three institutions: monasteries, cathedrals, schools and universities.

As you know, Saint Benedict is often called the father of Western monasticism, but by the way, he's also called the Co-patron of Europe, because his life and work had a fundamental influence in the development of European civilization. Paul the sixth described the monasteries and particularly Benedict in terms of the cross, the book, and the plough.

The cross is about the search for God. That's what the Benedictines and the monks were doing. They were seeking God. That seeking certainly created a kind of unity within Europe, but in order to seek they needed to read and that's why they preserved education. They valued reading, they valued learning. At this time of Dark Ages, they preserved ancient civilizations, the philosophies and the texts of Rome and Greece.

They also were about the plow. It's a time for work and they were manifesting order within that area. So prayer, study and work. This is a great contribution. There were roughly

35,000 monasteries peppered throughout all of Europe. Having massive influences, and the most learned people in Europe at this time, are largely the monks.

As the church starts to see this, they start drawing some of these monks to rebuild the cities because the cities were devastated by all the invasions and the internal corruptions. But they get rebuilt through the manifestations of the cathedrals.

What gets connected to them are schools. These schools become the central educational hub of learners within the church and the building up of these cities. It is also where, the several liberal arts get to be systematized, and it is out of these cathedral schools that come universities.

The first university was in Bologna and then in 1088, University of Paris. And this is of course is where St. Bonaventure came from, he both studied there and he became a master there. It was actually in this formation of the University of Paris, where his wisdom and leadership become powerful in terms of his ability to unite the order and he becomes like Aquinas, they will become great integrators in their own particular way.

And then other universities soon follow, Oxford, Cambridge, etc. Our universities in the West, come from the medieval institution. We still hold on to many of the kinds of patterns and the way those shapes have occurred. In 1990 John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter called *Ex Porter, Ecclesia Dei*. In Latin, “out of the heart of the church came the university.” Historically and factually, and this is a fact that's lost on most modern people.

What the medieval University gave us was two principles; the university principle, and the collegiate principle. University principle; It's about the education of the mind, and the collegiate principle is the education of the heart, about what happens outside of that university.

The university principle is of the classroom, the lab, the library. The medieval universities pedagogical approach was based on questions and debates. It was a prologue to discussion and exploration and debate. The Socratic Method, the art of the question, was infused in a way that says, let's have discussions.

This is an approach that's desperately needed today, because we are living right now in a time where students are fearful of disagreeing. They're fearful of being labeled, they're fearful being wrong. Then with that fear, they lack growth, the growth of those types of questions in debates are critical.

But the university by the way, was never only just about the classroom. This is the importance of the collegiate principle, what happens outside of the classroom.

We do have on our campuses, what we might call moral and spiritual death. When universities have capitulated to the sexual revolution, decimated the goods of marriage for an ethic of consent and safety, when students dull their minds and souls with weed and alcohol repressing any sense of wonder and transcendence. They're often lost in the cosmos. And this unfortunately has made this generation of Gen Z'ers, one of the most depressed and anxious in recorded history. We have some challenges.

What becomes clear at the beginning of medieval universities and it is desperately clear today, the intellectual life needs an ordered moral and spiritual life and education of the mind needs the formation of the will and the heart and soul. This is what John Henry Newman articulated through his work between this relationship between the university principle and the collegiate principal. So let me summarize.

The essence of the university is to educate the intellect. The university principle addresses the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and cultivates the mind. It sharpens it, it

makes it more precise and active and penetrating. But here's the problem. When you're only about the mind, one of the greatest vices of the university is intellectual pride. The university needs something beyond what constitutes its essence in order to give its integrity and Newman speaks about that. The integrity comes from the collegiate principle, the college that forms the will, it gives it its well-being.

The Collegiate principle assures a more intimate nexus of close relationships, where knowledge is properly digested, and where the spiritual and moral lives of students address and integrate with their intellectual work. So, this collegiate principle, where does it take place? It takes place in the mentorship with conversations of faculty and staff, in the spiritual direction from chaplains in worship and prayer and adoration and retreats, in sports, in celebrations and parties and dining halls. All those places where hopefully things are alive. And this is what Newman speaks about, that the key to the integrity of the college is found in two areas.

First one is friendship.

Newman noted that an education turns into an Arctic winter when teachers and staff do not develop friendships with their students. And friendship here is not being a buddy. It's not affirming the inclinations and ideas of others. Friends are when two look at the good together in a very serious way.

The second thing that Newman pointed out that's key to the collegial principle is the role of the church.

Newman maintained that the university cannot fulfill its objective fully, without the church's assistance. The church is necessary for its integrity, the Church steadies it in the performance of that office. Of course, this claim is highly disputed in the modern university today. But for Newman, the church is necessary for the integrity of the university. Not to impose some type of external correction, but to place faith on the largest conceptual map, to help the students see the contemplative life in its relationship to the active life.

Again, this period is so rich and there is a lot more to be said. But let me turn to the third lesson or third chapter of the modern area. Modern Art, and this is a very complex topic, and it is in many respects the most difficult topic to talk about. Because it's our age, and it's hard to talk about our age and our age is one of great advances in benefits. Many of us have benefited so much from Science and Technology, Health and Medicine, economic democracy, political democracy. The birth of modern culture in one hand is an event within Christianity. It's consistent with the development of a Christian culture.

But the modern period has also caused some ruptures, particularly with the Catholic educational tradition. This rupture explodes onto the scene with the French Revolution. The French Revolution is very different than the American Revolution. The American Revolution was a political revolution. The French Revolution was a cultural revolution. It sought to eliminate many things such as history. They wanted to go back to ground zero. You wanted to start history in 1792 to be year one. It was the establishment of a new state. It also wanted to eliminate the church. It was the elimination of the church by replacing it and supplanting it with reason.

It was the elimination also of the Catholic University. The great University of Paris was closed. And what opened up in its place was the Ecole Polytechnique, which is forming civil servants in scientific and technical expertise. These events, and many others, caused a kind of

rupture with the Catholic understanding of education. Let me highlight two principles that manifest this rupture.

The first rupture of the modern education with Catholic education refers to the primacy of reason alone over faith and reason. Within the Catholic education, faith and reason brings about the deepest wisdom. The assumption of the modern or enlightenment age is that reason has nothing to learn from faith. Actually, faith is seen as unreasonable or anti-reason because for moderns, humanity has not fallen. We're okay. We don't need God. What impedes progress is not sinners but systems and all we need is better data, better science and better technology. Reason is seen as an autonomous rail.

Universities understood that the truth of this relationship between great faith and reason was key to its understanding, but of course that has changed and there has been a shift of focus to Veritas. The key thing to Veritas is simply technical and scientific truth.

Professors lamented the loss of the mere moral and spiritual substance in this term Veritas and without a sense of transcendence and grace and faith. Often economic pressures and incentives and cultural forces disorder Veritas. That's the first principle.

The second principle is what we might call the primacy of action over contemplation. The problem of pragmatism is there are a few of us who have not caught this problem. Let me give you an example of modern history that I think helps to understand this. I think one of the great books in the 20th century is by a man named Josef Pieper called *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*.

Think about this just historically. German philosopher, 1947 in Germany comes out with his first book. Germany has been decimated. The Soviets on one side, we on the other side, it is absolutely flattened, and this philosopher comes out with a book on leisure. This is just one more example of an academic whose isolation in the ivory tower fails to understand the world he inhabits. But this is what Pieper writes in the first page of the book.

He says this, "to build our house, our country or institutions at this time, implies not only securing survival, but also putting in order our entire moral and intellectual heritage. And before any detailed plan along these lines can succeed, our beginning, our re-foundation, calls out immediately for a defense of leisure." Why would he say that what we need in this time of crisis in Germany, in 1947, is a defense of leisure? Because he feels that the modern world has forgotten an important truth. That was what is deepest about our humanity is not about what we've achieved, but about what we receive. Pieper also understood that in the concentration camps, all over Germany over the gates of those concentration camps, as many of you know, was a saying "work will set you free."

Pieper understood very clearly work will not set you free, work will enslave you into an ideology. Whether that ideology is Nazism or communism, or to be quite frank, whether it is American capitalism, or the kind of technocratic paradigm we're dealing with. Work is not enough. We need something more than just work. And that's why the concern of pragmatism is a challenge, because pragmatism is American philosophy of education that often jettisons philosophy and theology in the humanities, and it simply wants to get at what works. Pope Benedict put it this way, he says "the pragmatist views reality essentially from a functional point of view. He no longer approaches the world from the viewpoint of contemplation and wonder, but as one who measures ways and acts."

When we only look at reality as work, we kill wonder, because the only thing we're concerned about is what we do, we fall into careerism, consumerism, and the tyranny of the metric. We think the only thing that's really important are those things that are measurable.

So let's be clear, in the modern world we need reason, we need action. These are very important. Careers are very important. But if we only are focusing on those things that are institutions, we disorder it. So let me conclude: this story does not give us ready-made tactics or a blueprint about what we do tomorrow and Catholic universities. But this story does give us what we might call the crucial importance of roots of moral and spiritual roots, it's to these roots I want to conclude.

There's a woman named Simone Weil who was a Jewish woman and a Catholic convert who served the French Resistance in World War II. In 1943, the French Resistance asked her to create a plan, because it was pretty clear that they were going to defeat the Germans, and they wanted to know what to do to rebuild the culture of France. Her plan was basically named, the need for roots.

And for Weil, she said having roots is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. She states in the book that one of the challenges of the modern age is that we are uprooted. Especially our educational system that creates what we might call the problem of cut flowers. Education is prone to cut flowers. The next new thing, the cliché, the trend, the slogan, the acronym, the buzzword. Yet, here's the problem. When we marry the spirit of this age, we are most likely going to become widowers in the next.

The story of Catholic education can protect us from becoming mere children of our own age. It is a story that helps us to know where we came from; that gives us the confidence to know who we are, to know what to sacrifice for, to know what to preserve, to know what to fight for. Then it gives us the prudential judgments to map out the future and where we need to go.

Thank you very much for your time.

If you will allow it, I'd like to conclude with this prayer:

“God, you have created me to do us some definite service. You have committed some work to me, which you have not committed to another. I have my mission I may never know it in this life. But I shall be told that in the next. Somehow I am necessary for your purposes, is necessary as an ark angel in his I Have a part of the great work. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. You have not created me for nothing. I shall do good. I shall do your work. I shall be an angel of peace. Preacher of truth, my own place deign to fulfill your high purposes. I am here to serve you to be yours to be your instrument. Amen.”

Thank you.

Considering the Human Concerns: Pope Francis and Other Catholic Perspectives on AI, Social Media, and Technology

Andrew B. Gustafson, Ph. D. Creighton University

Introduction

The race for AI technology is a significant issue for humanity at this moment in history. There is a 30-to-1 ratio of AI developers to ethicists considering the ramifications of AI on society (Harris & Haskin, 2023). Studies indicate that people are concerned about the impact of generative AI and related technologies such as facial recognition (Markula, 2023), but others have argued that debating ethical principles for AI is useless (Munn, 2023). Rushing headlong into AI development without considering the consequences prevents companies from dutifully addressing the effects of new advances, which precludes reflection on the guidance offered by Catholic social thought. AI must be used thoughtfully and intentionally in a way which helps make us more human, not less human (Vukov, 2024). The Catholic Church and Catholic social thought have much to contribute to the discussions about Social Media and AI. Here we will first look at concerns regarding some unintended effects of AI technology, then consider the Church's views on technology historically, focusing especially on Pope Francis's advice on social media and AI. These Catholic Social Teaching (CST) documents provide insightful and constructive insights into the current situation and provide very helpful directives and questions to consider going forward. Finally, some of the books and resources which we are using in a recent Creighton University class on “Social Media, AI, and the Meaning of Life” will be provided at the end of the paper.

Some Concerns About the Impact of AI

AI can be seen as both a threat and a promise to human flourishing. Of course, there are amazing, wonderful things which AI can do for us in terms of efficiency, elimination of mundane tasks, and clearly its benefits in particular fields like finance and accounting, science, and medicine are truly remarkable and laudable (Marr, 2024; Weaver-Lambert, 2024). Yet, there are other potential challenges and specifically unintended consequences from AI use. AI is here to stay, no doubt, but that means that we need to seriously reflect on its potential effects, and thoughtfully utilize AI in ways which helps make the world a better, not worse, place.

In his book *Automation and Utopia* Danaher has recently argued that there are 5 potential threats to human flourishing posed by AI:

1. A **severance problem**—becoming disconnected from the real physical world;
2. An **attention problem**-- AI and social media distract us and dissipates our attention;
3. The **opacity problem**—that it is difficult for most to fully understand how AI works or how it is affecting us (particularly the tech-illiterate);
4. The **autonomy problem**—insofar as we are giving up our freedom and much of our decision-making to automation;

5. The **agency problem**—as we disempower ourselves by depending on technology to make our decisions, and so, we don't feel responsible (Danaher, 2019).

In addition to Danaher's concerns, many have also been concerned that AI will lead to job losses, particularly the loss of meaningful, useful work.¹ Vukov has also argued that embracing AI encourages a gnostic view of human beings—ignoring the physical embodiment which is an essential part of being human (Vukov, 2024). Additionally, potential misuses of AI pose an entirely different set of concerns for individuals and society—deep fakes in political ads, in evidence tampering, or other more invasive ways. For example, Microsoft has VASA-1, a program which, with one picture of a person and 3 seconds of their voice audio, can make a convincing video of that person (Microsoft 2024).² Finally, the ecological impacts of AI are rarely discussed, despite the fact that a 100 word email created by ChatGPT requires the equivalent of a bottle of water to produce (Verma & Tan, 2024) and a Chat-GPT search takes 10 times as much electricity as a Google search which is why “AI is poised to drive 160% increase in data center power demand” (Goldman Sachs, 2024). Simply put: AI is resource-intensive both in terms of electricity and water usage.³

Catholic Social Thought Priorities and AI: Dignity, Solidarity & Common Good, and the Poor

If we consider the effects of AI through the concerns of Catholic Social Thought, we find a fruitful lens and a grounding from which to consider the issues, and a more systematic basis is provided for our concerns about these already mentioned concerns. Each CST principle highlights specific concerns regarding AI and its uses.

1. Dignity

Dignity is one of the cornerstone CST principles, and AI poses various challenges to dignity:

¹“Goldman Sachs predicts 300 million jobs will be lost or degraded by artificial intelligence” (J. Kelly, 2023); or “40% of working hours across industries can be impacted by large language models” p11, “A New Era of Generative AI for Everyone” (Accenture, 2023); “AI is coming for our jobs. Can universal basic income be the solution?” (P. Kelly, 2023); “AI wants our jobs, all of them” (Maniscalco, 2024); and lastly, “Elon Musk says, AI will eventually create a situation where quote no job is needed” (CBS, 11/2/23)

² Deep fakes being used in elections or to try to undermine someone's character is a huge issue (See Jack Tapper's recent CNN deepfake story (CNN, Tapper, October 2024)). But additionally, recently there's been a lot of cyber porn that's being made by AI generation. News stories abound of teenage boys making cyber porn of their classmates in their high school with this sort of a technology, or middle-schoolers making deep fake videos of kids they don't like saying ridiculous things or doing ridiculous things to embarrass them (Microsoft, April 2024).

³ Some headlines read: “It's time to talk about the carbon footprint of artificial intelligence” (Deweerd, 2020). “AI's climate impact goes beyond its emissions” (Coleman, 2023) “Artificial intelligence is environmental costs and promise are pretty staggering” (Jones & Easterday, 2022)

- A. Loss of Purposeful work
- B. Autonomy Undermined
- C. Loss of Privacy
- D. Desire-Satisfaction Focus
- E. Permanent Record, and Inability to Re-start Anew

First, purposeful work is essential to the full dignity of an individual (Naughton, 2019). If many face a workless future, it seems that many will feel a sense of purposelessness and aimlessness. Work provides dignity-enhancing opportunities such as purpose, character development, and projects to complete and be proud of, and having such productive useful work is important for our mental health.

A second concern regarding dignity concerns autonomy being undermined-- since autonomy is an essential aspect of one's dignity. When deep fakes are made possible by things like Vasa-1 or similar technologies, how will that affect our autonomy and our sense of having freedom to make choices-- because we won't even know what's real and what's not making it quite difficult to make effectual choices. The ability for us to know and be confident in our epistemic capacities are undermined by these sorts of things, and of course it's much easier for us to be manipulated and fooled.

Third, a concern about privacy of the individual arises from the concern for dignity. The more AI technology develop the harder and harder it is to know how it's reading us, how it may be collecting data from us. Less and less of our lives are free from the view of AI algorithms, or video or audio monitoring. Fourth is a concern about materialism. On a fully Catholic view, dignity depends on a recognition that there is something transcendent to being human—something in addition to the material aspect of our existence. Will we simply become more and more focused on satiating our own desires, like the Wall-E-World people (Stanton, 2008), that we are only concerned about our material desires because there's no concern for anything else?⁴ Ironically, living ones life virtually could give us the worst of both worlds—as it simultaneously makes us less connected to the material world, yet allows us to become more self-focused and focused on satiating our desires. A fifth concern about dignity is the concern about our actions through data becoming a matter of permanent record, undermining the possibility of forgiveness, starting anew, and leaving mistakes behind. Pope Francis raises this concern when he says,

Fundamental respect for human dignity demands that we refuse to allow the uniqueness of the person to be identified with a set of data. Algorithms must not be allowed to determine how we understand human rights, to set aside the essential human values of compassion, mercy and forgiveness, or to eliminate the possibility of an individual changing and leaving his or her past behind. (Francis, 2024b, Sect.5)

⁴ In the movie WALL-E, the humans who were sent to a paradise world where their every wish would be fulfilled are gigantically obese individuals transported about and unable to care for themselves in any way. (Stanton, 2008).

Is it possible to forgive and forget when there is no getting rid of data from the past, and if not, is it possible to allow people to progress as individuals?

2. Common Good And Solidarity Concerns

In addition to the CST principle of dignity, a second set of principles which arise from the CST perspective are concern for common good and solidarity issues—especially with regard to the possibility of real community. Some of them are:

- A. The Problem of Isolation and Division
- B. Accentuated Inequities in an AI world
- C. Biases in the Technology
- D. Harm to well-being
- E. Obfuscation of who is responsible

First, the problem of isolation and division. Will AI (especially a virtual utopia) lead to more isolation and also more division, as well as less concern for others? How am I going to be concerned for others when I'm only interacting with other people that are in my own small sphere of interest and concern? This already happens to some extent with social media bubbles on Facebook where you associate primarily with people that think like you, or have desires and likes like you do. What will the continuation of this—particularly in a virtual utopia-- do to family life? It already has undermined family life in certain respects. But how will it continue to do that?

A second related issue having to do with common good and solidarity is the accentuated inequities which will arise in such a world. Pope Francis raises this concern when he says,

...there is the substantial risk of disproportionate benefit for the few at the price of the impoverishment of many. Respect for the dignity of labourers and the importance of employment for the economic well-being of individuals, families, and societies, for job security and just wages, ought to be a high priority for the international community as these forms of technology penetrate more deeply into our workplaces (Francis, 2024b, Sect.5).

There's a power imbalance with those who do have technology, those who don't, those who do understand it, those who do not. And it seems that AI may greatly accentuate the divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Third, the common good of all and solidarity among us cannot be realized in a world where bias is embedded in the technology, so bias is a major issue to face. Pope Francis points out the great importance of bias in AI algorithms:

The lack of different levels of mediation that these systems introduce is particularly exposed to forms of bias and discrimination: systemic errors can easily multiply, producing not only injustices in individual cases but also, due to the domino effect, real forms of social inequality.... When algorithms extrapolate information, they always run

the risk of distortion, replicating the injustices and prejudices of the environments where they originate. The faster and more complex they become, the more difficult it proves to understand why they produced a particular result (Francis, 2024b, sect.5).

Fourth, there is also a concern about the real significant harm to well being which can arise through some of these technologies: For example, virtual porn that we've talked about already, gambling where people can individually gamble on their own phone apart from anyone else, and even do it virtually with AI games that are going on. And they don't even have to be actual games or actual events, but they can be AI events and echo chambers as well, where we just hear what we want to hear. We hear what we already know or think we know.

An additional concern about AI arising from a CST concern for solidarity and common good is the question of does AI obscure responsibility? Pope Francis points to the dangers of concealing responsibility and the resulting possibilities to evade obligations to society:

“Intelligent” machines may perform the tasks assigned to them with ever greater efficiency, but the purpose and the meaning of their operations will continue to be determined or enabled by human beings possessed of their own universe of values. There is a risk that the criteria behind certain decisions will become less clear, responsibility for those decisions concealed, and producers enabled to evade their obligation to act for the benefit of the community (Francis, 2024b, sect.4).

Does AI undermine our ability to think about what we're responsible for? (it seems that it does). The fact is that many of the AI algorithms are a black box even to their inventors. The faster and more complex they become, the more difficult it proves to understand why they produce a particular result. The fact is, we don't always even know how AI works (Heikkilä, 2024). The algorithms give us these sorts of results, but we're not sure exactly how they got us that information. So even those who are using them oftentimes don't fully understand how the algorithms are working, or how the answers were given, even though they're oftentimes great answers or correct answers. If one doesn't even understand how the answer was reached, how can one take responsibility for it?

3. Concern for the Poor

A third key CST principle is the concern for the poor in particular. Are the poor left behind in this situation, where they don't have any way to catch up with others, as they're already behind.

1. Algorithms May Further Disempower the Poor
2. Automatic Systems will Tend to Rank People (Poor at bottom, or invisible)
3. There could be a massive loss of jobs, affecting the unskilled and uneducated severely.

First, the poor, who may not be able to offer the market system if they don't have the right income levels, frequently become invisible for market purposes in a of automatic processes, and its likely they won't be served in the same sorts of ways. They will become, in the words

of Zygmunt Bauman, “wasted lives” (Bauman, 2003). As Pope Francis points out, “In the future, the reliability of an applicant for a mortgage, the suitability of an individual for a job, the possibility of recidivism on the part of a convicted person, or the right to receive political asylum or social assistance could be determined by artificial intelligence systems” (Francis, 2024b, sect.5).

Second, automated systems of AI will tend to rank people, and could exacerbate the divide between rich and poor in society. Pope Francis says, “Reliance on automatic processes that categorize individuals...could have profound repercussions on the social fabric by establishing a ranking among citizens” (Francis, 2024b, sect.5).

Third, job loss for the poor in particular is very serious in a world where AI replaces many jobs. Francis says, “Jobs that were once the sole domain of human labour are rapidly being taken over by industrial applications of artificial intelligence. Here too, there is the substantial risk of disproportionate benefit for the few at the price of the impoverishment of many” (Francis, 2024b, sect.5).

AI may be able to help the poor and have a leveling effect, but it depends on how it is used going forward. If it is used primarily as a means to eliminate jobs (and so costs), it is unlikely to help the poor. David Rotman recently put it this way: “Simply put, we are at a juncture where either less-skilled workers will increasingly be able to take on what is now thought of as knowledge work, or the most talented knowledge workers will radically scale up their existing advantages over everyone else. Which outcome we get depends largely on how employers implement tools like ChatGPT” (Rotman, 2023).

***Miranda Prorsus*, and Other Relevant Catholic Documents about Technology**

There are a number of relevant church documents which speak about technology, and the concerns which arise from them are quite relevant to thinking about AI concerns. One which is neglected is *Miranda Prorsus*, from 1957-- providing the church's response to television radio and movies. But it is useful to examine it as well to consider the Church's general consistent positive approach to technology, as well as the recurring concerns and calls for responsibility to be taken by the producers of such technologies. Most of the documents are much more contemporary, such as World Communications Day from 2001 by John Paul II. He had many things to say about technology. Also, “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment” from 2018 and “World Communications Day” from Pope Francis in 2019. And “Christus Vivit”, which was shared with youth by Pope Francis in 2019. “World Day of Social Communications” in 2024, just recently, and then also the “World Day of Peace” also from 2024, even more recently. Of course there are plenty of other documents, and one can find headlines such as “Stop texting during meals. Pope Francis tells youngsters” (CBS, 2023) almost weekly, and Pope Francis has a lot to say on these issues. But our discussion will be limited to the above documents.

The church has always tried to be very positive about technology in general. Asking, “Where can we find the good?” is the general approach, and a general Christian response should be that technology is something that we've created, and as creatures of God and beings that

are creators like God is made in His image, we can make good things and things that can be used for good, but can also be used for evil. *Miranda Prorsus* exemplifies this perspective on new forms of technology when it says “these new arts should not only serve the truth, but also the perfecting of human life and morals” and also that “remarkable technical inventions.... are nevertheless, the gifts of God, our Creator, from whom all good gifts proceed” (Pius XII, 1957). According to the Church, technological gifts like AI and social media are good things that are from God. We may use them for the good or we could use them for our harm.

What *Miranda Prorsus* says about the contemporary technology of its day also applies to our day. When it states, “let the films, TV, and radio be at the service of the truth in such a way that the bonds between peoples may become yet closer, but they may have a more respectful understanding of each other that they may assist each other in any crisis” we should contextualize this for today and ask ourselves—how can we ensure that AI and social media technology are used in these helpful ways, rather than the opposite?

Miranda Prorsus also outlines various duties related to technology use and production. Regarding users of technology, it says, the first duty of the radio listener is that of choosing carefully and deliberately....programs which are given entrance. there must be such as encourage truth and goodness, and do not draw members of the family away from the fulfillment of their duty, whether to individuals or to society, they should be such as strengthen them. To carry out these duties properly, and in the case of children and youths, cause no harm, but rather assist and extend the salutary control of parents and teachers again, particularly those by which the mind is directed towards God (Pius XII, 1957).

We should apply this to AI and social media: are AI and social media providing this service for us today? Do they draw us and encourage us towards truth and goodness? Is it helping us to want to fulfill our duty to others, and to society? Or is it making us more and more self involved and self centered? Is it helping our children to become better citizens, and to be better children to their parents and better students to their teachers? Or is it doing just the opposite? There is no reason to relegate such questions to antiquity. They are still very relevant today, yet few people ask such questions directly. The judgments that we need to make must be based on what is technology doing in terms of those things? Is it helping us flourish as human beings, or is it harming us? (and if it's harming then we need to change our uses of it).

But a more serious duty falls on the creators of the technology according to *Miranda Prorsus*: “but the heaviest responsibility, though for a different reason, falls on directors and producers. The awareness of this burden is not an obstacle to noble undertakings, but rather ought to strengthen the minds” (Pius XII, 1957). The ethical responsibility of producers of technology is perhaps even more important than the responsibility for the consumer and the parents of would-be consumers.

Pope Francis has continued to support a generally positive hopeful stance towards technology, including social media and AI. In *Christus Vivit* (Franci, 2019b) Pope Francis describes the digital environment as “a new way to communicate and bond” and as public

sphere which provides opportunity for “possible social and political engagement and active citizenship” by facilitating “the circulation of independent information, providing effective protection for the most vulnerable and publicizing violations of their rights” (Francis, 2019b, 86-87) Certainly this is true-- social media can be a way for information to be disseminate. Even during the Arab Spring in 2011, there was a lot that was shared through social media to try to garner support for the revolutions that were going on in various countries (Smidi & Shahan, 2017). It happened in Iran, and many movements in the US have also relied on social media, such as BLM or the earlier Occupy Wall Street movement (Chang *et al*, 2022). Certainly social media has helped to highlight injustices that are being done. Despite whatever ills come from social media, it can in its best form and use help overcome injustices. Pope Francis is not the first Pope to support the positive possibilities of social media. Pope John Paul II said in 2001, “Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his good news may be heard from the house tops of the world” (John Paul II, 2001). Social media can be used for the good of spreading the Gospel even much more.

Pope Francis sees many positive possibilities from social media and AI. Speaking of the benefits of the internet on World Communications Day 2019, he said, “the Church has always sought to promote its use in the service of the encounter between persons, and of solidarity among all” and “the use of the social web is complementary to an encounter in the flesh that comes alive through the body, heart, eyes, gaze, breath of the other” (2019a). When it is used as a supplement, not a substitute for authentic relationships, it is a valuable resource:

If a family uses the Net to be more connected, to then meet at table and look into each other’s eyes, then it is a resource.... If a Church community coordinates its activity through the network, and then celebrates the Eucharist together, then it is a resource...If the Net becomes an opportunity to share stories and experiences of beauty or suffering that are physically distant from us, in order to pray together and together seek out the good to rediscover what unites us, then it is a resource. (Francis, 2019a)

The key is that it should always be used in the service of building up human relationships, not supplanting them. But of course he realized the internet can bring about harm as well: “networks, on the one hand, help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another but on the other, lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights” (2019a). And he points out that the networks we create on the internet through social media etc require responsibility, and social network communities are not necessarily communities in the healthy sense of that word:

The image of the net invites us to reflect on the multiplicity of lines and intersections that ensure its stability in the absence of a centre, a hierarchical structure, a form of vertical organization. The net works because all its elements share responsibility.... Everyone can see how, in the present scenario, social network communities are not automatically synonymous with community (Francis, 2019a)

But while Pope Francis also sees the positive potential of recent technologies, he also urges caution:

We rightly rejoice and give thanks for the impressive achievements of science and technologies, as a result of which countless ills that formerly plagued human life and caused great suffering, have been remedied at the same time technological scientific advances by making it possible to exercise hitherto unprecedented control over reality, are placing in human hands a vast array of options, including some that may pose a risk to our survival and endanger our common home. (Francis, 2024b)

There are good things that could come here, but we also have a lot to think about again. Francis points out in *Christus Vivit* that there are real dangers to misusing social media: “It is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact” (Francis, 2019b, par.88). Indeed, the digital environment is also one of “loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, and violence even to the extreme case of a dark web” (Francis, 2019b, par.88). Pope Francis highlights that digital media can expose people with the risk of addiction, isolation, and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships, and new forms of violence are spreading through the social media like cyber bullying, pornography and the exploitation of persons for sexual purposes, or online gambling. Many addiction issues can be spread through the Internet and through social media especially. Of course, there are instances where AI may be able to help curb some of these addictive behaviors. For example, it has recently been reported that, “For the past two years, millions of people searching for child abuse videos on Pornhub’s UK website have been interrupted. Each of the 4.4 million times someone has typed in words or phrases linked to abuse, a warning message has blocked the page, saying that kind of content is illegal. And in half the cases, a chatbot has also pointed people to where they can seek help” (Burgess, 2024). So there are opportunities to use this technology to decrease addictions as well.

Ironically, despite the worldwide reach of the internet, the impact of social media on youth can lead to isolation, loneliness, and lack of difference. As Francis said on World Communications Day in 2019, social network communities are not automatically synonymous with community. Pope Francis points out,

while modern advancement and technology have greatly improved our lives, one must be prudent with its usage. Technology is now a permanent part of the life of young people. The duplicity of technology, however, becomes evident when it leads to the development of certain vices. This danger is manifested through laziness, isolation, desolation, and boredom. It is evident that young people around the world are obsessively consuming media products. Despite living in a hyper connected world, communication among young people remains limited to those who are similar to them. There's a lack of spaces and opportunities to encounter difference. Now, of course, through social media and through different apps, you can meet people that are quite different from you, but more often than not you meet people that are quite like you. (Francis, 2018, 4)

So there's a loss of difference that's happening as we have more communication primarily with those that are very similar to ourselves. Once we get into the echo chambers resulting from social media, it is easier and easier to find those that you share commonalities with, but the

effect of the algorithms is that it can be much harder to find random or serendipitous encounters with people who are different than you in that online space.

Pope Francis also makes the interesting point that online relationships may create delusional parallel worlds. He says,

online relationships can become inhuman. Digital spaces bind us to the vulnerability of another human being and prevent us from our own self reflection. Problems like pornography distort a young person's perception of human sexuality. Technology used this way creates a delusional parallel reality that ignores human dignity. (Francis, 2019b, par.90).

Hyperreality has been in discussion now for over 30 years (Baudrillard, 1994)—hyper realities which are better than actual reality (Echo, 1990). The hyper real world consists of airbrushed models, who are much more beautiful than any regular looking woman that you find. You have airbrushed experiences and unrealistic expectations which are shown to you through media that aren't actual in the real world. And so one has these 2 different realities, the one reality that you like is the one that's not real. And the actual reality you don't like so much anymore, because you've experienced this nonreal reality through virtual. And so it has this delusional parallel world that causes a lot of frustration for people, including frustration with their own humanness, and the humanness of others.

Pope Francis points out that even when we're very rich in technology, we may be becoming poor in our humanity. He says “at this time in history, which risks becoming rich in technology and poor in humanity only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality only by recovering the wisdom of the heart can we confront and interpret the newness of our time, and rediscover the path to a fully human communication?” (Francis, 2024a) So that is his hope, but it will take a lot of intentionality and work to do this. He says,

AI can be seen as an opportunity or as a threat, depending on the inclination of the heart, everything within our reach becomes either an opportunity or a threat. Our very bodies, created for communication and communion can become a means of aggression. So, too, every technical extension of our humanity can be a means for loving service or hostile domination. Artificial intelligence systems can help to overcome ignorance and facilitate the exchange of information between different peoples and generations (Francis, 2024a).

So just as our body can be used for kind actions or for violent actions, depending on how we use it, in the same way, these technological developments that we have can be used for good or for evil, depending on how we choose to use them with big data. There's a concern here that we start to undermine or lose the humanity involved. Again Pope Francis says

the representation of reality in big data, however useful for the operation of machines, ultimately entails a substantial loss of the truth of things hindering interpersonal communication and threatening our very humanity. “Information cannot be separated from living relationships. These involve the body and immersion in the real world. They

involve correlating not only data but also human experiences. They require sensitivity to faces and facial expressions, compassion and sharing” (Francis, 2024a).

When data from many people is simply amalgamated and divided into general groupings, we've lost a lot of the humanity from which the data was reduced. Even if one could look at all of their own data of the external decisions that one has made or the decisions one tends to make, that doesn't tell everything there is to know about you. It doesn't tell you about your possibilities to change, or about decisions that you make about the humanity of those decisions. So big data alone, in isolation from the fullness of human experience, cannot give us a true picture of reality.

Despite these possible problems, the Church strives to use the Internet, as we said before, for good things (Francis, 2019a). At World Day of Social Communications 2024, Pope Francis spoke to some of the dire predictions of some about the negative impacts of AI. Pushing back against such apocalyptic narratives of a post-AI world, Francis says

Before all else, we need to set aside catastrophic predictions and their numbing effects. A century ago, Romano Guardini reflected on technology and humanity. Guardini urged us not to reject “the new” in an attempt to “preserve a beautiful world condemned to disappear”. At the same time, he prophetically warned that “we are constantly in the process of becoming. We must enter into this process, each in his or her own way, with openness but also with sensitivity to everything that is destructive and inhumane therein” (Francis, 2024a).

He concluded, “these are technical, scientific, and potential problems, political problems, but they cannot be resolved except by starting from our humanity.” In reflecting on the thoughts of Guardini from a hundred years ago, and his views about how we should engage with technology, Pope Francis says we shouldn't be scared of it, but we should be aware of its potential problems. Embrace it as best we can, because in many respects we have to. And so we have to figure out-- to what extent can we embrace this? And how do we put limits on it, so that it doesn't undermine our humanity?

A Positive Plan and Approach to AI Use

In his World Day of Peace (2024b) talk Pope Francis provided a series of questions which he felt were especially relevant for the church and people of faith to ask:

- First, how do we safeguard professionalism and dignity of workers in the fields of information, communication technology, together with that of others throughout the world?
- Second, how do we ensure the inner operability of platforms.
- Third, how do we enable businesses that develop digital platforms to accept their responsibilities with regard to content and advertising in the same way as editors of traditional communications media do. And this has been an ongoing question. This is Facebook, a media platform. If so, what kinds of responsibilities does it have for what goes on its media platform?

- Fourth, how do we make more transparent the criteria guiding the operation of algorithms for indexing and d-indexing, and for search engines that are capable of celebrating or canceling persons and opinions, histories and cultures. So there's a lot involved. There are certain things we might say we don't want on the web. But when do we have a responsibility not to cancel certain information?
- Fifth, how do we guarantee the transparency of information processing. How do we identify the paternity of writings and traceability of sources concealed behind the shield of anonymity? Again, as you have open AI sourcing, and you have people that are anonymous using this stuff to come up with all kinds of new forms of media, how do we hold them responsible for what they come up with, especially when it comes to cyber porn?
- Sixth, how do we make it clear whether an image or video is portraying an event or simulating it? This is a big question, and I don't think we've really come up with a good answer yet, but it is an important question.
- Seventh, how do we prevent sources from being reduced to one alone, thus fostering a single approach developed on the basis of an algorithm? How, instead, do we promote an environment suitable for preserving pluralism, portraying the complexity of reality? Again, algorithms tend to go towards the lowest common denominator and not leave the diversity that we want.
- Eighth, how can we make sustainable a technology so powerful, costly, and energy consuming?
- Ninth, as AI grows and the use of it grows, it's going to use more and more and more electricity. And I don't think we've crossed that bridge-- we haven't even thought about how much electricity that will take.
- Tenth, how can we make technology accessible? especially to developing countries, so it's an equal access technology that we can all use. So that a few won't just get further and further ahead of those who are left behind.

These ten questions are well worth concentrated consideration and reflection. Technology and progress will not of their own accord ask the reflective questions about fairness, responsibility, transparency, sustainability, social cohesion, the common good and the poor. That is why it is so important for us to raise these questions, and help direct AI in a way which will help humanity and make our world better and more humane.

Conclusion

AI and social media show great promise. They, like the many other things humans have created, can bring about great good or great harm. But we must use wise judgement and intentionality about how these new technologies are used—and the AI tech race which is happening right now is not conducive to such moderated restraint and reflection. But without restraint and reflection, a lot of harm could be done to society and the common good. AI is not necessarily beneficial unless we act with caution and thoughtful intentionality. An attitude which says “Get on board or get out of the way” which hears no evil, sees no evil and says no evil about new technology *will* more efficiently get us to the future, but it may be a future we

will regret. We cannot presume a priori that its development will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and to peace among peoples. the Pope said, “unless it has inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy, and reliability” (Francis, 2024b). Not all advancement is true progress. True Progress, according to Pope Francis requires that,

The inherent dignity of each human being and the fraternity that binds us together as members of the one human family must undergird the development of new technologies and serve as indisputable criteria for evaluating them before they are employed, so that digital progress can occur with due respect for justice and contribute to the cause of peace. Technological developments that do not lead to an improvement in the quality of life of all humanity, but on the contrary aggravate inequalities and conflicts, can never count as true progress. (Francis, 2024b)

We are living in an exciting period of history where we are witnessing rapid change. It provides opportunity for us to consider what it really means to be human, and what is worth preserving, and what does serve good purposes and what doesn't. Pope Francis says,

The rapid spread of astonishing innovations, whose workings and potential are beyond the ability of most of us to understand and appreciate, has proven both exciting and disorienting. This leads inevitably to deeper questions about the nature of human beings, our distinctiveness and the future of the species homo sapiens in the age of artificial intelligence. How can we remain fully human and guide this cultural transformation to serve a good purpose? (Francis, 2024a).

If the technology is going to aggravate inequalities and conflicts, if it's not going to improve our overall quality of life and not going to enable respect for justice and contribute to the cause of peace, then we need to figure out how to use it so that it will. These are the kind of considered evaluative judgments we have to make. Catholic Social Thought can give us helpful principles to guide our thinking on these matters. As “The Church and Internet”, a 2002 document from the Vatican admonished believers, we need virtues to guide us as we approach concerns about technology:

Prudence is necessary in order clearly to see the implications—the potential for good and evil—in this new medium and to respond creatively to its challenges and opportunities.

Justice is needed, especially justice in working to close the digital divide—the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor in today's world.[52] This requires a commitment to the international common good, no less than the “globalization of solidarity”.[53]

Fortitude, courage, is necessary. This means standing up for truth in the face of religious and moral relativism, for altruism and generosity in the face of individualistic consumerism, for decency in the face of sensuality and sin.

And **temperance** is needed—a self-disciplined approach to this remarkable technological instrument, the Internet, so as to use it wisely and only for good. (Pontifical Council for Communications, 2002)

It is up to us as educators at Catholic and Christian institutions to display these virtues, and encourage them in our students as they wrestle with these very live issues in the world today.⁵

Appendix/Addendum for Curricula

Here I share resources from my class on social media AI and the meaning of life. It was a great seminar group, with about 15 students. We read a book by Jaren Lanier, who works at Microsoft, who wrote *10 Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. He's been involved in this world for over 30 years, and really had some interesting things to say in that book. Another book by Maggie Jackson, a little bit older, called *Distracted*. is about how we are becoming more and more distracted. She talks to a lot of experts in a lot of different fields. And it was a fascinating read and Jackson really did a lot of research to come up with different ways that we're being distracted through technology-- not just phones-- it's a lot more than that. *Stolen Focus* is a book by Johann Hari and he brings out so many different aspects of how our society is losing its ability to focus—due to many things, including AI. We're actually changing people's brains, so they aren't able to focus in the way that human beings used to. *Irresistible* by Adam Altner is about addiction in many different forms. But he's especially focusing on phone and media addictions, social media addictions goes into interesting cases that have to do with even video game addictions in China, and how they deal with that, how they have camps set up to help teenagers, and 20 year olds get out of that world by having pretty military style, pretty severe military style camps. Another interesting and challenging book was *Reengineering Humanity* by Frischmann and Selinger is a great book about how AI and these kind of things are actually changing the way that our brain is operating, and perhaps causing us to lose certain capacities. It is a disturbing book in many respects. But it was fascinating, and really helped us learn a lot.

The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt was a new addition for our Fall 2024 course, and it has been very well received. Haidt highlights the severe impact which smart phone use among adolescents starting around 2011 has had on mental health of teenagers, and provides lots of research to support his claims and concerns.

We also watched a number of films. *Social Dilemma* is fascinating and the makers of that film (The Center for Humane Technology) also produced a fantastic Ted Talk called *The AI Dilemma* as well as another talk *Beyond the AI Dilemma*. I highly recommend all of those. We also watch some other films like *The Great Hack*, *The Creepy Line*, *The Circle*, and *Wall-E*, among others. They generate a lot of good discussion, and frequently pair well with the readings.

⁵ I would like to express my appreciation to my students who participated in our “Social Media, AI, and the Meaning of Life” spring 2024 course. Those discussions helped me think a great deal about the concerns of AI and social media. I also want to thank my wife and intellectual discussion partner Celeste Harvey, for all of our many discussions about AI and social media over the last year, and many thoughts here are fruit of those discussions. Finally, I want to thank Mike Gallagher and the Foster Center for Responsible Leadership for putting on the conference that made this work possible.

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Empowering Students: Service Learning and Servant Leadership

Heather McDivitt, Ph.D. St. Bonaventure University

Introduction

Intuitions of higher education seek to provide excellent educational experiences for their students. Researchers at The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) have identified eleven high-impact practices (HIPs) which help students flourish. According to the AAC&U (2024), “HIPs provide hands-on learning and increase student engagement, leading to a better alignment of knowledge attainment with degree completion and career-readiness goals. All of which best serve the student, institution, and broader society.” The AAC&U analyzed data collected by higher education institutions with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE survey) to explore how students participate in the high-impact practices on campuses and how their learning is enhanced with that participation. These high-impact experiences include first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, service learning, internships, capstone projects, and reflective e-portfolios. This paper will focus on the educational importance of service learning as a high-impact practice that helps students learn the material covered in the classroom during the semester, has the potential to assist students in understanding and embodying the Catholic mission and identity of their university, and can provide opportunity for students to learn and practice Franciscan servant leadership skills. This paper will first define service learning by looking at the benefits for students who engage in service learning. Then the paper will explore how service learning assists students in understanding the mission of Franciscan higher education. Lastly, the paper will describe how engagement in service learning and reflection on that experience can provide students with the valuable opportunity to practice Franciscan servant leadership skills.

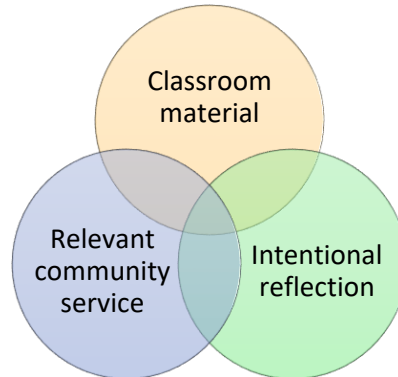
What Is Service Learning?

There is no universal definition of service learning. However, most definitions indicate there are three important components of the service learning experience. Service learning: (1) relies on academic material and course content; (2) is explored in relevant community service-based activities; and (3) is followed by a variety of intentional reflection opportunities (including combinations of individual and group reflections completed orally or written). According to the AAC&U (2024), service learning and community-based learning are educational opportunities that encourage students to engage in community service as part of an academic class.

In these programs, field-based “experiential learning” with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These

programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life. (AAC&U, 2024)

Service learning can be visualized as the relationship of all three components in the following diagram:



Service learning can be an effective high-impact practice which benefits students and community partners. Wodon (2022) asserts, “The concept of service learning did not emerge from Catholic educational institutions, but it is aligned with Catholic social thought and it has been emphasized by Pope Francis and the Congregation for Catholic Education, including in their guidance towards a Global Compact on Education to renew our passion for a more open and inclusive education” (p. 12).

How Can Service Learning Benefit Students, Campus, and the Community?

Significant research provides evidence showing the benefits of service learning in higher education. These benefits impact students, faculty, institutions of higher education and the local communities. A comprehensive examination of the benefits of service learning is summarized by Pavelea (2022):

Multiple benefits have been documented for students, teachers, schools, and communities (Culic & Pavelea, 2022). SL (service learning) helps students build competency in four domains: academic/professional (career interests, critical thinking, problem-solving, motivation to learn), social (teamwork, conflict management, communication, leadership, network building), personal (self-awareness, self-efficacy, grit, values), and civic (civic knowledge, responsibility, identity, and mindedness) (Celio et al., 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022; Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). For teachers, SL brings networking and mentoring opportunities, increased job satisfaction, and recognition of efforts. For schools, it can be translated into increased visibility, reputation, partnerships and collaborations, retention rates for both students and teachers. For communities, SL brings reduced stereotypes and positive relations, expertise, and useful service. (pp. 86-87).

Service learning as a high-impact practice has wide reaching benefits. Marco-Gardoqui et al. (2020) reviewed studies about the use of service learning in business schools and argue research demonstrates beneficial outcomes including greater social engagement, improved self-esteem,

improved team work skills, enhanced leadership skills, improved communication skills, improved problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and greater recognition of diversity. In addition to the benefits identified above, service learning enables students to witness and engage in the stated mission of Catholic higher educational institutions by practicing Franciscan servant leadership skills.

Embodying Catholic Higher Education and Mission

Serving others is a core foundation of the Catholic faith. It is also reflected in the purpose of Catholic higher education. Mann (2020) explains, “The religious missions of evangelical Christian and Catholic institutions of higher learning leads them to serve those beyond the campus community and strive to produce graduates who will continue to engage thoughtfully in their communities’ post-graduation” (p. 12). Service learning allows faculty to connect their academic course content to problems within the community and provides the opportunity for students to learn about problems and potential solutions to many societal problems.

Mission statements are central to the functioning of Catholic higher educational institutions. It is crucial that Catholic institutions of higher education understand their mission, purpose, and history to thrive and provide the educational experience that students are seeking. In *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education*, Briel et al. (2021) explain:

[John Henry] Newman explains at the beginning of *The Idea of the University* that the essence of the university is “intellectual, not moral,” although he goes on to say that the integrity of the university demands the moral and the spiritual, especially in relation to the Church. Another way of putting this, especially from a faculty perspective, is that our fundamental goal with students is to pursue with them the truth of things, to expand and enlarge the mind, embracing the truth in its multiform expressions. We are also to care for the souls of our students. In freedom and openness, we are to engage them in moral and spiritual questions. We are called to mentor and counsel as well as give witness to a life of charity and justice. (p. 77)

Service learning opportunities have the ability to connect the classroom curriculum and learning with real life experiences as students work to solve problems within the local community. The opportunity for reflection provides the chance to articulate the connection between the classroom and service and to explore themes of mission, service, and the good life. Service learning prompts students to ask questions about needs within the local community and have personal encounters with those who are struggling. Service learning enhances classroom learning with time to engage with social agencies and community partners seeking to address local needs. Mann (2020) summarizes, “[service learning] serves as the unique intersection for Christian higher education institutions to attend to their faithful missions while responding to society’s critiques and needs” (p. 21). For some students, service learning opportunities have the potential to foster leadership skills that will be beneficial not only as they complete their degrees, but also as they begin their careers.

What is servant leadership?

Students engaged in service learning have an opportunity to practice important professional skills and develop strong leadership habits. Students must communicate with local community members, attend planned events on time, coordinate travel plans with others, interact with people outside of the campus community, attempt to solve problems independently when they arise, and follow up on assigned tasks and responsibilities. Service learning can also offer students the ability to practice and reflect on Franciscan servant leadership skills.

The origins of the concept of servant leadership can be traced to the writings of Robert Greenleaf. Greenleaf developed the concept after reading Hermann Hesse's short novel *Journey to the East*, first published in German in 1932. In 1970 Greenleaf wrote his first essay on the topic, *The Servant as Leader* and went on to write several other essays and books on the topic of servant leadership and became the CEO of the Center for Servant Leadership. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership is a nonprofit organization located at Seton Hall University whose mission is "to advance the awareness, understanding and practice of servant leadership by individuals and organizations" (Greenleaf Center, n.d.). Greenleaf's understanding of servant leadership seeks to upend the traditional authoritarian model of top-down leadership to embrace the notion of a humble leadership that seeks to serve and improve the lives of others and the communities to which they belong. In *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf outlined ten characteristics of servant leadership including: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community.

The concept of servant leadership is demonstrated and exemplified in the actions of Francis of Assisi and the written instructions he developed for the early Franciscan friars. Cusato (2023) explained, "The friars had a keen awareness of how power was used (and abused) both in society and sometimes also in the Church itself; and how the misuse of power often affected most negatively the poor, the weak and the powerless. This awareness made them sensitive to the use of power when they themselves had to create their own structures of authority" (p. 94). The author went on to explain that "during the earliest period of the fraternity's existence (from 1208 to 1218), the community was small enough to be able to conceive of the roles of authority as a kind of shared responsibility" (p.95). However, as the Franciscan movement expanded, in both numbers and geographic reach, the friars had to establish guidelines for selecting authority figures and develop the stipulations which governed the leaders. Seeking to prevent abuses of power, Francis chose to emphasize the responsibility of service as integral to leadership. Cusato (2023) notes:

Hence, the *Early Rule*, Chapter 5, continues: 'And "whoever wishes to become great among" them, "Let him become" their "minister" [Matt. 20:26b] and "servant" [Matt. 20:27b]. And he who is great among them, "let him become the least" [Luke 22:26]. The last word here is actually, in Latin, *minor*. In other words, just as one is *minor* among those in the world, so too one must be *minor* among one's own in the order.

Chapter 4 states it in a very concise manner, again citing the Lord's own words, 'And the ministers and servants should remember what the Lord says: "I have come not to be served but to serve" [Matt. 20:28]'. (p. 96).

Francis sought to have the early Franciscans model the servant leadership of Christ as they served others in the world and as they served one another within their order. Cusato (2023) explains, "he has combined two small words – 'minister' and 'servant' – from two separate phrases in the gospel passage of Matthew 20 (verses 26b and 27b) and combined them into one descriptive if ungainly phrase so as to emphasize that not only must the designated leader (*custos*) be a 'minister', he must also exercise that authority as a 'servant'" (p. 96).

This embodiment of humble service to others is at the heart of the identity of what it means to be Franciscan. Benson (2024) explains: We usually call the brothers of this religious order "Franciscans," after their founder, but the name they chose signifies much more. *Fratres minores* [lesser brothers] links them to the image of Jesus washing the feet of his brothers on the night before he died. This Jesus, the Master who serves and is about to die, is therefore always before them. Francis would connect this image to all the names of position within the order. So, rather than use a term like *prior*, which means "before," Francis chose the name *custos* for the brother who watches over the affairs of a community, a word that gives us "custodian." He is a person who serves, who looks out for others, and is not placed before anyone. Likewise, the head of the entire order is called the "minister general," a name clearly reflecting service. (p. 55).

Francis urged his brothers to follow the example of Christ and serve each other, the poor, the sick, the vulnerable and those in need. The examples of Christ and Francis serve as powerful models for servant leadership.

Franciscan scholars Christensen and Moore (2011) argue "the spirituality of Francis of Assisi can inform and shape a Franciscan values-based model of servant leadership" (p. 74). Christensen and Moore build their understanding of Franciscan servant leadership upon Greenleaf's the concept of servant leadership. Additionally, Christensen and Moore describe the work of James Laub, who in 2003, developed an Organizational Leadership Assessment tool which can be used to define servant leadership. Laub argues servant leadership emphasizes valuing and developing people, builds the community of those being led, practices authenticity, provides leadership for the good of those being led, and shares power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organization, and those served. Christensen and Moore provide a framework for Franciscan educators to utilize readings and sources from the Franciscan tradition to bring the life of Francis into the present context and to allow Francis' faith and actions to demonstrate faithful servant leadership. Christensen and Moore (2011) argue:

He [Francis] held all in sacred trust for the greater honor and glory of God and for the common good, and his love of God and others impelled him to live in right relationship, as *servus et subditus* [servant and subject to all], for the good of the community. Francis' leadership was not based on traditional forms of power and authority, but on the inner

authority he received from his Creator and from following in the footprints of Jesus.
(pp. 77-78)

Christensen and Moore provide a six-step methodology for examining Francis as a servant leader. These steps include: (1) using primary sources; (2) considering the context and purpose of the text; (3) examining the actions and motivations of Francis from the text; (4) identifying the values and virtues of Francis from the text; (5) applying these virtues and values to a contemporary context for servant leadership; and (6) developing a summary statement of specific attitudes and behaviors that cultivate these values and virtues for servant leadership (Christensen & Moore, 2011). They conclude that using writings about the life and faith of Francis provides a foundation for analyzing servant leadership and is useful in cultivating the ability to lead and serve others with humility and compassion for the common good. As Christensen and Moore (2011) explain, “Francis was a true servant leader who chose to serve first and then lead. His spirit and life provide a model for servant leadership within contemporary situations and paradigms” (p. 83).

Christensen later turned her attention to Clare of Assisi and performed a similar analysis. She concluded, “The leadership exhibited by Clare of Assisi as evidenced through her writings indicates a style of service to her sisters and promotes the growth of each person she encountered. The answer to the question of whether Clare of Assisi was a servant leader is unequivocally ‘Yes’” (Christensen, 2013, p. 24). Using primary sources to analyze the lives and contexts of Francis and Clare can provide fruitful discussions about serving others as students reflect about service learning experiences.

Another important element of service learning is reflection about the service experience. In addition to learning about and reflecting on the service site and the community needs that are being addressed with the service, reflection opportunities are critical in connecting the service experiences to the Franciscan mission and values of an institution of higher education and can inspire students to think critically about the lives of Francis and Clare of Assisi and their demonstrated actions of servant leadership.

Service learning at St. Bonaventure University- one example

For the past three semesters, I have explored service learning in a required general education course, *Philosophy 104: Introduction to Ethics*. In the Spring of 2023, I introduced service learning to the course with a small honors class with 14 students. These students were required to identify a local organization or service site and complete twenty hours of service during the semester. The feedback from the students indicated twenty hours was burdensome, but they thought ten hours of service for the students enrolled in the class the following semester would be valuable and more manageable. In the Fall of 2023, I incorporated service learning into three sections (26 students in each section) and continued with three sections of 26 students in the Spring of 2024. These students were required to complete ten hours of service through either on campus opportunities or at local organizations. During the first semester in which I added service learning to the course, I focused on working out logistics concerning where the students could serve locally, how to record and document student service hours, and determined

what reflection activities would be most useful to the students. Over the course of the semester, I built relationships with others on campus who organize service opportunities and developed oral and written reflection activities that were used throughout the semester.

When I expanded service learning program from 14 honors students to 78 students in the Fall of 2023, I built on what I learned the previous semester by focusing on the intentional reflection aspect of service learning, and specifically, on our university mission and stated values (*see* <https://www.sbu.edu/about/values-mission>). After the students started their service hours, we spent a day reviewing our university's website, including reading and reviewing the University's mission statement and values (*see* the Appendix at the end of this paper). Students broke into small groups and discussed how they experienced the values (community, compassion, wisdom, and integrity) in their service and then described how their service and our university values related to the course content they were learning about in the ethics class. This initial class discussion started the connection between the course content, our university mission and values, and the service experiences. Later in the semester, the students were given a written homework assignment, in which they selected an experience they had during their service opportunity, and related it to our university mission and values and the course content. After completing the assignment independently as homework, they shared their reflections in small groups in class. Thereafter, students had the opportunity to voluntarily share their reflections with the entire class. At the end of the semester, as part of their final service-learning reflection journal, the students selected an incident from their service and analyzed the connection between their service experience, our university mission and values, and the course content in our ethics class. By providing the students multiple opportunities to make the connection between their service learning, classroom learning, and reflection on our university's missions and values, the students were able to engage in independent reflection and share their reflections with others.

The following semester, during the Spring of 2024, I continued building on the service learning experience in the Ethics class. However, during this semester, I expanded the reflection and analysis to include specific discussions and reflections about Franciscan servant leadership. During a class discussion, the students brainstormed and compiled a list of people they thought exemplified effective leaders. They also created a list of traits and characteristics that they thought good leaders should possess. I noticed that their initial list of characteristics envisioned leaders as strong, dominant, powerful, and authoritarian. I asked the students to circle back to our work on Christian ethics, the Beatitudes, and example of Christ. Many of the students in all three sections had previously completed the required class about the lives of Francis and Clare, so I asked them to reflect on the way they interacted with others. The students were able to quickly see how their traditional ideas about leadership were different from the leadership Christ and Francis demonstrated. I introduced the idea of servant leadership and highlighted actions of Christ and Francis that exemplified servant leadership to encourage the students to think further about the topic. Later in the semester, we had another class conversation relating the concept of servant leadership with their service learning experiences and our university's mission and values. One of the final written reflections for the class asked students to tie these concepts together as they reflected on their service experiences, our mission and servant leadership.

Besides assessing the service learning experience with student reflections, at the end of the semester, I asked students to complete an anonymous evaluation about the service-learning experience (in addition to the required university class evaluation). One of the questions asked the students if I should continue to make service learning a required part of the class or make it optional. Seventy-four of 76 students said service learning was beneficial to their learning and should remain a class requirement. Student written reflections about service, the mission of our university and the course content revealed the students made the connections between service and our Franciscan identity.

Service learning is an important high-impact practice that engages students in valuable community service activities, can help students understand and embody the Franciscan mission and values of an institution of higher education, and can foster discussions about servant leadership to equip students for lives of service and community engagement. Creating opportunities for students to engage in service can benefit the students, local community organizations, and individuals within the community receiving assistance. Students can apply what they are learning about in the classroom in real-life interactions and intentional written and oral reflections allow students time to process their learning, service experiences, and connect both to the Franciscan mission of our institutions.

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Appendix- St. Bonaventure University's Mission and Values:

Our Mission

St. Bonaventure is a Catholic university dedicated to educational excellence as informed by our Franciscan and liberal arts traditions. In the words of our patron, we believe that there should be “no knowledge without love,” and thus seek to transform the lives of our students, inspiring in them a lifelong commitment to service and citizenship.

St. Bonaventure embraces students, faculty and staff of all faiths and cultures and strives to bring out the best in every individual through meaningful relationships. As an academic and spiritual community, we endeavor to prepare our students for the challenges they will face in their professional careers and personal lives.

Our Values

Our Franciscan **COMMUNITY** affirms the unique dignity of everyone, each person reflecting the goodness of God, and invites all of our sisters and brothers to forge bonds of mutual acceptance and understanding that create a true sense of belonging.

We are a **COMMUNITY**...

- Nurturing **COMPASSION**.
- Seeking **WISDOM**.
- Building **INTEGRITY**.

COMPASSION: We are convinced that all of creation is God's gift, an awareness that calls forth a sense of solidarity with everyone and everything. As images of God, we strive to share God's unconditional love, particularly with those on the margins of society — the needy, the ignored, and the excluded.

WISDOM: We are convinced that education must be transformative of the whole person, concerned not only with the intellect, but also with the will, the heart, and the body. Education must be eminently practical, not just about learning concepts and skills, but discerning how to truly live humanly, deeply, and well in the world.

INTEGRITY: We are convinced that each of us must accept responsibility for our actions and that our relationships should be based on respect for the dignity of others, honesty, and transparency, realizing that the values we espouse mean little unless they are embodied in our personal and professional lives.

<https://www.sbu.edu/about/values-mission>

The Case of Clare College:

How to address the crisis in the humanities with a mission-focused core curriculum.

Michael Chiariello, Ph.D. St. Bonaventure University

In 2010, literary scholar Stanley Fish conceded in a pessimistic *New York Times* op-ed piece that “if your criteria are productivity, efficiency and consumer satisfaction, it makes perfect sense to withdraw funds and material support from the humanities - which do not earn their keep - and leave standing programs that have a more obvious relationship to a state’s economic prosperity.” (Fish, 2010). This is a succinct statement of what is often referred to as “the crisis in the humanities.” But this is too narrow an identification because the declining presence of the humanities, and liberal arts in general, is properly speaking a crisis in the university which affects all disciplines, insofar as the education of our students is concerned.

The story of Clare College, St. Bonaventure University’s former core curriculum, illustrates both possibilities and pitfalls institutions encounter in the challenging attempt to express an institution’s mission while creating a liberal arts core curriculum. What is the proper role of the Catholic academy in the face of this trend? The case in point for my remarks is the courageous, but failed effort by St. Bonaventure University to create and maintain a mission-focused core curriculum that we called “Clare College” after the first Franciscan woman. But first, I want to comment on the importance of the humanities and liberal arts often overlooked in curriculum development.

The Value of a Liberal Education.

This is not a recent issue. The classic statement of the importance of the liberal arts in a university education was offered by John Henry Cardinal Newman in his work “The idea of the university,” (1947) Newman’s argument for a liberal arts program for the soon to be established Catholic University of Ireland. His adversaries in this issue were what he called “utilitarians” who wished to see a new university specifically established to teach the professional skills needed for the workplace. Newman did not disparage professional education, rather he lamented that specialization was replacing the broader program of liberal arts. The term “liberal arts” and its distinction from more “practical” pursuits reflected the fact that the study of these subjects or skills were originally thought to be essential for a free person. I would add here that with the rise of liberal democracy, and the principles of equality and liberty, comes the need for a universal education for democratic society.

Newman describes the benefits of a liberal education as follows: “A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what ... I have ventured to call a philosophical habit.” (127) Newman argues that such an education is an optimal preparation for further study, including in professional areas and is a benefit in any profession the student may later practice.

Two Approaches to General Education.

Today liberal education is pursued in credits not specifically required to complete a major concentration, a program often referred to as **general education**, where students are directed to disperse their course-taking to areas distinct from their major field, and which in some way insure exposure of the students to samples of humanities, physical sciences and social sciences. This is often referred to as the distribution requirement, and it is the overwhelmingly popular approach. It has obvious advantages: requirements are satisfied by taking courses that are already being offered, especially entry-level courses in various disciplines, and it satisfies the sentiments of students wishing more freedom of choice in course taking. Perhaps most importantly, such an approach is economical, a factor the importance of which cannot be overstated, particularly when so many institutions are facing a need to constrain costs. However, the obvious drawback of the distribution requirement approach is that unlike in major field required courses, the set of courses chosen to satisfy distribution requirements would not necessarily have any internal connections, representing little more than a list of courses with no apparent collective purpose, other than ensuring that students had some basic familiarity with a few non-major areas of study. The idea that liberal education is achieved by widely dispersing students course choices alone is a common misconception. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that a student could satisfy general education requirements and not know it, and certainly without understanding why.

One might wonder whether required general education courses might follow the organized structure we find in major fields of study. This envisions an alternative to the distribution model, what is often referred to as a “core curriculum”: a sequential program of courses that are connected to some unifying purpose. Such purposes could include encouraging certain traits in students, for example “global citizenship” or more traditionally the traits identified by Newman. This was the path chosen by St. Bonaventure as it assembled Clare College.

The Story of Clare College

In the mid-1990’s St. Bonaventure University suffered a crisis of financial exigency while undergoing a Middle States Accreditation review. Following Middle States’ suggestion, a curriculum review process was initiated to provide “coherence” to the curriculum. This was taken loosely to mean that the curriculum should have a rationale justifying the set of courses to be required of our students. That rationale, in turn, was to serve as the basis for ongoing curricular assessment, while maintaining a consistency with our institution’s mission.

At the time, a group of lay faculty formed an informal study group to read the classics of the Franciscan intellectual tradition. Of particular interest was the thought of our namesake, the thirteenth century philosopher, St. Bonaventure. When the group took up the study of the saint’s *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (Mind’s Journey to God, 1990) they discovered how Bonaventure’s philosophy provided a schema to coherently organize the study of various disciplines. Bonaventure’s *Journey* describes a spiritual and philosophical journey to God through three stages of reflection, preceded by a stage of mental and spiritual preparation, and

followed by a concluding account of the soul's union with God. The stages comprise: (1) reflection on the natural, or what we might call "the external world," (2) reflection on the human world within, i.e., the mind, the soul, or the person, and (3) looking "upward" to the divine reality above, or reflecting on "the names of God:" God as the source of Being, or the font of Goodness.

Each of these stages of reflection divides into two steps. In the first, the mind reflects simply by use of its natural powers of reason, and finds God through His "traces" or the marks of His creative encounter in the world outside, inside and above. In the second, the power of reason is enhanced by divine illumination through faith, grace and God's word. What unfolds is a progressive schema, literally an itinerary of the mind's journey to God, which follows the six steps thereby formed. We adopted Bonaventure's account of the mind's journey to God in six steps, as a paradigm by which to give coherence to the undergraduate experience at an institution with our specific mission and tradition.

Thus, under the shadow of financial exigency, and with a prompting from Middle States, we undertook a campus wide conversation to answer the question what we thought were, or ought to be, the common elements of an St. Bonaventure University education. Numerous meetings were held for this purpose and preferences were noted and recorded. Eventually a specially appointed commission spent a summer reviewing the results of those earlier meetings and surveying the programs at other similar school. The first result of our deliberations was a set of goals for the curriculum: Here are the "Goals of the Core Curriculum" as adopted by the Summer Commission:

1. To promote an understanding of the major achievements and the modes of inquiry which have contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic developments of Western culture.
2. To explore the origins and history of humanity.
3. To address ultimate questions regarding the nature of God, persons, and the world with particular reference to the Catholic and Franciscan traditions.
4. To advance intelligent and principled participation in the moral conversation of a democratic society.
5. To promote an awareness of other cultures, traditions and voices.
6. To identify and address the future challenges confronting humanity.

We adopted Bonaventure's metaphysical account of the world of study to frame and unify various disciplines and thus provide coherence to the general education portion of our students' program. The importance of Bonaventure's account and its relation to our intellectual mission, as well as the history of the Franciscan order, cannot be overstated. Bonaventure, an academic philosopher and Franciscan, had resolved a theological difficulty which had encumbered the Franciscans' growing desire for higher education. Among the earliest Franciscans, scholarship was discouraged. Francis had clearly disparaged such study believing it encouraged pride and distracted from prayer. Bonaventure overcame this problem by understanding study as a form of worship or prayer. Moreover, he adhered to a Platonic philosophy which sees individual beings as signifying abstract forms or ideas. In Bonaventure's

case, the study of nature becomes an encounter with God's creative act. As Bonaventure wrote in his life of Francis, "where Francis sees beautiful things he sees beauty itself." (Life, 110)

With wide participation throughout the university, the Summer Commission fashioned a list of "core areas" – not specific courses or disciplines by themselves, but broader ways of situating the disciplines, often suggested by Bonaventure's identification of the three areas of study. The core areas integrated various modes of inquiry, such as inquiry in the natural world, inquiry into the social world and so on. Ultimately, what resulted was a program of interdisciplinary courses, corresponding to core areas, which were independent of specific disciplines and thus unmoored to the traditional academic departments and schools. This would later prove to be both a strength and a weakness of the proposal. The decision was made to bypass the already embedded department structure, insisting that the new curriculum be interdisciplinary, and allowing only one way, one course, to satisfy each core area.

It was also proposed that a new administrative unit be established called Clare College headed by an independent dean. Unfortunately, there was insurmountable opposition to allowing Clare College to hire, fire or tenure any faculty, and many faculty refused to teach these courses that were so-to-speak out of their disciplines. The core areas were to cover the disciplines pursuing their common but distinctive modes of inquiry, and several other synthesizing courses to be created in the social sciences, art and literature and so on.

This process of review and redesign of the curriculum invigorated cross disciplinary discussion throughout the university, across departments and schools. Moreover, it stimulated a public discussion of both the nature of liberal education and the possible retrieval of the Franciscan tradition as its foundation.

Unfortunately, the conclusion of that process left the faculty divided, and deans and departments did not commit to staffing Clare sections, or for designating hires to staff those sections. All previous curricula had drawn courses, and thus faculty, from the already established school and departmental structure. And this points to the fundamental problem for Clare College: the dislocation of faculty and the Clare courses.

There was a consensus among the faculty that Clare College should not develop into a fully self-sufficient school. Many preferred that Clare College be regarded as an appendage of the School of Arts and Sciences and its departments, but that school had blocked faculty hires for the purpose of teaching Clare College courses. Not surprisingly, this led to serious staffing problems which could only be resolved by challenging the faculty consensus regarding the established departmental organization, and concern for disciplinary boundaries, not to mention the need for increased expenditures. Eventually our Faculty Senate voted to abandon Clare College and return to a scaled down program of distribution requirements. Rejected was the notion that general education can or should be organized into a coherent institutional entity.

But the loss of the program, with all its administrative difficulties, should not be lamented as a complete failure. Clare College and the many faculty who contributed to this initiative, made significant contributions to the history of curriculum development at St. Bonaventure University in a series of firsts:

1. The first fully interdisciplinary program, which embedded diversity and global perspectives into our curriculum while incorporating the Catholic-Franciscan intellectual tradition as a foundation for liberal education.
2. We were the first academic unit to receive independent national accreditation from the American Academy of Liberal Education (AALE).
3. We were the first to design and implement a full-scale University wide learner outcomes assessment, which proved invaluable during subsequent accreditation reviews.
4. The first pilot learning community for attrition-risk first year undeclared arts students.
5. The first totally online course.
6. The first university-wide service-learning program.
7. Recipients of several major grants and faculty development funds, including Pew Foundation, Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), and inclusion in an innovative 3-year faculty development program project aimed at “Bridging the Gap between the Sciences and the Humanities,” with a \$250,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Most gratifying, particularly considering the high level of faculty participation, was the Site Visit Report by the AALE (2013), where we read:

St. Bonaventure University has instituted a liberal arts core curriculum that is innovative, creative, bold and courageous. In establishing Clare College, St. Bonaventure joins a select group of schools that are leaders in higher education in realizing a mission-focused curriculum. The core curriculum both reflects and advances St. Bonaventure's mission: "a Catholic university dedicated to educational excellence in the Franciscan tradition . . ." That this mission is taken seriously by the university community is seen in the large proportion of faculty who participate, with generosity, by teaching in Clare College .. In providing the liberal arts core for all students, Clare College provides a unique and unifying Bonaventure signature for all the university's degree programs, both the professional schools and the liberal arts majors.

But unfortunately, much of this record was either ignored or disparaged by many colleagues who opposed continued support for Clare College, and others who believed Clare College was getting an inordinate level of attention and funding for a general education program. Many argued, incorrectly, that Clare College was the cause of enrollment decline. Most unfortunately, the positive advantages were obscured: the degree such a core curriculum differs from the current academic culture makes it difficult for many to see its benefits as I venture to explain below.

There is more to the difference between core curricula and distribution models than just a different set of courses. The difference is profound and can be revolutionary. Implementation of a vital interdisciplinary core does require the creation of a distinct community of inquiry where conventional academic practices are not applicable and faculty culture is very different. Because core faculty are expected to develop and teach new material, or traditional material in a new way, faculty are both teachers and learners, modeling curiosity

and life-long learning. Faculty are expected to dialogue across disciplines modeling respect for disciplinary diversity. It should be clear that many such initiatives are inimical to the current departmental organization of inquiry, and that only something like a core with courses and faculty independent of conventional department descriptions can achieve the flexibility necessary to achieve a common purpose, perhaps a transcending intellectual, political or spiritual mission.

This calls for a serious commitment to what Newman called “the philosophical habit of mind” which he argues is “the main purpose of a university.” (Newman, 110) And this brings us back to the demand for intellectual coherence, which is missing from so much higher education today, but which lamentably represents the fragmented reality of today’s academic world. As Newman puts it, “the philosophical habit entails looking at reality in a unified fashion while seeing how the various areas of knowledge (*e.g.*, the studies or the disciplines) are integrated within that totality.” (Newman, 101)

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

Many liken the process of curriculum planning, with its give and take among disparate disciplines and departments, to a political negotiation among parties with conflicting interests. Yet what I have reported is a more positive idealization of the process, but no less correct. Disciplines are not political parties, but rather modes of inquiry to which academics commit. What might appear to be horse-trading or turf-protecting in the collective shaping of a common core is better viewed as the pursuit of disparate academic goals to which our colleagues are committed, sometimes passionately, and almost always for good and respect-worthy reasons. Moreover, it is most important to see a curriculum as a living institution fostered by an ongoing faculty conversation of ideas rather than interests.

Perhaps an apt political analogy for the process of curriculum building is a revolution, or a successful democratic movement for large-scale reform. However, the ongoing administrative problem is to maintain a continuity of ideals through succeeding generations of faculty. The discouraging reality is that change is easier to effect than to maintain. While making a curriculum revolution may depend on the enthusiasm of volunteers, maintaining it requires consistent support from senior administration for the institutionalization of such a change through hiring, promotion, and resources for faculty development.

A core curriculum, particularly one that stands in contrast to normal academic compartmentalization, needs to cultivate its own community of support including a core cadre of dedicated and self-renewing faculty and an independent internal administration. Where such change entails crossing disciplinary boundaries in course content and faculty development, many colleagues will be understandably cautious. Advocates who are committed to such a contrary vision of the academy need to address questions regarding the quality of programs and the qualifications of faculty. Indeed, in my experience many colleagues simply assumed that courses and faculty that transgress disciplinary boundaries are substandard and thus resist the hiring of committed generalists. Younger faculty may see teaching general education as a career risk. Unfortunately, the consequence, in many institutions, is staffing by the involuntary

assignment of regular faculty and/or the widespread use of adjunct faculty. Of course, this not only fulfills the suspicions of many faculty skeptics, but it invites discontinuity and drift in the transmission of the core's originating vision. To avoid this sort of breakdown, institutional leadership's whole-hearted commitment is needed. This is practically axiomatic: passive or half-hearted support not only dooms efforts at reform, but it also signals the failure of such efforts to express clearly the institution's mission.

Finally, I suggest that we must address a much larger context in curriculum development, particularly in schools whose mission includes transmission of an intellectual tradition, such as in our case, the Catholic/Franciscan tradition. A crucial, but unacknowledged, element of this sort of mission addresses an ongoing crisis: the increasing incoherence of our academic and intellectual culture. The outlines are well known: (1) Higher education has become increasingly professionalized challenging the significance of the liberal arts, particularly regarding traditional requirements, among both students and administrators. (2) Knowledge has become increasingly fragmented among disparate disciplines, with positivist rejection of metaphysics and post-modern skepticism regarding meta-narratives. How should a curriculum address this situation? Or, more to the point, how should a curriculum which conveys, as in the case of my university, the Catholic and Franciscan intellectual tradition, address this post-modern condition? Education needs to prepare students to respond to this fragmentation. Thus we return to the need for coherence.

The privileging of liberal education, by requiring it of our students, is a step forward. Through the collaborative development and delivery of a liberal arts core of the sort I have in mind, students see masters of different disciplines in dialogue, respecting the diversity of intellectual life, and most importantly, seeking a sense of a coherent whole intellectually, personally, and for our institution and others like it, spiritually. The fact that this precedes the inevitable move into their specialized major fields and non-liberal areas of professional preparation is most important. We ought to offer an education that gives our students much more than either a collection of unrelated choices, or a too highly specialized and thus incomplete, instrumental education.

I believe that institutions responsible for the transmission of a distinct intellectual tradition serve a purpose that runs counter to the prevailing intellectual culture, perhaps as a corrective, or simply to preserve the possibility of an alternative. And there is no doubt that institutions of other faith traditions, or with some other coherent set of values and worldview, may also serve that purpose. Such mission-focused institutions provide a rationale, perhaps an imperative, for liberal education and the values it embodies.

So I must agree with Stanley Fish, the current status of liberal education fails the test of efficiency, productivity and consumer satisfaction. But are these criteria appropriate, or do we bear a greater cultural responsibility?

I close with a provocative remark by Catholic philosopher, and advocate of Newman's ideas, Alasdair MacIntyre. As he writes, "the role of the American Catholic university is to challenge its secular counterparts ... by recovering both for them and for itself and **a less**

fragmented conception of what is an education ...From a Catholic point of view the contemporary secular university is not at fault because it is not Catholic. It is at fault insofar as it is not a university.” (McIntyre, 2006, 10–14).

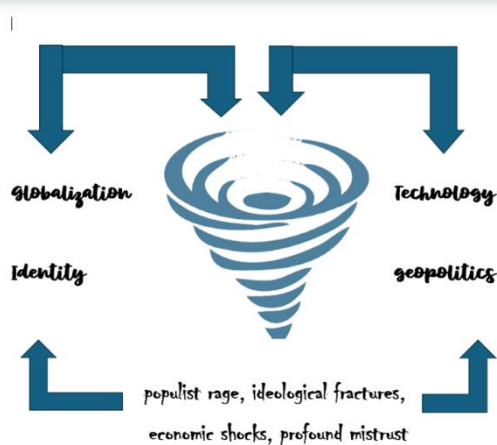
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**The Whole Holistically:
Mega-Forces, Pope Francis, and Catholic Franciscan Higher Education**
David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap. St. Bonaventure University

In his latest book, Fareed Zakaria identifies the four “revolutions” today that are producing profound disruptions and pervasive anxiety in every field of work and every aspect of culture: globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics.¹ We are, he says, in an “age of revolutions” and the reactions to these revolutions are populist rage, ideological fractures, economic shocks, and profound mistrust of almost every institution, including higher education.² Zakaria writes:

Since the sixteenth century, technological and economic change have produced enormous advances but also massive disruption. The disruption and the unequal distribution of its benefits stoke huge anxiety.



Change and anxiety, in turn, leads to an identity revolution, with people searching for new meaning and community... Throughout this story, we will see two competing plotlines: liberalism, meaning progress, growth, disruption, *revolution in the sense of radical advance*, and illiberalism, standing for regression, restriction, nostalgia, *revolution in the sense of returning to the past*. That dual meaning of revolution endures to this day.³

In whatever role or position we stand in higher education, whether as student, professor, trustee, administrator, or staff, we must come to a resolution of the dilemma before us. There

is no sitting on the sidelines when it comes to the current disruptions and the anxieties they produce around the world. We need to take a stand. Is the time in which we live and work best understood as a time of *radical advance* or *radical return/retreat*? Do we promote post-Enlightenment progress and laissez-faire free markets, and encourage uncritical pride in unfettered autonomy, individualism, freedom, and choice? Or do we “resist the resistance” of the Enlightenment and call for a return to the common good, a sense of order and stability, tradition, and authority? How do we educate in this “age of accelerations,” where the volume and velocity of change challenges, questions, or disrupts every policy, practice, procedure, or tradition?

This essay will take up these provocative questions. Thus, the task of this essay is:

1. First, I want to look at the basic trends or higher-order mega-forces likely to affect the general landscape of higher education in the coming years. Whether we like these trends or not, whether we agree with them or not, is not the question. They will affect us

¹ Fareed Zakaria, *Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2024).

² David B. Couturier, “Trust and the Fraternal Economy: Efforts at Economic Reform in the Franciscan Tradition,” in Aaron Gies and Benjamin Winters, eds., *Trust and the Franciscan Tradition* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2024)., forthcoming.

³ Zakaria, 17.

however we feel. Even if we choose to deny their importance or relevance, these forces and headwinds are already on the march and on the way.

2. Second, I want to investigate the way Pope Francis poses the risks inherent in our age of revolutions. I think it will be clear that the Holy Father has thought long and hard and over many years about the so-called “mega-forces” coming toward us. We will also find that Pope Francis interprets the risks facing us outside and beyond the “advance and retreat” paradigm noted above. He looks at the disruptions facing institutions today, including higher education, from a profoundly anthropological point of view. Because he reads globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics outside the post-Enlightenment framework, Pope Francis can provide us with a more robust set of opportunities for developing higher education in the 21st century.
3. Third, I will demonstrate that Pope Francis’ anthropological shift is rooted in his commitment to the poor, marginalized and excluded in the world today. I will set forward the proposition that Pope Francis is piloting a strategy of what I call “the whole holistically,” a strategy for the social transformation of Catholic colleges and universities.

The Mega-Forces of Higher Education Today

I have been working for the past nine years with my colleagues Mike Hoffman, Ann Lehman, and Dave Hilmey as leaders of St. Bonaventure’s University’s strategic planning initiatives. We have already successfully launched two strategic plans and are ready, under the guidance of Dr. Jeff Gingerich, to undertake a third one. Each of our two previously inaugurated plans (2016 and 2021) began with an analysis of trends and risks facing institutions of higher education.

In 2021, this is how we presented the major trends affecting St. Bonaventure University and the way we intended to focus attention on them:

Strategic Trends and Themes

1. By 2025 the population of high school graduates will begin a period of significant decline. This decline is expected to be even more pronounced in our traditional underground recruitment areas.
2. The demographic makeup of our traditional undergraduates has begun and will continue to shift to needier (financially, academically prepared, etc.) and/or underrepresented minority populations.
3. As a tuition-driven institution, SBU is, and will continue to remain, vulnerable to market fluctuations and the unstable dynamics of competition on price.
4. Market opportunities exist for adult, non-traditional learners.
5. The changing student demographics, in both undergraduate and graduate, will require flexible learning and support ecosystems to acquire knowledge, pursue

skills, and develop self-care habits necessary for success in work and life after college.

6. Students and families are increasingly focused on outcomes. Undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional (certificates, etc.) academic programs will need to be developed to meet the needs of an evolving/accelerating workforce as well as to develop students' skills, character, and values.
7. In the current and near-future collegiate athletics environment, institutions like St. Bonaventure will be unable to achieve both competitiveness and financial sustainability.
8. To survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, institutions will need a clear purpose (mission) properly embedded in governance and programs.
9. Higher education institutions need to be organized to encourage agility and forward thinking to survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive higher education environment.
10. The financial picture of small, private, tuition driven higher education institutions remains fragile and will require a commitment to new initiatives and structures that will guarantee a long-term financial sustainability.⁴

These ten trends led our University Planning Commission to recommend the following strategic focus areas for the next five years:

Sample Areas of Strategic Focus:

1. Re-engineering for quality-based admissions/enrollment.
2. Developing and nurturing our faculty and staff.
3. Developing a competitive and sustainable athletic program.
4. Promoting a significant shift to a minority-based student population.
5. Developing graduate programs to become a co-equal priority enterprise of the University.
6. Becoming a mission-driven comprehensive Catholic university that honors and builds on its Franciscan and liberal arts tradition.

In light of the trends and risks we were experiencing, our vision back in 2020 was to go into the future boldly. This meant shedding a corporate tendency to risk aversion and presenting ourselves as “boldly Bonaventure.” This required a mission-based, data-driven, assessment-conscious progressive transformation of resources, energy, and attitudes for the common good of our students, faculty, and staff.

Just four years later, the trends affecting college higher education today appear similar, like previous iterations of trends in earlier plans. However, they are now more immediate and

⁴ “Strategic Trends and Themes,” University Planning Document, January 15, 2020.

intense and, one might say, universal. *Hanover Research* is a global team of more than two hundred consultant experts that help institutions strengthen their academic portfolio, maximize enrollment and retention, manage costs, improve brand perception, and engage alumni.⁵ They have outlined five major trends affecting higher education in 2024:

TREND 1: Institutions Reduce Enrollment Barriers for a Changing Prospective Student Demographic⁶

What students need and expect from colleges and universities today is different than in previous decades. As such, institutions are focused on improving college access for both traditional and non-traditional students to meet more students where they are.

TREND 2: Colleges and Universities Strategically Refine Student Supports to Improve Retention

As student needs deepen and enrollments fluctuate, institutions are taking decisive, data-driven steps to help enrolled students persist and succeed with a wider array of academic, financial, and personal support.

TREND 3: Campuses Promote High-Return Academic Programs that Connect Student Interest with Industry Needs

In an ever more competitive environment, higher education institutions are gaining students' attention by connecting their interests to degrees and certificates that can promise a strong return on investment.

TREND 4: Institutions Articulate Their Value to Students and Underline Their Economic Impact

As public sentiment on higher education shifts and legislation tightens, colleges and universities are tasked with not only differentiating themselves for prospective students, but also clarifying their purpose and value in the larger community.

TREND 5: Higher Education Leaders Lean into Nimble Approaches to Finances and Organizational Structures

To adjust to new fiscal realities, institutions are nimbly leaning into innovation and change to achieve long-term institutional sustainability and success.

The consulting firm Deloitte LLC, which specializes in higher education issues, expresses the trends a bit more concisely:

1. **Peak college enrollment:** Enrollment of traditional college students has been falling for more than a decade, and this trend is projected to continue as the number of high school graduates decreases over the next decade.

⁵ For more information on *Hanover Research*, see www.hanoverresearch.com.

⁶ These four trends and their explanation come directly from Hanover Research Report, 2024 Trends in Higher Education, found at: <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/reports-and-briefs/2024-trends-in-higher-education/?org=higher-education>.

2. Questions around the value of degrees: While the four-year college degree generally provides a wage premium and career mobility, that is not true for all degrees. Therefore, certain programs need to demonstrate value or further evolve.
3. Challenges to the business model: Colleges and universities can no longer rely solely on traditional students. They need to look beyond tuition, fees, and discounting and, through innovative marketing and more cost-effective delivery models, bring in new segments of learners, such as adult learners who have accumulated some postsecondary credits but fell short of completion or those looking to retool in the workforce.
4. New demands from employees: In the post-COVID-19 pandemic environment, campus employees want improved work/life balance, more advancement opportunities, and options for hybrid and remote work.
5. Diminishing trust in institutions: Public trust in institutions has plummeted,² and colleges and universities are no exception. The percentage of survey respondents who say that colleges have a positive effect on the way things are going in the United States decreased from 65% in 2020 to 58% in 2021 to 55% in 2022.⁷

A study by Duke Corporate Education quoted in a recent Deloitte report on risk management and higher education explains the situation we are facing in the industry:

It is time to get comfortable being perpetually uncomfortable. The known, mostly predictable, rhythms associated with universities of the past one hundred years have given way to syncopation caused by two off-beat troublemakers: technological change and cost pressure.⁸

⁷ Cynthia Vitters and Jake Braunsdorf, "Risk Governance in Higher Education: What Boards of Trustees Need to Know," (Deloitte, 2023)

⁸ Deloitte, "Significant risks facing higher education: Taking an enterprise approach to risk management" (Deloitte Development LLC, 2018), 2. Duke Corporate Education (Duke CE) is a premier global provider of leadership offerings that enable leaders at all levels to adapt and move the organization forward. Duke CE is a support organization of [Duke University](#), with global offices located London, UK; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore and Durham, North Carolina in the US.

Business Model Risks

Business model risks challenge an institution's ability to generate adequate revenue and, in some cases, to even exist. The factors below impact the sustainability and relevance of college and university business models in an environment where new approaches to education delivery, revenue generation, and enrollment are evolving rapidly. Institutions that do not plan for these factors may find themselves outpaced by more agile competitors.

Examples: tuition dependency, education delivery mix, endowment returns.

Enrollment Supply Risks

In the absence of robust, consistent student enrollment, tuition-dependent institutions cannot sustain their financial health and fund operations. Gaps between estimates and actual student enrollment limit a school's ability to forecast faculty turnover, resource use, and infrastructure needs to support the student population. Recent trends have pointed to declining student populations (between 2026 and 2031 the number of high school graduates is expected to drop by 9%), as well as shifting demographics.

Examples: Federal regulations, Immigration policies, market demands, rising student debt.

Reputation Risks

In the 24/7 news cycle where negative headlines score highly, higher education institutions have frequently become the target. Schools can lose alumni and business relationships, brand favorability, etc. Institutions with reputational awareness and control over the increasingly vast presence in the media can reduce the risk of damaging a reputation they have spent years building.

Examples: Brand management, campus safety, student activism

Operating Model Risks

Operating model risks stem from inadequate processes, people, and systems that affect an institution's ability to function efficiently and effectively. Operational agility is critical to staying competitive, flexible, and relevant as strategies and business models shift. As shown below, college and university operating models involve a range of activities such as how to deliver academic program, conduct research, make decisions, manage relationships with vendors, sustain enrollment, and maintain accreditation status.

Examples: operational efficiency, third party vendors, accreditation, facilities and asset management, crisis management, talent management, cybersecurity.

The risks associated with the public trends facing all higher education institutions are significant. In 2018, Deloitte published a report naming four major sets of risks⁹:

⁹ The four risks and their explanations come directly from the Deloitte Report, "Significant risks facing higher education," 3-6.

In 2023, Deloitte compiled a much larger list of risks for boards and administrators to consider¹⁰:

Common and emerging risks faced by colleges and universities

Through the development of ERM programs, institutions can identify, assess, prioritize, and respond to the wide variety and criticality of risk. While each college and university has a unique risk profile, there are common risks that most institutions face and trustees should be familiar with, including:

- Financial risk: The declining enrollment of traditional students, tuition dependency, and rising operating costs present direct financial risks to colleges and universities.
- Operational risk: Financial pressures and stakeholder needs require efficient supply chains, facilities, assets, and business continuity management to mitigate operational risk.
- Cybersecurity risk: Digitalization and widespread use of laptops, smartphones, and online media have increased exposure to hackers and cybercriminals intent on appropriating, corrupting, or exposing data, information, and intellectual property.
- Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risk: Decisions related to ESG and the potential risks stemming from implementing an ESG agenda.
- Health and safety risk: College and universities have a duty of care for students and should prioritize their physical safety and mental health and do the same for employees.
- Talent risk: The war for talent translates to higher competition and pressure to retain high-quality faculty, administrators, and staff. Failure to provide competitive compensation, growth opportunities, and work/life balance can put the institution at risk.
- Legal, regulatory, and compliance risk: The greater the legal, regulatory, and compliance demands an institution faces, the greater the risk in those areas.
- Third-party risk: A breach, failure, or disruption at a third-party supplier or partner could present financial, operational, cybersecurity, or other threats to the institution.
- Reputational risk: Virtually any type of risk event can generate reputational risk if it were to become public, which is likely in today's media environment. Also, student retention rates and graduates' employment opportunities now strongly affect an institution's reputation.

In addition, emerging risks include:

- Generative AI and its potential impact on teaching and academic integrity, student performance, and administrative operations.
- Affirmative action policies, particularly given the recent US Supreme Court decision, significantly limiting affirmative-action admissions programs, and the potential fallout from similar legal actions.
- New outcomes and accountability standards and the different measures of outcomes driving accountability for institutional performance and effectiveness.

¹⁰ Cynthia Vitters and Jake Braunsdorf, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/risk-management-in-higher-education.html>.

An analysis of our sample of trends and risks suggests three major assumptions behind them:

1. The trends and associated risks we have sampled are described in economic or financial terms and they depend on financial models remaining robust and sustainable. This puts higher education in a chronically defensive and reactive mode. It suggests that institutions of higher learning will shape culture less and less if nothing changes. Other dynamics will shape culture and history, leaving education chasing after corporate interests and entertainment needs increasingly.
2. Zakaria alerts us that there is more at stake in Western institutions than the trends and risks we have seen suggested (i.e., refining student retention mechanisms or gaining student attention amidst a flood of competing and changing interests). Zakaria draws us to the debates and consequences of the “*radical advance or radical return*” dilemma facing Western civilization. If we are to heal the populist rage, ideological fractures, economic shocks, and profound mistrust of our age, we will need to meet, discuss, and dialogue over the dilemma between radical advance or radical retreat, progression or regression.¹¹
3. Zakaria’s analysis of “revolutions” suggests that there is another formidable layer of challenge (and opportunity) available to us. The four revolutions that Zakaria studies in his recent book (globalization, technology, identity, and geopolitics) are not simply drivers of economics (moving bottom lines up or down in increasingly indecipherable ways). They are also *anthropological challenges* to common ways of knowing the self and one’s place in the world. The way they have been understood and implemented in the modern and post-modern world has had huge negative effects, if Zakaria’s analysis is correct. They are at the root of the chronic anxiety, isolation, and unhappiness plaguing Western society.¹² They are what has led us to the populist rage, ideological fractures and profound mistrust appearing in our time. The antidotes of present risk management techniques seem grossly inadequate to the task of managing anything below the economic surface of things.

We look now to the social teaching of Pope Francis to provide another layer of meaning that goes beyond the technocratic paradigm of most organizational consultants.

Pope Francis, Higher Education and “the Whole Holistically”

In a recent article, Massimo Faggioli, a renowned theologian at Villanova University, produced a short study of Pope Francis’ influence on Catholic colleges and universities.¹³ Faggioli goes as far as to suggest that the Pope has “changed the mission of Catholic colleges and universities” and he has done so by a striking charge to these institutions to go deeper and to go outward. Faggioli points out the multiple occasions at which Pope Francis has encouraged Catholic

¹¹ Zakaria, “The Infinite Abyss, in “The Age of Revolutions,” 309-326.

¹² Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation* (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023).

¹³ Massimo Faggioli, “How Pope Francis has changed the Mission of Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 16, 2024.

institutions of higher education to think more broadly and to speak more boldly beyond the academy and its internecine conflicts. Faggioli sees in Pope Francis a mandate for colleges and universities to “go outward, in service of a fractured world.”

In an address to the then Congregation for Catholic Education, Pope Francis offered his reasons for this new mission of social transformation:

Our world has become a global village with multiple processes of interaction, where every person belongs to humanity and shares in the hope of a better future with the entire family of peoples. At the same time, unfortunately, there are many forms of violence, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, and approaches that restrict fundamental freedoms, creating a throwaway culture. In such a context, Catholic educational institutes are called first to put into practice the grammar of dialogue which educates in encounter and in the appreciation of cultural and religious diversities.¹⁴

As he has done on many occasions, Pope Francis is finding the tragic roots of today’s most trenchant social problems not primarily in failed economic strategies (right wing or left wing) or in flawed political calculations (progressive or conservative). He speaks of a profound “anthropological crisis,” a confusion about the very nature of the human person, a reductionism that strips human beings of their “infinite dignity” and their innate connection to God, one another and indeed to all creation. In an October 2017 speech to the people of Bologna, Francis talked about the role of the university with words that connect universities to the profound holistic dynamics with all creation in *Laudato Si*: “The identity to which we belong is that of a common home, of the *universitas*. The word *universitas* contains the idea of the whole and that of the community.”¹⁵

The origins of our word, university, is in the Latin “*universitas*” which holds the idea of the whole. And further, the word Catholic refers to wholeness. In its modifying form, “a Catholic university,” one is able to suggest a deeper meaning to the phrase “a Catholic university.” It is in the title of this presentation, “The Whole Holistically.”

What Pope Francis is getting at is that a Catholic University is not to be a space of polarizing rage, denominational division, and dogmatic exclusion. It is meant to be a place of encounter where all participants “practice the grammar of dialogue” in the appreciation of “cultural and religious diversities.” As a place of transparency, accountability, participation and dialogue, a Catholic university studies, researches, and engages intellectually and affectively “with the whole” of creation. It is interested in and supportive of the vitality of our “common home” as it engages the past, in the present and for the sake of a common future.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *The Pope: Catholic schools and universities in the service of the growth of humanity, dialogue and hope*, 09.02.2017 found at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/02/09/170209b.html>.

¹⁵ Discourse of the Holy Father, October 1, 2017 found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171001_visitapastorale-bologna-mondoaccademico.html.

Pope Francis and the Risks for Institutions of Higher Education

The Pope is clear that colleges and universities in general and Catholic ones in particular face a dual risk of self-isolation and social elitism. Students and faculty can live in a bubble of self-

28% of U.S. adults are now religiously unaffiliated

% of U.S. adults who identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular"



Source: 2020-23 data based on Pew Research Center's National Public Opinion Reference Surveys, nationally representative surveys conducted online and by mail; respondents recruited using address-based sampling. Data from 2019 and earlier comes from the Center's random-digit-dial phone surveys, including the 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Studies.

"Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

importance and anxious preoccupation. At the same time, the very proposition of the importance of a Catholic higher education is in peril, as fewer Catholics find meaning in attending church and younger generations of Catholics increasingly claim no religious affiliation or find no specific worth in religious values or institutions.¹⁶

How do we mitigate this specific religious risk? The Pope has spoken often about his wish to build a "poor church for the poor."¹⁷ His devotion to St. Francis of Assisi is clear. He sees the church as more than a sanctuary for saints. In his words, it is a "field hospital" for the poor and vulnerable, the marginalized and the excluded. The Pope looks to recraft colleges and universities, so they are equipped for the task of social transformation from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down. This

transformation of higher education from the property of the rich elite to institutions in service of the poor comes with high stakes and genuine risks. Faggioli names those found in Pope Francis' work:

- The crisis of the *universitas* as an idea.
- Tyranny of the market system and the disappearance of many of the small institutions of Catholic higher education.
- The transition from the leadership of members of the clergy and religious order to lay leadership (that is, to the members of another kind of priesthood in the capitalistic system).
- The risk of watering down or even dissolution for Catholic identity.
- The contractualization and adjunctification of teaching.
- The uncertain relationship with the evangelizing mission of the church, and,
- The universities are moving away from classics, but also from religion and tradition.¹⁸

¹⁶ The Pew Research Center, Gregory Smith et al., "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," (January 24, 2024), accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

¹⁷ Joshua McElwee, "Pope Francis: I want a poor Church," National Catholic Reporter (March 16, 2013), at: <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-francis-i-would-love-church-poor>.

¹⁸ See: Faggioli, NCR (January 16, 2024).

But what are the roots of these social and economic trends? Pope Francis in his social teachings returns repeatedly to several factors: the loss of respect for the infinite dignity of every person, the commodification of the goods of the earth, the priority of private interest over the common good, the loss of a spirit of transcendence and its replacement with materialism.

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis offers several others.¹⁹ The subtitle of *Laudato Si* is “*On Caring for our Common Home*.” We have already seen how Pope Francis connects “universitas” (university) to the dynamics of our common home. In that sense, universities suffer similar risks to that of the earth itself. Both are suffering from an *anthropological crisis* that prioritizes the current, immediate, and material needs of people today over the needs and interests of any future generation. The risks, therefore, are five:

(1) Damage and destruction²⁰:

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, the Pope speaks first about the loss of the great biodiversity of the planet because of human agency. “Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” (33). By accentuating the peril of the planet itself and having written and spoken extensively about this crisis, the Pope is reorganizing the theological agenda of the past five decades and reshaping the relationship the papacy and bishops have with Catholic colleges and universities. Since the 1960s the relationship between Catholic colleges and universities and the papacy (as well as with bishops) has been tense, driven by deep suspicions over loyalty and fidelity. Pope Francis has turned the page on those days of suspicion and tension. He has asked colleges and universities to join him in a mission of social transformation, so that the mercy and compassion of God will be more fully realized especially by those systematically excluded and marginalized in the name of “inevitable human progress.” Pope Francis has refocused attention on the plight of the poor and of the planet. He has asked colleges and universities to refocus as well.

(2) Indifference:

Pope Francis points often to the problem of “global indifference” regarding the most prominent forms of exclusion and injustice erupting in the world. In *Laudato Si*, the Pope concludes that a deep conversion is needed. I wrote of Pope Francis’ logic recently:

This failure to abide by a universal communion is dangerous since it serves up the cause of our own destruction. The Holy Father reasons that our modern logic of a justifiable and structured economic inequality where some deserve privileges in the economic sphere while others are deprived of necessities is now

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Caring for our Common Home* (2015), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

²⁰ I analyze these five risks in my article, David B. Couturier, “The Theology of Risk in *Laudato Si*: An Ecological Formation”, *Educatio Catholica* (2020), 37-52.

migrating into the biological sphere, affecting all God's creatures. The unequal forms of abandonment and exclusion that we have used against the poor are now the same ones that we use against all God's creatures. We now feel justified in depriving even the smallest and humblest of God's creatures of their right to life and their right to praise God in their unique and specific ways. To protect the rights of all creatures, human and non-human, The pope aims at dismantling all dominative and depriving definitions of power.²¹

In "our common home," whether it refers to the planet or to the board room, dominative and depriving definitions of power are to be excluded. Pope Francis is advising that the social transformation he is advocating must follow the model of fraternity with its elements of humility, minority, and community in all settings.

(3) Exclusion:

The Pope speaks of the significant risk to human development and ecological sustainability that is posed by the exclusion of the poor and most vulnerable creatures of the earth. At the beginning of this *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis uses a stark image of the earth's condition. She is the sister crying out because of the harm inflicted upon her by humanity's irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has given her. According to Pope Francis, ecological degradation is an act of violence by those who have translated their status into "lords and masters" of creation from that of brothers and sisters as originally intended by God. Thus, the condition of the earth now becomes deplorable and pitiable. The pope's diagnosis is critical: "This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22)."²²

What blinds us to our identity within the entirety of God's plan is an ideology of self-sufficiency and the brazen refusal of mutual dependence: "As the Catechism teaches: 'God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle, and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.'" (88)²³

If the earth is our "common home" and every Catholic "universitas" is also properly a "common home," as well, then universities must be spaces of dialogue, freedom, mutual interdependence, the anti-thesis to deserts of self-sufficiency.

(4) Technology:

Pope Francis speaks of the risk of a technocratic paradigm or logic that neither works nor is in tune with nature, nor respects her principles or objective ends. Technocratic logic moves us from cooperation with the other to the relentless search for domination

²¹ David B. Couturier, *The Theology of Risk*, 44-45.

²² David B. Couturier, *The Theology of Risk*, 45.

²³ David B. Couturier, *The Theology of Risk*, 45.

and absolute control over the other. We seek mastery over and not partnership with the other, whether that “other” is another human being or “the earth” itself. The encyclical explains it this way:

... we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers, and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. (106)

The application here is that no amount of technological wizardry will save colleges and universities. No number of technological gadgets will attract students and increase enrollment for long, if we fail to maintain or even advance the values of individual dignity, community, compassion, integrity, and wisdom with love.

(5) A misguided anthropocentrism.

Pope Francis strongly suggests that we have gotten used to our dominative status, exaggerating our superiority and centrality over all creatures to the point that we disregard and dismiss creation with impunity. We accept no limits to our desires, no boundaries to our wishes, and no parameters to our passions. Thus, we show little respect for an original goodness in others or in creation itself that we must honor.

This excessive anthropocentrism is delusional and dangerous. It does not understand and honor the social bonds that exist with the rest of creation. Our obsession with “dominion” over the universe blinds us to the harm our ecological neglect has done to creation.

The pope is calling for an “ecological humility” that is attentive to the worth of the poor: the poor person and now the poor earth. We must cede our unilateral declaration of independence from reality as it is. We must give up the behaviors of absolute dominion and take up a correct relationship with the world, strengthening our openness to others as a ‘thou’ relationship “capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue.” (119)

The risk that an exaggerated anthropocentrism poses is that we are so concerned and obsessed with our superior status that everything else is diminished in stature. Everything and everyone else – God, neighbor, and creation, becomes irrelevant unless it can serve one’s immediate interests. (122) Nothing and no one else matters except in the degree that it affects me and mine immediately. Others become mere objects, open to exploitation, abuse, abandonment, and every other disordered desire. The earth, once conceived as God’s good creation and gift, becomes “nature,” an abstract with laws and

first principles and then devolves into “stuff” to be bought and sold without regard or respect for our social bonds to the whole and integral development of humankind.²⁴

This suggests that Catholic colleges and universities are challenged to an examination of corporate conscience. Are we servant-leaders in the fraternity and ecological humility needed by both the planet and the poor? Have we revised our curricula to support only “industry needs” or have we been bold enough to prioritize deeper anthropological and ecological interests? Do we dialogue with other Franciscan colleges and universities to leverage learning that supports the social transformation needed by society at this time of anthropological and ecological crisis? Do we still see one another primarily as competitors for the scarce resources of higher education or do we envision a shared fraternity and network of Franciscan colleges and universities to meet common challenges in our common home?

Mega-Forces and Risks: What next?

No doubt there are substantial risks to the flourishing of private colleges and universities in the extremely competitive and atavistic market forces today. Educational consultants provide advice and tools that can stabilize our finances and upgrade our standing in the public square. We should take advantage of them. However, we should remember that, if our problems were simply technical, the suggestions of educational consultants would work miracles. However, our deepest challenges are not mechanical or at base even economical; they are anthropological. Our crisis is one of meaning and motive, vision and mission.

What next steps can we take as Catholic universities and colleges, given the mega-forces and risks that continue to face us? There are several things we should consider.

1. *Pay attention.* These mega-forces will not magically go away and the risks are real. They should be in the forefront of your strategic planning processes. Every department and unit should be made aware of their importance and intensity. They may be stated at a high level pitch, but they do have practical implications and consequences if we ignore them.
2. *Likely impacts.* The university/college planning group should assess the likely impact of these mega-forces and risks on your particular institution. Even if you choose to do nothing differently, these mega-forces will affect enrollment, budgets, priorities, culture, and branding efforts.
3. *Don't panic; prioritize.* These mega-forces create urgency; they need not and should not create a sense of panic. The urgency of mega-forces gives us opportunities for change. Simply managing these risks is not enough. It will need leadership with its unique skills of visioning, inspiring and innovating. There should be a regular planning department that can walk boards, cabinets, senates and campus members through solid processes of strategizing and prioritizing.
4. *Be flexible; become agile.* Colleges and universities are not usually known for their institutional flexibility and agility. Inherited structures of dialogue and campus communication can be notoriously cumbersome and time-consuming. We live in an

²⁴ This is drawn from David B Couturier, *The Theology of Risk*, 49.

“age of accelerations,” where the volume and velocity of change is now exponential. College administrations and Senates should realistically assess how agile they are in responding to issues and concerns of students, faculty and the marketplace today. Heavily top-down or hierarchical models of decision-making need to be reconsidered for more mission-driven models because they weather turbulence better in the long-run than do medieval models.

5. *Name strategic priorities that are doable and measurable.* A college that is truly mission-driven through and through is ready and able to name its strategic priorities and drive them through the whole organization. The model of strategic planning we are advocating meets the standards of transparency, accountability, dialogue, participation, solidarity and austerity. The tactics that are the tools by which strategic priorities are fulfilled need to be doable and measurable.
6. *Focus on the wins, not just the winds.* Mega-forces can seem like tsunami-winds ready to buffet and batter institutions. A solid strategic planning mechanism, however, can help institutions meet these forces realistically and soberly by helping teams focus on the wins that come with attention, planning and prioritizing.

David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap., Ph.D., DMin., Lic. Psych., is Executive Director of the Franciscan Institute, Associate Professor of Theology and Franciscan Studies, and Director of University Planning at St. Bonaventure University. He also holds an appointment as the Dean R. Hoge Professor of Pastoral Planning and Church Management at the Graduate Theological Foundation. His published works include *The Fraternal Economy* (2007), *Franciscans and their Finances* (2015), and *Integrating Missions: Organizational Identities and Founding Stories in Multi-Partnered Health Systems* (2023).

A Model of Optimal Investment for Catholic Universities

Benjamin Posmanick Ph.D. St. Bonaventure University

Michael Gallagher Ph.D. St. Bonaventure University

Abstract

University administrators at Catholic universities are tasked with being able to balance the demand for both Catholic and curricular amenities. To help school administrators to efficiently operate their respective schools, we create a series of simple models of investment where the university optimally chooses between Catholic and curricular amenities to maximize students' welfare subject to the school's budget constraint. The model shows that schools should increase their investment in Catholic amenities when the proportion of Catholic students increases or the preferences for Catholic amenities increases.

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Benjamin J. Posmanick is an Assistant Professor at St. Bonaventure University (bposmani@sbu.edu).

Michael Gallagher is an Associate Professor at St. Bonaventure University (mgallagh@sbu.edu).

Introduction

Catholic universities have a unique obligation to provide an education to their students in two dimensions. The first dimension is fundamental to the schools' Catholic tradition: provide Catholic education via the curriculum, infrastructure and standards on campus, and access to religious leaders, such as friars or priests. The first dimension can be categorized as providing Catholic amenities. The second dimension is fundamental to any university: provide education in secular topics, such as business, arts, and sciences education. The second dimension can be categorized as providing curricular amenities.¹ Michael J. Naughton, the director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas, described one unique task of a Catholic institution as "A key element of the Catholic educator's mission is the impartation of wisdom to his or her students" ([Harbiger Institute for Catholic Leadership, 2020](#)).

University administrators at Catholic universities are tasked with being able to balance the demand for both Catholic and curricular amenities. Of course, in a perfect world, Catholic universities would be easily able to purchase, or invest in, both Catholic and curricular amenities and fully exploit every opportunity both amenities offer. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world and administrators, much like everyone else, face constraints that prevent them from being able to have everything the university and its students may want.

Economists study problems such as those facing university administrators. We call these kinds of problems "constrained optimization" and solve for the best possible solution to a problem given defined constraints. However, most university administrators are not economists or have not had significant levels of economics training. Therefore, our objective in this paper is to present simple models of optimization for university administrators who would like to optimally invest in Catholic and curricular amenities. With the lessons from our model, university administrators will be able to employ a simple toolkit to improve university decision-making.

We present three levels of our model: the first with only Catholic students, the second with Catholic and secular students, and the third with Catholic, Christian, and secular students. In each model, we assume that the university's objective is to maximize the students' well-being subject to the university's budget constraint. The assumption leads our model to be different from classical constrained optimization where someone maximizes their own well-being subject to their budget constraint. Each model shows that the university should spend more of the budget constraint on Catholic amenities when the average student at the university has a stronger preference for Catholic amenities, either because the share of Catholic students increases or preferences for Catholic amenities increase.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review of school choice for college students. Section 3 provides the model in three subsections. Section 4 concludes by providing a discussion of how administrators can best use the model.

¹ We provide a fuller discussion of Catholic and curricular amenities in Section 3.

Literature Review

While this paper considers Catholic, Christian, and secular students, the literature contains a plethora of information on every conceivable point of interest for students deciding on which college to attend. Indeed, this is true and necessary as potential college students' preferences are so heterogeneous. Choosing a college is a daunting decision and the literature is littered with rankings, innumerable criteria, and endless points of differentiation. Near the top of the list of metrics is the College Scorecard, an online database started in 2015 to provide more information about colleges. The College Scorecard's key indicator is the net present value from attending a certain college, using earnings ten years after first attending that college.

While this paper explores spending on Catholic amenities, it is important to recognize the changing landscape in student preferences. Dan Berrett and Eric Hoover present a significant change in students values between 1974 and 2014. In 1974, 65% of college freshmen considered "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life" important, compared to only 45% in 2014. Also, in a major shift, in 1974, only 44% considered, "Being very well off financially" important, versus a whopping 82% in 2014 (Berrett and Hoover, 2015). Society has changed and the quest for enrollment continues. Can Catholic Institutions remain true to the Catholic Charism in light of these changing demographics? This literature review seeks to unpack some of the prevailing information on college spending and student demand.

Brian Jacob, Brian McCall, and Kevin Strange conduct an exhaustive survey in this National Bureau of Economic Research working paper: *College as Country Club: Do Colleges Cater to Students' Preferences for Consumption?* (Jacob et al., 2013). This study reinforces the idea of very strong heterogeneity across students. The authors point out that wealthy students are more willing to pay more for consumption amenities and that high-achieving students are more willing to pay for academic quality. Jacob, McCall, and Strange, show that the students at less selective schools, perhaps private schools, value consumption amenities more than improving academic quality. The students attending small, private, liberal arts institutions, are more interested in the college experience than in academic rigor. In fact, Jacob, McCall, and Strange, find students are much more likely to attend an institution which matches their background, i.e., Catholic students are more likely to attend Catholic colleges.

Timothy Hanchin, in his article *From below upwards: Worship and Wonder in Higher Education* (2017) speaks to the gap between academia and ones' worship life. Catholic Higher Education in our time is far removed from the ancient tradition of contemplation and prayer. Hanchin cite's Augustine's *On the Teacher*, in which Augustine claims our knowing comes in the form of illumination from prayer and contemplation (Hanchin, 2017). This is a far cry from today's college campuses, where discipline specialization, and facts are all important. Today's higher education arena is largely a credentialing vehicle. Hanchin (2017) points out that not only are these ideas not mutually exclusive, but that worship can transform one's economy of desire from consumption to gratitude. Worship may therefore heal atrophied wonder, aiding scholars in overcoming bias and prophetically resisting the

commodification of education prevalent today.² The real message here is that return on investment in Catholic amenities at Catholic Universities is very difficult to quantify, but easy to qualify.

Denise Davidson and Amy Paciej-Woodruff in their 2018 work, *Are College Students Too Entitled Today? The Role of Customer Service in Meeting Student Needs and Expectations* wrestle with the very question, are college students today too coddled (2018)? Independent of the Catholic question, but nonetheless central to our discussion is the question of spending on amenities in colleges. Davidson and Paciej-Woodruff take the approach that students are consumers. No one disagrees that today's students are consumers, but the issue explored here is the extent the consumer is catered to. Skyrocketing tuition is placed against the backdrop of extravagant amenities such as climbing walls and lazy rivers. Davidson and Paciej-Woodruff contend that the best student-centered customer service outcome is to combine customer service and education. This means providing appropriate environments that facilitate student learning and degree attainment (Davidson and Paciej-Woodruff, 2018).

Jessie Bazan discusses the upward trend of offering luxury living in college environments. "Luxury suites are sprouting up on campuses across the country. These spacious apartments are often all-inclusive, boasting state-of-the-art bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchens decked out with top-of-the-line appliances" (Bazan, 2017). This is a far cry from university dorm life of the past. Is this really necessary? Is it helpful? Even more important, is it harmful? What young person needs these amenities? What bonding and interpersonal relationship skills are being lost with this self selected isolation. Bazan proposes, that not only is it not helpful, it actually causes students to miss arguably the best part of college: the shared experiences and the camaraderie associated with simpler, old fashioned dorm life (2017). Bazan further argues this is even more important for Catholics. "Christians come to know the world through the lens of community. We should rely on each other and be there to support one another. This ought to mean something when students consider where to live" (Bazan, 2017). Bazan further points out that Catholics and more broadly, Christians, are meant to embrace the poor, and a simple life. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24; Bazan, 2017).

None the less, Bazan finally argues, this does not mean we should expect students to live in poverty or squalor. We all are aware of the religious "Vow of Poverty," but this doesn't mean living without, it means living in community. Sharing, everyone has what they need, and no one has excess. Poverty implies a religious can live in continual trust in God, with this relationship not encumbered with pursuit of material needs. Colleges, especially Catholic and Christian, should spend on amenities. "Be intentional about cultivating community in the residence halls. Give the resident assistants adequate funding to host social events on the floor. Employ a professional hall minister who lives in the dorm and is available

² See Hanchin 2017 p.91.

to address students' spiritual needs. Designate a chapel space in each hall where students can escape for peace and prayer" (Bazan, 2017).

Hagstrom takes the notion of community even further and talks about "Biblical Hospitality" (2013). Hagstrom claims hospitality should be the framework for issues of Catholic Mission (2013). All different religious traditions are welcomed to Catholic Institutions and are encouraged to be true to their own religious identities. Hospitality provides the basis for both diversity and academic freedom, providing an environment where students and faculty feel safe and valued, and meaningful learning can take place.

A Model of Investment for Universities

A fundamental difference between a Catholic university, or any private, religiously-affiliated university, and a public university is that Catholic universities have a mission that aligns with religious values whereas public universities in the United States, by definition, do not. Therefore, while public universities only need to be concerned with investments in non-religious curricular amenities, Catholic universities must balance investments they make between Catholic amenities and curricular amenities.

To illustrate the differences, we can examine the mission statements of St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan institution, and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), a public school and the alma mater of Benjamin Posmanick, co-author of this paper. In part, the St. Bonaventure mission statement reads "St. Bonaventure is a Catholic university dedicated to educational excellence as informed by our Franciscan and liberal arts traditions. In the words of our patron, we believe that there should be 'no knowledge without love,' and thus seek to transform the lives of our students, inspiring in them a lifelong commitment to service and citizenship."³ On the other hand, SIUE's mission statement reads "Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is a student-centered educational community dedicated to communicating, expanding and integrating knowledge. In a spirit of collaboration enriched by diverse ideas, our comprehensive and unique array of undergraduate and graduate programs develop professionals, scholars and leaders who shape a changing world."⁴ We can immediately see that St. Bonaventure University is focused on a holistic, religiously-based educational mission. SIUE, instead, is focused on curricular values of "integrating knowledge" to "develop professionals." The point here is not to denigrate either mission statement, but to highlight the differences between a Catholic and public university.

On one hand, Catholic amenities increase the Catholic educational value for students. For instance, a school may choose to recruit and hire an additional priest or friar to work with students. Schools may also choose to invest in infrastructure, such as new or better church facilities, or Catholic educational centers, like the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University or the Center for Catholic Studies at University of St. Thomas. Alternatively, a school could choose to setup offices to enforce standards for Catholic

³ See more at <https://www.sbu.edu/about/values-mission>.

⁴ See more at <https://www.siu.edu/about/mission-goals-plans/>.

behavior, similar to the Personnel Conduct Policy at Brigham Young University (a private, Mormon-based university).⁵

Curricular amenities may be defined very simply — they are amenities meant to further secular educational value for students. For instance, hiring a new mathematics professor solely with the goal of teaching students calculus would count as a curricular investment. Alternatively, a university may choose to make a curricular investment in better research components for the library, such as new data sets, access to additional journals, or purchasing additional books.

Regardless of how a school chooses to invest in either Catholic or curricular amenities, it is important to understand how a school should choose to efficiently allocate funds between Catholic and curricular amenities. Our goal in this paper is to provide school administrators with a framework for understanding the marginal decision-making process pioneered by economists to efficiently run their schools. However, we do not specify precisely in which ways the schools make their investments, such as between hiring a priest or building a new chapel.

A Model with Only Catholic Students

In the initial model, we begin with the simplifying assumption that all students are Catholic. In later sections, we will add in Christian and secular students as well.

In our model, we assume that a Catholic university is the agent, or the decision-maker responsible for optimizing an objective function. In the model, the school has the objective of maximizing the students' utility function subject to the school's budget constraint.⁶ The utility function is given by

$$U = A^{\alpha_{Ca}} E^{(1-\alpha_{Ca})} \quad (1)$$

where the term A defines the amount of Catholic amenities provided and E defines the amount of curricular amenities provided. The term α_{Ca} defines the preferences that Catholic students have for Catholic amenities. The term $(1 - \alpha_{Ca})$ defines the preferences that Catholic students have for curricular amenities. The preference parameters are scaled so that they add to 1.

The budget constraint for the school is based on the school's endowment, number of students, and operating budget set by the board of trustees. We do not set the actual level of the budget constraint in our model, but we do assume that the school spends the entire budget on Catholic and curricular amenities. Therefore, the budget constraint is defined as

⁵ See more at: <https://policy.byu.edu/view/personnel-conduct-policy#:~:text=Be%20honest,law%20and%20follow%20campus%20policies>.

⁶ One can imagine numerous objective functions for a school, including production functions that characterize research or teaching. We choose the students' welfare as the objective function, which may be a strong assumption. For instance, Milton Friedman argued that individuals are not careful about spending someone else's money on another person (Friedman and Friedman 1990). However, for lack of well-recognized objective function for schools, we use student welfare, which schools undoubtedly produce.

$$BC = \gamma A + \phi E \quad (2)$$

where γ is the cost of an additional unit of Catholic amenities and ϕ is the cost of an additional unit of curricular amenities.

The constrained optimization problem for the school is then to maximize student welfare subject to the budget constraint. Economists would solve this kind of problem via a Lagrange optimization setup by

$$L = A^{\alpha_{Ca}} E^{(1-\alpha_{Ca})} + \lambda(BC - \gamma A - \phi E) \quad (3)$$

The optimal solution for investment in Catholic and curricular amenities are shown by

$$A^* = \frac{BC}{\gamma} \times \alpha_{Ca}, \quad E^* = \frac{BC}{\phi} \times (1 - \alpha_{Ca}).$$

The results show that the fraction of the university's budget constraint which should be spent on Catholic amenities is based on the preference for Catholic amenities given by α_{Ca} .⁷ As α_{Ca} grows closer to 1, the fraction of the budget constraint which should be spent on Catholic amenities increases to 1 as well. For instance, one could imagine a Catholic university that has a value of α_{Ca} which is sufficiently close to 1 to cause the school to be organized with Catholicism as its sole purpose, such as a seminary. Alternatively, a school may have a value of α_{Ca} which is sufficiently close to 0 that Catholicism is completely removed from its mission, such as a state school. At the same time, when the preferences for Catholic amenities increase, by definition, the preferences for curricular amenities decrease.

Additionally, having the price γ in the denominator suggests that the school should purchase as many units of Catholic amenities as possible given the fraction of the budget constraint the school should spend on Catholic amenities ($BC \times \alpha_{Ca}$). For instance, suppose that the price of Catholic amenities were to be cut in half. For simplicity, suppose that the only Catholic amenity available to the school is to hire priests. In that case, the school should double the number of priests it employs. On the other hand, if the cost of priests were to double, the school should cut the number of priests employed by the school in half.

A Model with Catholic and Secular Students

While the model presented in Section 3.1 does a nice job of establishing the intuition of constrained optimization for Catholic universities, most schools do not only have Catholic students. On the contrary, they often have Christian and secular students as well. In this section, we add secular students to the model. We will consider Christian in addition to secular students in Section 3.3.

In the model with Catholic and secular students, schools maximize the welfare of students by using the students' preferences weighted by the respective proportion of students, such as Catholic or secular students. Schools now face the utility function given by

⁷ Full solutions to the models are provided in the Appendix.

$$U = \theta_{Ca}[\alpha_{Ca} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ca}) \ln(E)] + (1 - \theta_{Ca})[\alpha_S \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_S) \ln(E)] \quad (4)$$

where θ_{Ca} is the proportion of the student body which is Catholic and secular students have the preference parameter α_S for Catholic amenities. It is reasonable to assume that $\alpha_{Ca} > \alpha_S$, which is to say that Catholic students have a stronger preference for Catholic amenities than secular students do. The utility function is very similar to the simpler function provided in Section 3.1. In this case, however, we weight the utilities by the proportion of Catholic and secular students. Moreover, we now take the natural log of the utility functions. The natural log allows the function to be solved and does not affect the results of optimization.

The maximization problem is then given by

$$\begin{aligned} L = & \theta_{Ca}[\alpha_{Ca} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ca})\ln(E)] \\ & +(1 - \theta_{Ca}) [\alpha_S \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_S)\ln(E)] \\ & +\lambda(BC - \gamma A - \phi E) \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

The results are very similar to the simple model in Section 3.1:

$$A^* = \frac{BC}{\gamma} [\theta_{Ca} \alpha_{Ca} + (1 - \theta_{Ca}) \alpha_S], \quad E^* = \frac{BC}{\phi} [\theta_{Ca} (1 - \alpha_{Ca}) + (1 - \theta_{Ca}) (1 - \alpha_S)].$$

However, the new result states that the proportion of the budget constraint that the school should spend on Catholic amenities is a weighted average of the tastes for Catholic amenities held by the Catholic and secular students. When the fraction of Catholic students increases, the school should increase the amount of the budget constraint spent on Catholic amenities by $\alpha_{Ca} - \alpha_S$. Therefore, if the Catholic and secular students have very similar preferences, the changes to spending caused by an increase in Catholic students will be small. On the other hand, if the Catholic and secular student have very different preferences, the changes to spending caused by an increase in Catholic students will be large. Moreover, when students, Catholic or secular, have stronger preferences for Catholic amenities, schools should spend more on Catholic amenities.

A Model with Catholic, Christian, and Secular Students

In the final model we present, we assume that students at Catholic universities can be categorized as Catholic, Christian, and secular. We do not consider a model with more than three categories of students, however, the analysis and takeaways can trivially be extended to include any number of categories.

In the final model, the university now maximizes a weighted utility function composed of the utility functions for Catholic, Christian, and secular students. The utility function is now given by

$$\begin{aligned}
U &= \theta_{Ca}[\alpha_{Ca} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ca}) \ln(E)] \\
&\quad + \theta_{Ch}[\alpha_{Ch} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ch}) \ln(E)] \\
&\quad + (1 - \theta_{Ca} - \theta_{Ch})[\alpha_s \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_s) \ln(E)]
\end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

where θ_{Ca} is the share of Catholic students and θ_{Ch} is the share of Christian students. We still have the taste parameters for Catholic amenities for Catholic, Christian, and secular students given by α_{Ca} , α_{Ch} , and α_s . It is reasonable to assume that Catholic students have the strongest preferences for Catholic amenities, followed by Christian students, and then secular students. Mathematically, the assumption can be shown as $\alpha_{Ca} > \alpha_{Ch}$ and $\alpha_{Ch} > \alpha_s$.

The maximization problem is given by

$$\begin{aligned}
L &= \theta_{Ca}[\alpha_{Ca} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ca}) \ln(E)] \\
&\quad + \theta_{Ch}[\alpha_{Ch} \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_{Ch}) \ln(E)] \\
&\quad + (1 - \theta_{Ca} - \theta_{Ch})[\alpha_s \ln(A) + (1 - \alpha_s) \ln(E)] \\
&\quad + \lambda(BC - \gamma A - \phi E)
\end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

and the results are an extension of those presented in Section 3.2 as shown by

$$A^* = \frac{BC}{\gamma} [\theta_{Ca} \alpha_{Ca} + \theta_{Ch} \alpha_{Ch} + (1 - \theta_{Ca} - \theta_{Ch}) \alpha_s]$$

$$E^* = \frac{BC}{\phi} [\theta_{Ca}(1 - \alpha_{Ca}) + \theta_{Ch}(1 - \alpha_{Ch}) + (1 - \theta_{Ca} - \theta_{Ch})(1 - \alpha_s)].$$

Similar to before, the optimal amount of the budget that should be spent on Catholic amenities is based on the weighted average of the taste parameters for Catholic amenities. When the students have a strong preference for Catholic amenities, as shown by a higher weighted average of the taste parameters, the school should invest more in Catholic amenities. The higher weighted average may be attained because all of the taste parameters are high or because the weights are high for students who have strong taste parameters. For instance, if Catholic students are a large share of the student body, it could be that the school spends a high amount on Catholic amenities, even if the secular students do not prefer Catholic amenities at all ($\alpha_s = 0$). Specifically, when the share of Catholic students increases at the expense of secular students, the school should increase expenditure on Catholic amenities by $\alpha_{Ca} - \alpha_s$.

Conclusion and Discussion

It is important for administrators to understand that, even if they are not trained as economists, an economic framework for investment can improve their decision making. We have provided a simple model designed to help administrators to think about economics and investment. The models presented here provide insights into how university administrators can optimally invest in Catholic and curricular amenities.

In our description of the model, we assumed that the composition of the student body and their preferences are simply taken as a given by the university. However, while that allows for a simple understanding of decision making, it is not the case that the composition and preferences of the student body are entirely exogenous.

Given that universities have control over their admissions process, the university can, and should, ensure that their admissions process aligns with their investments in Catholic and curricular amenities. This is where the ability to set strategic, long-term objectives by university administrators must be utilized. For instance, suppose that a university president and board of trustees agree that the university should become more rooted in its Catholic tradition and would like to make investments to further the goal. In such a case, it may be optimal to actively recruit a larger portion of Catholic students or attempt to attract students with stronger preferences for Catholic amenities. One way to achieve the goal of a student body with strong preferences for Catholic amenities may be to send recruiters predominantly to Catholic high schools. Another way may be to distribute recruitment materials which highlight the Catholic amenities on the campus, thereby attracting students who demand Catholic amenities and detaching those who do not.

Another possibility is that administrators would like to maintain the current student body and the culture of the school. When an administrator is looking to make optimal investments to optimize the school based on the current student body, the school can use surveys to ascertain the preferences students have for Catholic amenities.

In a more complex case, it is not necessary that Catholic and curricular amenities be disparate. In fact, Michael J. Naughton makes the case that a well-rounded education rooted in Catholic values produces a better understanding of any field of knowledge ([Harbiger Institute for Catholic Leadership, 2020](#)). Taken from the perspective of Catholic and curricular amenities being complementary, it is possible for schools to optimally invest in both Catholic and curricular amenities simultaneously. It is important for administrators to understand that it is possible for money to be spent on Catholic and curricular amenities simultaneously. In our framework, the administrator's job will be to determine how much Catholic and curricular amenities are improved by the expenditure and apply the values when determining if A^* or E^* has been achieved.

Administrators who would like to learn more about economics to improve decision making have many resources available in addition to our models. One recommendation is *Microeconomic Theory* by Layard and Walters (1978). Another is *Price Theory* by Milton Friedman (2008).

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Teaching Brief: Using TikTok/Video Assignments to Drive Engagement and Understanding in Undergraduate Business Analytics Courses and Beyond

Michael D. Herley D.B.A. St. John's University*

Abstract

This paper presents an innovative teaching strategy using TikTok in an undergraduate business statistics course over three years (2020-2023). The assignment taps into current trends among college students using TikTok, making the course more relevant while aligning with St. John's University's mission as a Catholic, Vincentian institution to deliver an innovative, quality education and to "empower diverse learners with quality education for life." Student interest in business analytics increased from a pre-class median rating of 1.85 to a post-class median rating of 3.65 (on a scale of 1 to 5), with 94% reporting increased engagement and 96% attesting to a deeper understanding of topics via the TikTok assignment compared to traditional methods. Equality of the median and variance tests confirm the strategy's significant positive impact on engagement and learning outcomes. These results advocate for a broader application of digital tools across undergraduate classes, potentially signaling a needed pedagogical shift toward integrating social media into the classroom.

*Herley is at the Peter J. Tobin College of Business, St. John's University, Queens, NY, and is the corresponding author. herleym@stjohns.edu.

Introduction

After completing my first semester at The Peter J. Tobin College of Business at St. John's University in May 2020, I sought to implement a fresh and diverse learning assessment that would spark student interest through imaginative methods—a core part of our mission. This approach encouraged students to convey key concepts in business statistics through storytelling on video. St. John's University, a Vincentian institution located in Queens, NY, is one of the largest Catholic universities in the U.S. It is renowned for its diverse student body, making it an ideal setting for this research.

While it is traditional to take a ready-aim-fire approach in academia, I did the opposite, taking a fire-ready-aim approach, and like *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost, it “has made all the difference.” During the summer of 2020, I observed my teenage daughters' exuberance for the social media app TikTok. I viewed this under the prism of my daughters being the artistic types, one a dancer and the other a traditional artist. I can vividly remember waking up one night to get a glass of water and noticing my 15-year-old daughter in her bedroom with the spotlight on painting a portrait of Scooby-Doo. I wanted to develop a quantitative-oriented assignment that would tap into the skill set of those naturally more creative and stretch the non-creative types to learn an increasingly valuable skill in business today—the storytelling of data through video and memes.

In the fall of 2020, I implemented a TikTok project to assess student learning in an Honors Modern Statistics I class with 32 students. Students could pick any topic covered during the semester to create a 30 to 60-second TikTok teaching lesson, with the audience being incoming students in the same class next semester. Students also had the option to use their iPhones to record their video-teaching lessons, though TikTok was encouraged because of its embedded video-editing tools. The assignment parameters for the first semester were limited, and there were no examples of prior student work to share—my students and I were breaking new ground. Given the quality of the submissions and positive student feedback, I rolled out the TikTok assignment to all subsequent Modern Statistics I classes for the spring 2021 semester, weeks before the onset of COVID-19. While the onset of the pandemic was not the impetus for the TikTok assignment, anecdotal observations suggest that the assignment helped to keep students engaged during the extended remote learning period and may have contributed to the pedagogical success of the assignment.

More details on the assignment expectations were included for the spring 2021 semester, and in the summer of 2021, I partnered with St. John's University's Center for Teaching and Learning to develop an assignment rubric, rolling it out the following semester. A copy of the current rubric is included in the appendices. Students were proud of their work, and many allowed me to share their TikToks in future semesters and on my LinkedIn page. Subsequent students found that watching previous submissions helped them understand course topics better and develop new ideas for their TikToks.

This paper examines the impact of TikTok video assignments on holistic learning and student engagement. It is organized as follows: introduction, literature review (brief), data,

results, student TikTok examples, conclusions, acknowledgments, appendices, and references.

Literature Review

Going back to 2007, perhaps earlier, it has been recognized that traditional teaching methods are outdated given the complexities of today's business world (Weick). Despite this, many university instructors fail to appreciate the need for classroom innovation, with business schools lagging in adapting to the demands of the data analytics field (Horton & Hardin, 2015). The traditional "chalk-and-talk" method still dominates undergraduate business education (Anderson & Krasnozhon, 2021).

Dieleman et al. (2022) highlight the significant role of classroom innovation in successful pedagogy, tracing its importance from the mid-1970s to the present. According to Statista, most TikTok users are 18-24, which corresponds to the typical age range of undergraduate and five-year master's students. As of July 2024, the U.S. had nearly 120.5 million TikTok users, the second-highest number of any country.

Art-based methods can help managers better represent the real world and meet the demands of 21st-century corporations by leveraging creativity (Adler, 2006). The American Institute for Economic Research (2020) suggests that TikTok empowers users to tap into their latent creativity. Combining the "language of the eye" with the "language of the mind" is particularly powerful (McCandless, 2010). According to an AACSB X post (2018), "Creativity will become one of the most important skills for the workforce, as creative people will invent new business models, products, ways of working, and customer experiences."

Much of the literature on classroom teaching focuses on academics creating TikTok lessons for their students rather than allowing students to assume the role of teacher for their peers (Middleton, 2022). The socially relevant aspect of TikTok bridges the gap between student interests and their studies (Kaye et al., 2022). TikTok's creative nature enables students to develop content relevant to various academic disciplines, including math (Aziz & Dali, 2023). Its unique features pique student interest and stimulate learning (Aziz & Dali, 2023). Additionally, TikTok in the classroom helps instructors connect classroom material with culturally relevant content (Kaye et al., 2022).

Music is a critical component of many TikTok videos, which has been shown to enhance students' educational experience and performance (Knudsen & Duncan, 2018; Rozinski, 2015; Soper, 2010). Ding et al. (2022) found that brief videos of two minutes or less effectively keep students focused on instructional content.

Data

To assess the impact of the TikTok assignment, a six-question anonymous Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent to 231 current St. John's University students who took Modern Statistics I, where this assignment was offered from fall 2020 to fall 2023. The survey was open from 03/23/2024 to 04/04/2024. Approximately 60% of the students, or 139, completed the survey. One hundred percent of these 139 students answered the five quantitative

questions, and 33%, or 46 students, answered the open-ended question, providing insightful qualitative feedback. A representative sampling of the qualitative feedback from the student Survey Monkey questionnaire is included in the appendices. In addition, I conducted nine 20 to 30-minute follow-up interviews over Zoom with students from 06/18/2024 to 06/29/2024 to garner deeper insights. These perspectives are also included in the appendices.

Results

Below are the results of the quantitative questions, including the equality of the median and variance tests:

- More than 94% of students stated that the TikTok assignment enhanced their interest and participation in learning the subject matter compared to traditional assignments (see Figure 1).
- Student interest in business analytics increased from a pre-class median rating of 1.85 to a post-class median of 3.65 on a scale of 1 to 5 (see Figure 2).
- The p-values for the various equality of the median tests are essentially zero, implying that the probability of observing such a difference (or more extreme) in the before and after medians is extremely low if there is no difference. The increase in median interest from 1.85 to 3.65 is substantial and suggests that the course content and the innovative teaching method of using TikTok effectively engages students (see Figure 3).
- The sizeable p-values for the equality of variance tests suggest that the evidence supporting the null hypothesis that the variances are equal is strong. The consistency of the variances and the significant positive shift in the median highlight that the course consistently benefits students across different initial interest levels. (see Figure 4).
- Approximately 77% of students said the TikTok project changed their view of statistics for the better, while 23% said it remained the same. Notably, no student said it changed their view of statistics for the worse (see Figure 5).
- More than 96% of participants said the TikTok assignment helped them remember or understand the topic more deeply than other topics covered in the course (see Figure 6).

The last survey question asked students to provide additional feedback, suggestions, or comments about the TikTok assignment to help the instructor improve or understand their experience better. Overall, the feedback was positive. A representative sampling of student responses is included in the appendices.

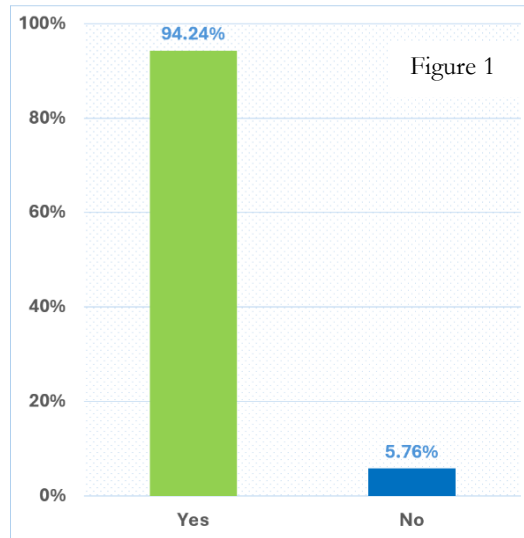


Figure 1: Did the TikTok/Video assignment enhance your interest and participation in learning the subject matter compared to traditional assignments?

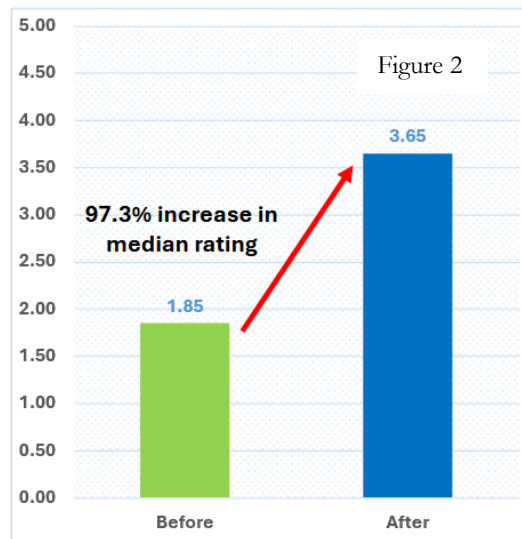


Figure 2: Please rate your interest in Business Analytics on a scale from 1 (not interested) to 5 (very interested) before and after taking Modern Statistics I.

Method	df	Value	Probability
Wilcoxon/Mann-Whitney		7.564273	0.0000
Wilcoxon/Mann-Whitney (tie-adj.)		7.575791	0.0000
Med. Chi-square	1	54.62196	0.0000
Adj. Med. Chi-square	1	52.86013	0.0000
Kruskal-Wallis	1	57.22957	0.0000
Kruskal-Wallis (tie-adj.)	1	57.40399	0.0000
van der Waerden	1	55.14944	0.0000

Figure 3: Equality of Median Tests
(author's data)

Method	df	Value	Probability
F-test	(138, 137)	1.142126	0.4371
Siegel-Tukey		1.425569	0.1540
Bartlett	1	0.604321	0.4369
Levene	(1, 275)	0.000446	0.9832
Brown-Forsythe	(1, 275)	0.193686	0.6602

Figure 4: Equality of Variance Tests
(author's data)

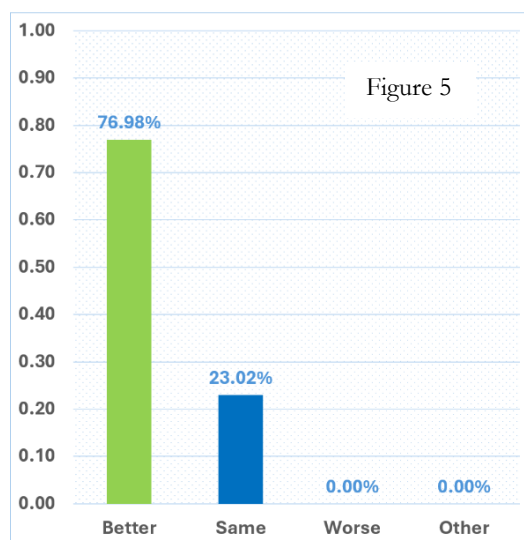


Figure 5: If the TikTok project changed your view of statistics, how did it change? Select the option that best describes your experience (for the better, for the worse, about the same, other—please specify).

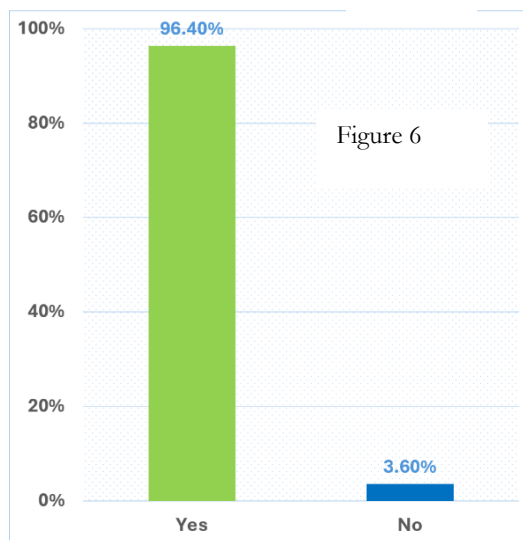


Figure 6: Do you feel that the TikTok assignment helped you remember or understand the topic more deeply than other topics covered in the course? (Yes or No).

Student TikTok Examples

Below are examples from several students over recent semesters. They agreed to share their work in this article, hoping other instructors would consider adopting similar assignments in their classes.



Figure 7

Figure 7: Tobin student being reminded that the best we can do is fail to reject our null hypothesis, and one should never “accept” it. This was one of the submissions from my first semester that included the TikTok project. The TikTok can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3LvOkIZ>.

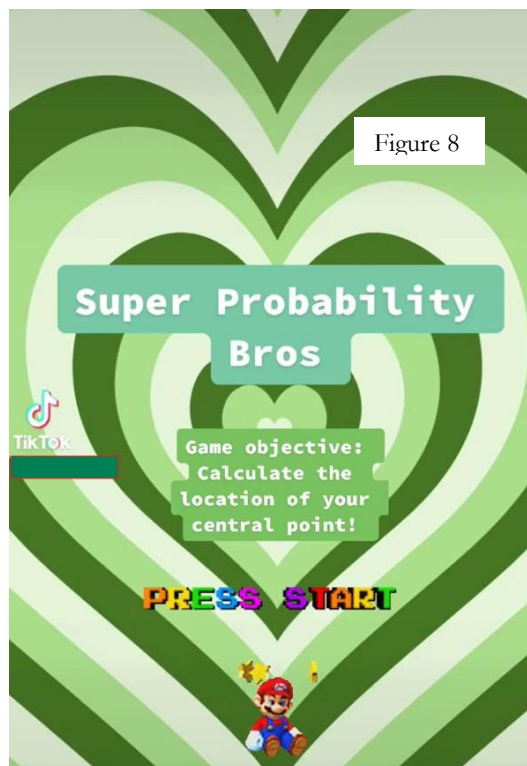


Figure 8

Figure 8: A Tobin student demonstrates the basic principles of probability theory through a video game approach. The TikTok can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/4cRxda0>.



Figure 9

Figure 9: A Tobin student explains Simpson's paradox through a rap. The TikTok can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3y4MeX4>.

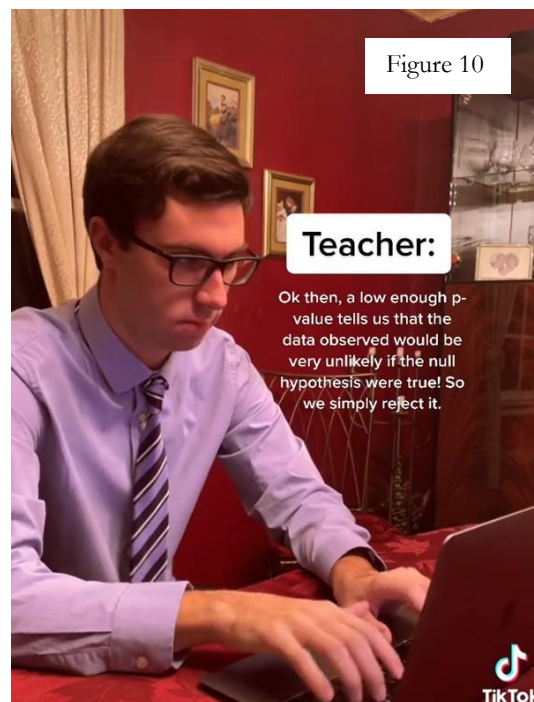


Figure 10

Figure 10: Tobin student explains p-values and hypothesis testing. The TikTok can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/4cPhhoU>.



Figure 11: In this example, a Tobin student performs a music parody of a popular Christmas song. He chose not to use TikTok and was granted permission to exceed the typical 60-second time limit. The video can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/4d6TwZ9>.

Conclusions

Innovation is essential to foster student engagement and learning in subjects like business statistics, where many incoming students may approach the material with anxiety or indifference. TikTok assignments provide a way to meet students on familiar ground, making coursework more relevant and engaging—all at a time of increased scrutiny around the value of a college education and smaller student populations. In line with St. John’s University’s mission as a Catholic and Vincentian institution, this approach supports quality, inclusive education that empowers diverse learners to connect with course content in meaningful ways.

Integrating social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels can benefit a range of majors within business schools and even broader academic disciplines. However, implementing social media assignments on a larger scale requires a shift in perspective, resources, and faculty training. I encourage faculty to consider a “fire-ready-aim” approach and explore how social media assignments could enhance pedagogical success and student engagement in their courses.

An additional benefit of this assignment is the development of student presentation skills through analytical storytelling on camera. These skills can carry over to the workplace, preparing students for recorded and live video interviews that are increasingly common in the hiring process for internships and full-time positions.

Future research should explore how social media assignments affect student engagement in disciplines beyond business and in international settings where TikTok usage among college-aged students is less widespread. Such research could reveal new insights into how mission-driven educational practices, grounded in innovative pedagogy, can foster engagement and adaptability in diverse learning environments.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the fantastic students at St. John’s University’s Tobin College of Business who participated in the Survey Monkey questionnaire, those students who participated in the Zoom follow-up interviews, and the handful of students who allowed me to include a copy of their

TikToks in the paper; Niall C. Hegarty, Ed.D., also at St. John's University, for his ongoing encouragement to improve my craft in the classroom; and Michael Gallagher, Ph.D. of St. Bonaventure University for encouraging me to present my thinking on using TikTok assignments in the classroom at St. Bonaventure University's April 2024 conference: Leadership in Catholic Higher Education: Knowing Our Past to Guide Our Future.

Appendices

Qualitative Feedback from Students via Survey Monkey Questionnaire

The last survey question asked students to provide additional feedback, suggestions, or comments about the TikTok assignment to help the instructor improve or understand their experience better. A representative sample of student responses is shown below:

- “I think TikTok created a great engagement in the topic. As TikTok is a powerful and still new social media platform, it was a way for students to express their knowledge of the learned topic in their own way.”
- “I really enjoyed exploring TikTok to help me better portray topics of statistics in not only a creative but engaging way! In the world of business analytics in general, it is always important to keep up to date with the latest technology and find ways we can use it to better our understanding of this field.”
- “The TikTok assignment made the class really fun and engaging. I definitely still remember what I did my TikTok on and that was 2 years ago!”
- “This project is a great way to take textbook concepts that are often difficult to visualize and comprehend and put them in a real-world context. Therefore amplifying the learning experience.”
- “It helped solidify certain rules, laws, and concepts by applying them to real-life situations in a fun and engaging way. I will forever remember Bayes rule because of my TikTok on it.”
- “The TikTok project made it more fun and engaging to do the homework. Especially since I had to be creative and adapt the formulas and concepts to a hobby or thing, I do on a daily basis. It also helped me understand it better, which helped me for my internship and now full-time job.”
- “I genuinely enjoyed the opportunity to display my BUA learnings in an assignment that allowed students to be creative and free in their interpretation. I am someone who is not mathematically gifted and generally not interested in analytics or stats, but being able to relate the course learnings to something in my own life where I could apply it and understand, helped me grasp the concepts better.”
- “I think the TikTok assignment was a great way to get students to think creatively about how statistics can be applied to the real world in ways we may have not consciously thought about before.”
- “I enjoyed that the professor tried to make class interesting in a way that the students would relate to. I haven’t had many other professors who have tried to connect our curriculum with things we might be interested in.”
- “The TikTok assignment was really intriguing and helped me learn the materials much better. It kept me engaged and it felt like a really relatable way to learn. I loved the

assignment and I loved making my TikTok for the final!”

- “Not too demanding of an assignment, and truly helped learn in a unique and modern way.”
- “It was interactive and allows statistics to relate to something we use.”
- “I loved doing the TikTok project! Not only did it help us learn more about business analytics, but it was engaging and allowed us to be creative.”
- “I enjoyed the short video aspect of this project, which I feel is a better way to study and remember material.”
- “The project was a great tool for students to put what they learned in the books to practical use.”
- “I enjoyed that we could be creative, and it didn’t limit what we could do. I wished that we had the opportunity to make longer videos because I was always concerned with making it 2 mins or below. For future projects perhaps have the option to also do class games or surveys to conduct experiments for more engagement or slideshow presentations based on passion topics.”
- “It was a unique way of completing an assignment. Personally, my video had multiple concepts and I had a sort of script to practice, which was my notes. So it helped me remember things easy.”
- “I felt as though the TikTok assignment allowed me to execute an idea on my own which gave me the confidence I needed to go forward in the class doing better than I was previously. It was a fun way to learn, which we can always use more of!”
- “I thoroughly enjoy the TikTok assignment, especially since we are able to choose our own topic. It also was just a way that allowed us to be very creative in a class that’s very information-heavy.”
- “It made textbook concepts easier to understand in real-life scenarios.”
- “I actually really enjoyed the TikTok project. It helped me get excited about the subject, finding unique ways to incorporate the class material into really life.”

ChatGPT Summary of Zoom Follow-Up Interviews

To collect and analyze student additional feedback on the TikTok assignment, I conducted nine 20 to 30-minute Zoom interviews with ten students. To facilitate a timely analysis of these conversations, process a large volume of student feedback, and incorporate an artificial intelligence aspect into this research, transcripts of the Zoom interviews were created using Otter.ai. Subsequently, ChatGPT was used to create summaries of each interview, followed by a master summary of the individual summaries. I was present for all these interviews, and I believe ChatGPT’s summaries accurately reflected my discussions with students. However, it should be noted that using artificial intelligence in this way may not capture the entire essence of the student interviews. Nevertheless, I believe the inclusion of this feedback is valuable for other

faculty considering employing a similar assignment in their classes.

Below is ChatGPT's unedited summary of summaries. My only request was that ChatGPT limit it to about one and a half pages.

"The TikTok assignment, integrated into a business statistics course, garnered overwhelmingly positive feedback from students, highlighting its engaging and creative nature:

"Engagement and Motivation: Students consistently reported that the freedom to be creative was the most engaging aspect of the TikTok assignment. This creative liberty allowed them to explore statistical concepts in ways that resonated with their personal interests and strengths. For example, one student combined their love of singing and music with statistical concepts, which significantly strengthened their interest in the subject. This approach contrasted sharply with traditional assignments, making the learning process more enjoyable and less intimidating.

"Skill Development: The project helped students develop various non-academic skills. These included:

- "Creativity: Students enjoyed the challenge of presenting statistical concepts in an engaging manner.
- "Technical Skills: The assignment required them to utilize video editing tools and platforms like TikTok, which are increasingly relevant in today's digital age.
- "Communication: Crafting a clear and concise message for their videos improved their ability to communicate complex ideas effectively.
- "Confidence: Presenting their work to classmates helped boost their confidence in public speaking and presentation.

"Memory Retention: Students noted that the project helped solidify their understanding of key concepts. By revisiting and applying course material in their videos, they were able to reinforce their learning in a memorable way. For instance, the concept of failing to reject the null hypothesis was mentioned as a lasting takeaway from the assignment.

"Student Feedback: One student emphasized how the assignment was memorable and enjoyable, standing out among other college projects. They appreciated the opportunity to showcase their understanding through a medium that aligned with their creative interests. Another student noted that seeing examples from previous classes sparked their creativity and helped them conceptualize their projects.

"Suggestions for Improvement: Students suggested minor enhancements, such as allowing longer video durations and the option to use platforms like YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels. There was also support for encouraging students to appear on camera [more], enhancing their presentation skills further.

"Overall Impact: The TikTok assignment effectively blended creativity with academic learning, providing a dynamic and engaging way for students to grasp complex statistical

concepts. It also equipped them with valuable skills that extend beyond the classroom, making it a highly beneficial educational tool.”

TikTok Rubric

Below is the current TikTok Rubric used for my Modern Statistic I classes at the Tobin College of Business.

Criteria	Points
<p>Teaches Something</p> <p>Breakdowns the components of a statistical or probability concept in detail (Exemplar); Discusses most of these concepts in detail (Good); and Discusses very few of these and explanations are not detailed or are incorrect (Needs Work).</p>	70 points
<p>Clarity</p> <p>TikTok is extremely clear and easy to understand (Exemplar); Lesson is partially clear and understandable (Good); and Lesson is not clear and is hard to understand (Needs Work).</p>	10 points
<p>Creativity</p> <p>TikTok provides a visually captivating example that other college-aged students would find interesting, with a timely theme (Exemplar); TikTok is somewhat captivating to the viewer (Good); and TikTok is not captivating. An inappropriate theme or music was used for a business statistics project. (Needs Work).</p>	15 points
<p>TikTok Length</p> <p>TikTok is at least 45 seconds in length, but no more than 60 seconds (Exemplar); and TikTok is too brief (Needs Work).</p>	5 points
	Total Points: 100

Table 1: TikTok Assignment Rubric

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False Gods and Prophets: Why Promoting Catholic Traditions is Critical to Catholic Higher Education

Mark C. Mitschow, Ph.D. State University of New York Geneseo

Charles J. Coate, Ph.D. St. Bonaventure University

Abstract

For centuries Catholic educational institutions have had a dual mandate to advance intellectual and spiritual knowledge rooted in Judeo/Christian values of the Old and New Testaments. Using this intellectual tradition as a base, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has evolved into a guide for social and economic development. Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* provided the framework for modern CST establishing social, economic, and business ethics.

The current, unprecedented technological growth and societal change creates enormous problems for all large institutions, including Catholic higher education. Technological advances and globalization allow misinformation to spread rapidly, eroding public trust in institutions and allowing ideologues and malevolent actors to peddle the destructive "new dogma" undermining many developed societies.

Balancing these competing forces is a significant contemporary challenge. Despite unprecedentedly rapid changes, the underlying ethical and moral issues today are like those in the past. Elites become corrupted "false gods and prophets" who advance destructive "solutions" ("new dogma") that undermine society.

Trends such as declining church attendance and religious influence in developed nations has diminished Catholic colleges' "feeder" institutions and knowledge base, forcing those colleges to demonstrate that their traditions are relevant and ethically appropriate to a wider audience. This paper argues that Catholic higher education should rely on and teach traditional Catholic values such as Biblical text and CST to proactively confront contemporary false gods, prophets, and dogmas.

Key Words: *Business Ethics, Catholic higher education, Catholic Social Teaching, Dogma, False Gods and Prophets*

Introduction and Motivation

For centuries Catholic educational institutions have had a dual mandate to advance knowledge with a learning model that advances both an intellectual (university) and a spiritual (collegiate) dimension. Further, the classic Greek quest for knowledge and reason also shaped these Catholic higher education institutions (Naughton 2024). This learning model, which is rooted in Judeo-Christian values of the Old and New Testaments, has fostered many significant intellectual and societal advancements, allowing Catholic educational institutions to play a critical role in addressing social and economic challenges for centuries.

The world is in a constant state of tumult and change, but today these changes are coming more rapidly. Factors such as globalization, climate change, the pandemic, and radical populism have led to widespread social unrest, mass migration, various social and geopolitical agendas, and a corresponding loss of trust in institutions, including traditional religious and educational institutions. Higher education in the U.S. is also under significant financial stress, with approximately 20% of all colleges expected to close in the next 20 years (Moody 2024). The problem may be worse for Catholic higher education due to the large number of small, tuition-driven institutions and declining attendance at “feeder institutions” such as Catholic churches and schools.

Traditional religions in the US are shrinking, and today approximately 15% of the population has no religious affiliation (Davis and Graham 2023, xii). Society’s underlying value systems, similar across many religions, are being replaced with new “dogma” that frequently undermines or misdirects traditional values. Self-serving and often state-based actors have also taken advantage of improved communication technologies to spread disinformation and propaganda (US Department of State 2022, Wanless and Burke 2019). Such information often spreads much faster than it can be corrected as the speed of current technological innovations is much greater than in the past (Rosner, 2023, *World Economic Forum*). In addition, new technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) may soon allow non-human creators to shape society.

While social changes now come more rapidly, a review of the Old and New Testaments indicates that the underlying problems and the resulting “new dogma” are not new. These ancient texts repeatedly warn of “False Gods and Prophets,” a broad classification that includes the Pharisees discussed throughout the New Testament. False prophets and hypocritical religious leaders are described throughout the Bible (New Oxford Annotated Bible, 1973) as being self-absorbed, greedy, and cynically uninterested in the truth. Honorable leaders and ordinary people are told to avoid them:

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands... Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them” (Psalm 115: 4-8).

False prophets "... have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God' when the Lord has not spoken" (Ezekiel 22:28).

"And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Mathew 24:11).

People led by false teachers are "...deprived in mind and of truth" (Timothy 6:5).

The Pharisees were the Jewish religious leaders and teachers at the time of Jesus. Their purpose was to help guide the people in fulfilling God's will for individuals and society. As such, they were held in high esteem by ancient Israeli society. Jesus recognized that the Pharisees had abandoned their true purpose and created new rules and roles ("dogma") to enhance their own power and prestige often at the expense of the poor and marginalized. The resulting hypocrisy created a poisonous dichotomy between the words and actions of the Pharisees that undermined God's plan for humanity.

The Catholic Church has developed doctrines of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to provide religious based guidance to socio-economic problems and help define and shape a just society. CST has its foundations Scripture, numerous Papal encyclicals, and a large body of research. Contemporary CST is traced to *Rerum Novarum* ("Of Things New"), issued by Leo XIII (1891) in response to social and economic problems associated with the Industrial Revolution. Several other Papal encyclicals have supported and extended *Rerum Novarum*, including *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931), *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI, 1967), and *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991). CST has been further refined and systematized by religious and secular researchers and forms the basis for contemporary business ethics.

This paper's purpose is to show how Catholic higher education can use its roots and traditions encompassed in CST to meet its dual mandate and address contemporary challenges of false or misleading dogmas. We also outline guidance for Catholic higher education to use its roots to proactively confront those dogmas (Naughten, 2024). The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section II describes the contemporary environment and its impact on Catholic higher education. Section III discusses False Gods and Prophets and the related issue of the Pharisees, while section IV defines CST and explains its usefulness in addressing contemporary problems. Section V provides examples of modern false gods in several fields. Section VI describes a response strategy for Catholic Higher Education that relies on its traditions and roots to address these concerns. Section VII summarizes and concludes the paper.

The Contemporary Environment and Catholic Higher Education

Many of the challenges that characterize our current environment are not new. Hypocritical leaders spreading false dogma have commonly misled societies, resulting in several periods of institutional corruption and decline that were later exposed by economic and technological changes. For example, the Renaissance and the invention of the Gutenberg printing press created conditions that

allowed the Protestant Reformation (Rubin 2014). Those same cultural and technological changes then became an important component of the Counter-Reformation (Nowakowska, 2011).

However, there are at least two differences in our current environment that make contemporary false dogma more dangerous. First, the current speed of technological innovations is much greater than in the past (World Economic Forum, 2023). Malevolent, often state-based, actors have taken advantage of improved communications technologies to spread disinformation and propaganda (US Department of State, 2022; Wanless and Burke, 2019). Since disinformation now spreads much faster than can be corrected, it is imperative to have an existing template for assessing the reliability of information on (particularly) the Internet. Further, globalization and the Internet allow false dogmas to spread across the globe simultaneously rather than starting in one place and spreading. This problem will worsen with the growth of AI and especially generative AI as these technologies allow both humans and machines to develop false dogma.

In addition, declining public support for traditional religion erodes societal knowledge of its associated values and contributions, thus removing a line of defense against misinformation. These false dogmas are portrayed as well intentioned but are often imbedded by adversarial governments trying to undermine our societal and democratic norms.

Between 2000 and 2023 the percentage of Catholics who attend mass several times a month has dropped by at least a third (Jones, 2024) and continues to decline. While total parochial school enrollment has recently stabilized, it has fallen by approximately 14% since 2013 (Data Brief, 2024). Furthermore, those enrollment trends are not uniform. The biggest declines have been in the northeast where many of the small, tuition-driven Catholic colleges are based. The decline of other Catholic institutions (e.g., parochial schools and churches) is especially concerning to Catholic higher education because those institutions have traditionally been feeders for Catholic colleges and universities.

Declining church attendance and parochial school enrollment hurts Catholic colleges in other ways as well. Lower church attendance and parochial school enrollment also means there are fewer students who understand and appreciate the Catholic theology and traditions these institutions were established to inculcate as part of their dual mandate. The resulting loss of institutional memory erodes Catholic higher education's distinctive characteristics and requires them to waste valuable time reinventing solutions to rapidly spreading false dogma.

Using the existing philosophical framework the Church has spent centuries developing allows Catholic higher education to address contemporary challenges more quickly in many fields (e.g., business ethics). It also allows Catholic colleges and universities to meet their dual mandate by introduce both nominally Catholic and non-Catholic students to this rich heritage and demonstrates how this philosophical framework remains useful and relevant to them. This in turn creates a potential market advantage that should help Catholic colleges and universities survive in an increasingly challenging economic environment.

False Gods and Prophets Creating False Dogma

The Judeo-Christian heritage cautions against false gods and prophets who by their nature mislead and misdirect people. Examples are throughout the Old and New Testaments, including but not limited to the following:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (John 4:1).

“Beware of false prophets in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7: 15-20).

“And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” (Mathew 24:11).

People led by false teachers are “...deprived in mind and of truth” (Timothy 6:5).

”For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, ...they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (Timothy 4: 3-4).

False prophets and hypocritical religious leaders are described throughout the Bible as being self-absorbed, greedy, and cynically uninterested in the truth. Honorable leaders and ordinary people are instructed to avoid them:

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands...Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them” (Psalm 115: 4-8).

False prophets “... have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God’ when the Lord has not spoken” (Ezekiel 22:28).

Jeremiah 14:14 “they are prophesying to you lying visions, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds” (Jeremiah 14:14).

“For the false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24)

“But false prophets also arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ... and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

“See to it that that none takes you captive by philosophical and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

“For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve” Romans (22: 19).

The Pharisees. Throughout the Gospels Jesus consistently reserved his harshest criticism for the Jewish community’s religious leaders. In Matthew 23: 27 Jesus describes the Pharisees as being “like whitewashed tombs, which look fine on the outside, but are full on bones and decay on the inside.” He also says the Pharisees “... tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matthew 23:4). This is why Jesus’ told his followers to “obey and follow everything they (Pharisees) tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:2).

Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the socio-economic doctrine of the Catholic Church designed to address the growth and wellbeing of people and societies. Contemporary CST has its roots in *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XII, 1891), which was issued to address social and economic challenges associated with the Industrial Revolution. Since then, CST has developed into a complex body of literature involving Papal encyclicals, pontifical councils, and academic research. While the fundamental social concepts of *Rerum Novarum* have remained unchanged, these concepts have been updated to address more contemporary fields such as business ethics.

Centesimus Annus (John Paul II, 1991) reaffirmed that CST principles are meant to address the social, economic, cultural, and political elements of human life with the family as the basic social unit. John Paul II (1991) lists three cornerstones of the Church’s social doctrine: *Human dignity, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity*. The US Catholic Bishops list *Life and dignity of the human person, Call to Family, Community, and Participation, Rights and Responsibility, Option for the poor and vulnerable, Dignity and rights of workers, Solidarity, and Care for God’s creation* as the seven themes. Other principles include the *Common good* (as separate from *Participation*) and *Promotion of peace* (or justice). Both Popes Benedict XVI and Francis have provided additional contributions to CST by focusing on basic values; *Love (Deus Caritas Est, Benedict XVI 2005), Hope (Spe Salvi, Benedict XVI, 2007), and Faith (Lumen Fidei, Francis, 2013)*.

CST is complex. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Compendium)*, prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004), comprehensively addresses CST in over 500 sub-sections. Many efforts have been made to simplify this doctrine to be more understandable and practical. For example, an early effort was Byron (1998), who listed and discussed ten building blocks of CST. The US Catholic Bishops (2005) have listed seven CST themes listed below in Table 1. While various numbers may be motivated by Ten Commandments,

the seven sacraments, or the three persons in the Trinity, these foundations, themes, or principles are intertwined.

Table 1: US Council of Catholic Bishops' Seven Themes of CST

Life and dignity of the human person – human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of society.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation – The person is sacred and also social. How societies are organized directly affects human dignity. Marriage and family are the central social institutions of society. Persons have the right and duty to participate in society and seek the common good.

Rights and Responsibility – Human dignity can be protected and community achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities met.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable – a basic moral test of a society is how the most vulnerable members of society fare.

Dignity of Work and Workers Rights – The economy must serve people. Work is a form of participation in God's creation. The dignity of work depends on the protection of the rights of workers (fair wages, private property, economic initiative).

Solidarity – We are one human family whatever our difference (national, ethnic, economic or ideological). We are our brothers and sisters' keepers.

Care for Creation – We show respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.

Modern False Gods and Prophets

Below are three examples of false gods. The first is gold or wealth (including business, markets, and a corporate economy), which is timeless, and CST has addressed in a modern context for decades. The second and third involve social media influencers and AI, both of which are contemporary false gods. While these false gods pose different societal and economic threats, CST principles offer guidance in addressing all of them.

Gold and Business: The Classic False God. Gold and wealth are a classic false god that has direct applications to business education. In Exodus 32: 1-4; Aaron created the golden calf while Moses ascended Mt. Sinai. The Gospels expand on this false god in multiple passages. In Mathew 6:24, Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. “Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” The allure of wealth makes this false god particularly difficult to resist. “Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24).

This false god, gold and wealth, is easily extended to contemporary society and particularly to business ethics. Concepts such as markets, property, wealth, poverty, and the related issues between capital (owners) and labor (workers) are centuries-old dilemmas that became more pressing as the Industrial Revolution created then unprecedented income disparities between the parties. *Rerum Novarum*, which was written at the end of the Gilded Age to specifically address these questions, views business as a vocation and asserts that economies and their related structures must serve people. Within this framework societies flourish socially and economically. Later encyclicals and other research further developed CST, which has since been largely adopted by religious and secular ethicists as the basis for contemporary business ethics.

Rerum Novarum was followed by numerous related encyclicals each contributing to business ethics. These encyclicals include *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931), *Mater et Magistra* (John XXIII, 1961), *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI, 1967), and *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991). *Quadragesimo Anno*, issued during a worldwide economic depression, stressed not only the need for continued co-operation between labor and capital but also for charity. It reaffirmed that economic activity must serve the common good as well as private gain. *Mater et Magistra* and *Populorum Progressio* called for a more global perspective in balancing social and economic growth; developed nations were called to support the growth of developing nations. Governments and businesses were both part of this mission.

The greatest impact on business and its operational ethics may have been generated by *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991). *Centesimus Annus* offered a clear role for market-based economies in CST. Free market systems, with some limitation or ethical guides, provided a beneficial system for economic and social development that resulted in better outcomes than other alternatives such as socialism. Other early secular contributions to CST were Stieber and Primeaux (1991), which explored the economic efficiency of markets in a business ethics context and Primeaux and Stieber (1993), which supported profit maximization as a mandate for ethical business. Williams (1993) further developed these insights.

Two decades after *Centesimus Annus* Turkson and Toso (2012) became a standard work linking CST to business ethics. They state that when business and markets operate properly, they make a significant contribution to not only the material but also the spiritual wellbeing of humankind. Consequently, the businessperson's development and distribution of goods and services is a true vocation. Coate and Mitschow (2013) also supported the constructive collaboration between CST and free markets. However, rather than using a macro approach of prior researchers, they used a micro analysis at the level of workers and families to divide Catholic Charities' Ten Principles of CST into economic and social system categories. They then explored how (particularly) the societal principles influenced criticism of market economies such as consumerism and poor resource allocation.

Social Media Influencers: New False Prophets. Social media influencers ('influencers') are people who have gained "a large and engaged social media following and can influence the

opinions, behaviors, and purchase decisions of their followers” (Social Media Glossary, 2024). Influencers often have millions of followers and can monetarize their resulting celebrity accordingly. Many simply promote their sponsors’ goods and services, which may or may not be useful. These influencers are a technology-based extension of the consumerism/materialism debate and another example of gold and wealth as a potential false god.

This influence may also extend beyond a typical business and become more societal or values based. While these influencers clearly have credibility with their followers, they may or may not have any expertise in the field they are attempting to influence. Unlike traditional marketing celebrity endorsers who are typically regulated by the companies employing them, social media influencers are often entirely unregulated. Both their motives and the social consequences of their influence are therefore decidedly mixed. Some influencers have significant expertise and support beneficial social ends such as encouraging more people to enter the skilled trades (Chen, 2024) while others have no subject matter expertise, promote ineffective or dangerous “solutions,” and may even be criminals. Their ability to do good or harm is entirely dependent on how many followers they have.

Rube Franke and Jodi Hildebrandt were influencers offering parenting advice on their video channel to more than two million followers. Unfortunately, their “advice” was based on abusive and harmful mistreatment of Franke’s children. In August 2023, Franke was arrested when her malnourished twelve-year-old son escaped his shackles and fled to a neighbor’s house (Wendling 2024). The resulting investigation revealed a litany of abuse against all five of her children (Wood 2024), and both Franke and Hildebrandt were eventually sentenced to decades in prison. How many of Franke and Hildebrandt’s followers took their destructive advice is a disturbing question.

Misdirected Influencers can be easily seen as false prophets where the damage wrought by them can extend far beyond those directly exposed. Such false gods described below:

Jeremiah 14:14 “they are prophesying to you lying visions, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds” (Jeremiah 14:14).

“For the false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24)

“But false prophets also arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ... and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Artificial Intelligence (AI): A Potential New False God. Artificial Intelligence is “the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages” (Oxford Languages, 2024). It is pattern recognition based on training

algorithms reliant on a data set that allows AI to learn. When the learning is objective (i.e., when the data set has clearly defined right and wrong solutions) such as reading handwritten numbers, the learning is relatively reliable and trustworthy, but when the training set is less objective or controlled the resulting learning is less reliable.

Generative Artificial Intelligence “... refers to deep-learning models that can generate high-quality text, images, and other content based on the data they were trained on” (IBM Research, 2024, “What is Generative AI?”). The development of (particularly) Generative AI presents enormous opportunities for human growth and progress. For example, it could help cure diseases, overcome disabilities like quadriplegia and traumatic brain injuries, relieve humans from engaging in dangerous or repetitive tasks, and greatly leverage human creativity. Unfortunately, AI’s immense power and speed also create the potential for a potentially tyrannical and non-human false god. Four such ethical risks are outlined below.

AI development is at least partly based on theft: Generative AI commonly learns by examining material found on the Internet, including huge amounts of copyrighted, trademarked, and other proprietary material, all of which is used without permission of or compensation to that material’s owners (Apple, Neelbauer, and Schweidel, 2023).

AI learns at an incredible rate. AI can access and assimilate the knowledge available on the Internet much faster than humans, allowing it to quickly outperform humans in even simple things like defeating human chess masters. As AI further develops, its rapid learning could make it difficult or impossible for humans to control (Anderson and Rainie, 2018). In addition, the data sets on the internet are often not accurate, objective, or even honest. Hence, AI may learn from a very bad teacher.

AI hallucinates and can learn to lie. When given a question it cannot answer AI will frequently make up citations based on perceived patterns that do not exist, resulting in incorrect or nonsensical answers (IBM Research, 2024, “What are AI Hallucinations?”). Some experimental generative AI models have also learned to lie, manipulate, and engage in psychopathic behavior (Eliot, 2024). While having AI simulate people with personality disorders may be useful in developing treatments for severe mental illness, a powerful machine that learns much faster than humans developing such traits poses obvious risks for society. Even more disturbing is the possibility that generative AI could independently learn to deceive without human intervention (Wiggers, 2024).

Who controls AI? AI is currently being developed by Google, Microsoft, other giant corporations, and frequently adversarial countries using secret proprietary technology. Trusting such entities is very risky, and society must be skeptical of these AI tools. Regulation and control of poorly understood technology may prove problematic, especially when it involves other nations. The issue becomes even more imperative if generative AI learns to develop itself independent of any human initiative.

AI creates several new and particularly important technological challenges for society. AI is by definition a decision-making tool. Society must therefore be wary of overreliance on such tools and question proposed decisions to balance the power of this tool with the benefit to human society. AI has the potential to become a dangerous false god as cautioned in biblical text.

“For the false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24)

In the future, it will be critical that societies identify and reject both malevolent influencers peddling destructive ignorance and misleading machine based. These concerns are one reason why Catholic higher education must teach students values consistent with CST principles.

The Task for Catholic Higher Education.

While all higher educational institutions seek to give students knowledge, critical thinking skills, and practical education, Catholic colleges and universities are charged to do these things while also providing a robust understanding of Catholic traditions. Students must understand how these traditions relate to living a good life, contributing to the common good of societies and avoiding the destructive, reductive solutions proposed by many new dogmas. For many Catholic colleges and universities that task may be as simple as expounding on their own roots and traditions and those of their various affiliated orders and educating students in that context. However, some institutions may also have to educate their faculty and staff in these principles.

Declining church attendance and the loss of “feeder institutions present challenges for the Catholic colleges and universities that have traditionally relied on them. However, it also provides an opportunity for (particularly) small, tuition-driven Catholic higher education institutions. Many contemporary students and parents greatly desire meaning in their lives and thus seek an education “bigger than themselves.” Catholic colleges and universities that meet their dual mandate could therefore have a distinct advantage in an educational marketplace currently undergoing severe stress.

We suggest that Catholic higher Education adopt a strategy based on both the university’s and the founding order’s (e.g., Augustinian, Benedictine, Franciscan) missions when addressing contemporary false gods and prophets. While a university’s mission should help guide how their dual mandate is fulfilled in specific circumstances, we suggest the following template. First, Catholic higher education institutions should focus on biblical text when examining ethical and societal issues. Second, the traditions of the College’s religious order should be taught as an element of that college’s heritage. Finally, CST should be taught and wherever possible used in the student’s major field of study, particularly when examining contemporary issues. This will provide students with an invaluable framework to understand contemporary issues, realize that many of those issues are like those in the past, and appreciate that Catholic traditions coupled with practical (professional) knowledge can provide relevant solutions.

Catholic colleges and universities must realize that while biblical studies and theology courses meet the educational goal at the university level the content of those courses may be complex or confusing to students. Yet, to meet its dual mandate a Catholic college or university's students must use their higher education both for themselves and to contribute to society. The decline in religious practice leaves many students and (particularly) professional school faculty unfamiliar with many Catholic traditions. Yet these same faculty are relied upon to incorporate these traditional Catholic values into their pedagogy. Further, college faculty are a critical component of the day-to-day culture of any campus.

To meet their dual mandate Catholic colleges and university should emphasize at least the theological fundamentals in their pedagogy. As an example, Catholic colleges and universities should teach the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) in introductory general education. However, Hebrew law actually includes *The 613 Mitzvot* (commandments), which are lengthy and complex. Jesus typically criticized the Pharisees for following the letter of the law and not the intent. Students and faculty can remember the Ten Commandments and recognize these as a code of conduct.

Lengthy and complex religious teaching are not a new problem. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment he replied (Matthew 22:37-39), "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your souls and all your mind" and second, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." In Mark 12:33 these quotes are followed by a teacher of the law stating (in comprehending) "it is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer on the alter animals and other sacrifices to God." All colleges expect both students and faculty to be good neighbors, but in Luke 10, Jesus tells the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* to illustrate who is your neighbor.

One lesson on love given at the last supper is John 13:34-35. "And now I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you... if you love one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples." John 15:13 adds perspective on love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man may lay down his life for another." Since loving friends or neighbors has an element of self-sacrifice, campus service projects and professional careers can be viewed as vocational.

The third course is one based in CST and linked to professional majors. Any CST course has a basis in scripture. However, CST can be complex, as illustrated in the discussion earlier in this paper. Hence, in 2005 the USSCB Bishops summarized CST in their Seven Principles. There is significant guidance in the literature supporting the teaching of CST at the university level. A few examples include both general overviews (Massaro, 2023; McKenna, 2019) and those designed for specific disciplines such as business (Till and Smith, 2010) or social work (Donaldson, 2008). These CST principles provide an excellent basis for understanding and addressing many contemporary problems. Multiple examples are discussed below.

Income disparity a critical problem confronting contemporary society. While income disparity may be a new phrase it is certainly not a new concern. Deuteronomy (15:10-11) informs “there will always be poor in the land...be openhanded with poor and needy in your land.” In proactive terms Leviticus (19:9-10) suggests “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edge of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest” leave for poor and foreigners.” The CST Principles *Option for the Poor* and *Dignity of Work/ Rights of Workers* address this social concern from both a local and a global perspective.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are addressed in multiple CST Principles. At a basic level DEI relates to *Life and Dignity of the Human Person* in that we are all sacred. DEI is also addressed in *Solidarity*, which states regardless of our differences we are brothers and sisters in one human family. Consider the parable of *the Good Samaritan* above.

Climate change is covered in *Care for Creation*, which recognizes humanity’s role as stewards of creation. As expected from all economic and social structures, this stewardship recognizes the need for policy to serve society and not burden the poor.

Catholic higher education should engage students in active solutions to these issues. But education should also make students aware of false dogmas, or misdirected rules and virtue signals that may emerge, for the outcomes of such misinformation are like those of the Pharisees.

Be on your guard against the teachers of the law who like to walk around with their long robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace; who chose the reserve seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts; who take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes and make a show of saying long prayers! (Luke 20:45-47).

Section VII. Summary and Conclusion

We live in an era of social unrest, mass migration, radical populism, and a corresponding loss of trust in institutions (including traditional religious and educational institutions) that provides fertile ground for “false gods and prophets” peddling often destructive “new dogma.” While specific elements in this cycle of corruption, crises, chaos, and eventual reform are not new, the scope and speed with which are occurring is. Societies that are being undermined by rapidly spreading disinformation and propaganda simply do not have the luxury of building new assessment tools from scratch. The biblical stories (particularly those involving the Pharisees) and the resulting CST are useful assessment tools that also provide Catholic colleges and universities with a competitive advantage in a challenging educational marketplace.

The current environment poses significant challenges for all higher education institutions. Like their secular counterparts, Catholic colleges and universities face rising tuition, a shrinking pool of college-ready students, declining feeder institutions, and consequently a perceived lack of

relevance. It is therefore imperative that Catholic higher education institutions focus on their core strengths and distinctive contributions such as CST.

For centuries Catholic higher educational institutions have played a critical role in advancing secular knowledge while providing sectarian solutions to social and economic challenges. The dual mandate of combining the university (academic) and collegiate (spiritual) learning has been enormously beneficial well beyond the Catholic world. Catholic colleges and universities that “lean into” this dual mandate will honor their *raison d’être* and potentially gain a significant competitive advantage *vis-à-vis* secular institutions.

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Book Review:

Andrew Gustafson and Celeste Harvey, *Finding Faith in Business: An Economy of Communion Vision* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2024)

Once again, an American election turned on what James Carville said decades ago, “it’s the economy, stupid.” Polls of the 2024 election indicated that roughly 40% of voters said the economy was their top issue, outpacing any other one. For most Americans “the economy” comes down to simple calculations about the price of gasoline, groceries, childcare, and mortgage payments. When products are available and prices are reasonable, the economy is good; when they are not, the economy is bad and can sink an administration.

But what makes an economy sustainably good and trustworthy for people and the planet for the long term? This is the ultimate question tackled by editors Andrew Gustafson and Celeste Harvey in their new book, *Finding Faith in Business*. The volume is a collection of essays by professors of business, theology, ethics, and management. The essays reveal and explain the goal of an “economy of communion” to “use business to bring about improvement in people’s lives and a transformation of society for the better.” (p.20) This transformation happens in the economy of communion by a massive shift in culture:

In the EoC, entrepreneurs are inspired by principles rooted in a culture different than what prevails in conventional practice and theory of economics. We can define this “culture” as a “culture of giving,” which is the antithesis of a “culture of having.” (p. 21)

The challenge of an economy of communion mindset is to re-think the distribution of goods through a logic defined by three words: generativity, reciprocity, and gratuity. The axis of economics hinges, we are told, on more than maximizing profit and self-interests. Business is to be seen as “communal practice where everyone is committed to the good of the whole, and each is willing to sacrifice and give to the other.” (p. 21) The volume is a prophetic exposé of how to develop such a humanized and self-transcendent vision of economics. The roster of scholars who engage the questions and challenges is impressive. The book is a product of a symposium held in 2018 at Creighton University’s Common Good Institute at the Heider College of Business.

Perhaps no one synthesizes the deepest challenges facing the EoC model of business better than David Cloutier in his article, “Simplicity of Lifestyle as the Goal of Business: Practicing the Economy of Communion as a Challenge to Consumer Society.” Cloutier, a professor at the Catholic of University of America, pulls no punches with his analysis of economics’ pessimistic view of human nature. He ties it to an unreasonable and unsustainable modern myth of life’s ultimate goal as one of luxury. He argues for another goal that is more transparent and transcendent, as well as more achievable and sustainable: a lifestyle of simplicity.

In a world that has become as polarized, privatized, alienated, and lonely as our hyperactive business models require, it is inspiring and illuminating to get a comprehensive look at an

alternative economic model that views business positively and one where relationships are privileged over transactions. This volume is an excellent introduction to an economic model that “shares, includes the poor, and uses profits to create communion.” (p. 39)

David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap., PhD., DMin.
Associate Professor of Theology and Franciscan Studies
St. Bonaventure University