

Introduction

With this issue of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, we bring you several new articles that originate from the fall 2014 conference, “The Idea of a Catholic College,” organized and hosted by King’s College. The previous issue of this journal featured the first round of these scholarly works, and the first six articles published here offer new and varied perspectives on Catholic identity, curricular innovations, and student perception of mission at Catholic institutions. The final three articles published here explore the assessment of oral communication, bystander intervention strategies, and the legacy of the University of Central America in El Salvador.

In “Depth in an Age of Digital Distraction,” Conor Kelly argues that Catholic colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to address millennials’ preoccupation with all things digital, so long as these institutions remain committed and are willing to deepen and strengthen a liberal arts education that fosters both the intellectual and spiritual life. The author proposes that the values of solitude, sacramentality, and communion—hallmarks of Catholic institutions—can serve as an antidote to a lack of self-evaluation and depth of thought that is seemingly so prevalent among young people today. A major shortfall of digital connectivity is the loss of the brain’s ability to think in deep and sustained reflection. Ironically, the more connected people are, the more isolated they become. By encouraging and forming students in the possibilities of true solitude, Catholic institutions help students pinpoint the inadequacies of an uninterrupted life of connectivity. Kelly proposes that instilling a strong sacramental imagination helps students resist the temptation to interact with the world primarily through digital media. The sacramental imagination and the experience of communion made possible on Catholic campuses establish an environment in which students can experience a deeper engagement with the world and greater attention to the true, the good, and the beautiful. The strengths imbedded in the Catholic ethos are tools for helping students become more attuned to a proper use of digital technology, and thus better able to serve contemporary culture.

Pope Francis continues to excite and intrigue people worldwide with his style of leadership and engagement. Joseph Curran’s examination of Pope Francis’s commitment to dialogue finds valuable lessons for

Catholic institutions of higher education. In “Teaching and Leading Through Dialogue,” the author contends that the Holy Father’s willingness to foster and lead dialogues that include opposing viewpoints on the most controversial issues serves as a model for Catholic colleges and universities. Three themes in particular stand out in the author’s view: governance, teaching, and conflict resolution. Francis governs with a deep sense of collegiality and communion. The lesson for the Catholic college or university is to remember its rootedness in intellectual inquiry and devotion to the pursuit of truth. Second, Curran finds that Francis’s style of teaching is best emulated in the college or university setting when the learning environment “is a place for advancing knowledge through shared intellectual inquiry,” transforming the classroom into a space for a dialectical learning process. Third, the pope’s style points to a path away from polarization, using a mode of dialogue that does not begin with the presumption that one party has the final solutions to the most difficult conflicts. Catholic institutions are well-suited for this task of asking dangerous questions, listening to those who disagree in order to move through a cooperative process toward the truth.

Mara Brecht addresses one of the dilemmas faced by any teacher of theology in our Catholic institutions, namely, how to faithfully present and effectively engage students while avoiding the extremes of “Catholic tight” or “Catholic lite.” In “God Talk Across and Between the Boundaries of Traditions,” the author prefers what she calls a “public theological approach” that can transform students’ normal ways of thinking. Instead of teaching as one with a repository of knowledge, teachers of public theology not only understand the tradition, but also are able to communicate across cultural and generational boundaries in ways that “privilege students and student learning.” To be transformative, the teaching of theology must be linked to the situation and condition of millennials. For theology, this means a new approach and a shift from the traditional paradigm to one that makes room for alternative perspectives and new participants in the crafting of “God talk.”

Recent issues of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* have examined professional education at Catholic colleges and universities, particularly business and nursing programs. Patricia Maurice and Brian Peterson broaden the discussion on professional education with their article, “How to Be an Ethical Engineer in an Often Unethical World.” The authors propose that Catholic institutions ought to mine the wealth of resources of a liberal arts education to better align the humanities with the technical disciplines. Included in this alignment are emphases on the common good as well as social justice. In addition,

the revised curriculum they propose would bring faculty from the humanities into closer collaboration and dialogue with those in the sciences and technical disciplines. This collaboration achieves greater understanding across disciplines, exposing the humanists to scientific ways of knowing, and providing scientists with a deeper appreciation for the methods of disciplines such as philosophy and theology. The culmination of this collaborative activity is a fully integrated interdisciplinary course that, among other things, provides technical literacy for students in the liberal arts, and promotes critical thinking and ethical reflection among science and engineering students.

The next two articles discuss the degree to which students understand and appropriate the institutional mission and tradition of their respective colleges and universities. Jason King and Andrew Herr studied more than 1,000 students from a wide array of Catholic institutions to ascertain how institutional culture and other factors affected student perceptions of Catholic identity. "Does Catholic Identity Affect Students?" discusses those institutional characteristics that do or do not seem to affect student perceptions of Catholic identity. It may not surprise the reader to learn that institutional characteristics have less of an effect than formal policies, especially those related to life in the residence halls. Other activities such as daily Mass have an impact on student perceptions, but alcohol policies or having a religious as president do not significantly affect student perceptions of "Catholicity." Likewise, service programs or service learning did not influence student perceptions of mission and identity. The article concludes with a cautionary note regarding the limits of the study, and advises that quantitative measures are helpful and useful, but represent only one indicator of Catholic mission and identity.

The second study explores differences in student perceptions of mission at Catholic and independent colleges and universities. Ellen Boylan compared student data from the Mission Perception Inventory compiled by the National Survey of Student Engagement, using the results from fifty-nine Catholic institutions and twenty-four independent colleges. "Where Catholic Identity Is Visible" discusses several factors, such as "the religious heritage of the institution, active discussion of ethics in the classroom, respect for diversity, and opportunities for students to strengthen religious commitment," that contribute to a stronger sense of mission and identity in Catholic institutions than in their secular counterparts. Length of time spent at the institution is also crucial, in that seniors express a stronger sense of mission identity than first-year students. Finally, Boylan mentions several areas

needing greater attention if Catholic institutions desire to strengthen student appropriation of mission and identity.

As noted above, the last three articles, not originating from the King's College conference, round out the diversity of scholarly work we are privileged to offer with this issue of the *Journal*.

Assessment of learning outcomes remains at the forefront of concerns among administrators, faculty, accrediting agencies, and the public at large. Liberal arts institutions pride themselves in graduating students with proficiency in skills such as oral communication. "Stewards of the Word" reviews one successful approach that could be instructive for colleges and universities that seek ways to improve students' oral communication skills. Joan Crist and Kirk Robinson developed a consistent and effective assessment process for oral communication located in selected core religious studies and philosophy courses at Calumet College of Saint Joseph. Using a specially designed Signature Assignment Rubric in theology and philosophy courses, the authors addressed a college-wide concern regarding the improvement of students' oral communication skills. The process is adapted from the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, and places greater emphasis on an oral final exam in selected courses as the major means of assessing student achievement. Throughout the course of the semester, students are engaged in a variety of oral communication activities, as a preparation for the final exam. The results indicate a promising model for other Catholic institutions to consider.

Many experts and authors contend that sexual assault on college and university campuses has reached epidemic proportions. This is no less the case on Catholic campuses. Thus institutions across the country are investing significant resources and personnel to address this widespread problem. Siena College developed an evidence-based best practice approach to sexual violence using bystander intervention education and principles of Catholic Social Teaching in creative and constructive models of pedagogy. In "Educating for Justice," Joy Galarneau and Shannon O'Neill describe a case study that incorporates bystander intervention education in multiple settings across the campus. A key component is the series of workshops that teaches students three levels of bystander intervention strategies to employ, depending on their abilities and willingness to engage. As well, the programs tap the richness of the Franciscan tradition and Catholic Social Teaching as powerful resources for addressing sexual violence. While the program is still young, the authors report positive signs, such as an increase in bystander intervention and a decrease in incidents of sexual violence.

The final article, “The University as Agent of Social Transformation,” takes us beyond the boundaries of the United States to El Salvador and the University of Central America, founded in 1965 by the Jesuits. While most of our articles stem from Catholic institutions in this country, we cannot forget the enormous contributions that Catholic universities are making in the transformations of societies around the world. Orfilio Valiente describes the evolutionary development of the University of Central America from a haven for students of wealthy families to an institution focused on addressing the inequalities and injustices faced by the vast majority of El Salvador’s citizens. In the process, UCA became an agent of transformation and social change. In the midst of unimaginable violence, UCA was a voice of reason, and along with Archbishop Oscar Romero, struggled to foster real dialogue and strengthen civil society. The martyrdom of the Jesuits there in 1989 stands as a symbol of the “commitment and solidarity of the UCA to the Salvadoran poor.” Since the peace accord signing in 1992, the UCA continues to serve as a national conscience while finding ways to collaborate with the government and private sector to achieve full human development for all people of El Salvador, particularly the poor.

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