

2014

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SPRING 2014

# Intersections



IN THIS ISSUE

## The State of College

**Intersections** is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-six colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. It is published by the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA, and has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

## About the Cover and Artist

Mary Griep

*St. Dimitrios Orthodox Church, Thessloniki Greece*

(detail: "In the well"), 2010-2011

16' x 10', Mixed media

The cover art is a detail of a larger work, itself part of a series of large-scale drawings of sacred spaces of the medieval era, called *The Anastylosis Project*. This term from art history describes "a method of restoring a monument distinguished by often dismantling and, in theory, rebuilding the structure using the original methods and materials."

As an artist and educator, I see my work as an exploration of the contemplative, in contrast to contemporary ideas about speed and instant access. Taking contemplative practice as my inspiration, I value long, careful, and quiet consideration of subject matter, and the deep learning that comes from engagement with the spiritual. Through my artwork, teaching, and sustained travel with students (pilgrimage), I have tried to open eyes and hearts to a numinous world where art communicates beyond words and the sacred interacts with the intellectual and the physical.

The ongoing *Anastylosis Project* had its genesis in travel with students, following medieval pilgrimage routes in

France and Italy, in the form of 100 detail drawings of Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals. The intimacy of the details quite literally drew me into a conversation with the buildings, and I became intrigued by the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual experience of sacred spaces. Over the past sixteen years the intimate small drawings have given way to large-scale meditations on the experience of eleventh and twelfth century religious buildings. The majority of the worship spaces I have drawn are Christian, but I have found that all have the power to pull a visitor around and through the spaces, continuing a centuries-old conversation about the nature of human experience and the constant ambition to express and experience the sacred.

To date the *Anastylosis Project* includes: Chartres Cathedral, Angkor Wat, Thatbyinnyu Temple (Buddhist, Myanmar), the Palace of the Governors and the Castillo (Mayan, Mexico), the Ulu Camii (Divrigi, Turkey), Borgund Stav Church (Norway), St. Dimitrios (Greece), the Fransiskanerkirche (Salzburg, Austria), and San Marco Cathedral (Venice, in progress.)

Images of the entire project can be seen at [marygriep.com](http://marygriep.com).

# Contents

- 4 From the Publisher  
**Mark Wilhelm**
- 5 From the Editor  
**Jason Mahn**
- 6 The Religious Genealogy of College: Interrogating the Ambivalence of Delbanco's *College*  
**George Connell**
- 10 A College Degree or a College Experience? Reflecting on Selingo's *College (Un)Bound*  
**Laurie Brill**
- 15 Types, Methods, and Sagas in Lutheran Higher Education: Learning from Childers  
**Lake Lambert**
- 20 Post-Secular Religion on Campus: Conversing with Jacobsen and Jacobsen  
**L. DeAne Lagerquist**
- 25 The Prophetic Vocation and the Nature(s) of College: Reimagining College with Jim Farrell  
**Peder Jothen**
- 30 The Courage to Change: Creating New Hearts with Palmer and Zajonc  
**Martha E. Stortz**
- 37 Learning Across Campus: Hearing Bok's Call to Conversation  
**David Ratke**
- 42 The Information Deluge: Navigating the Digital Age with Recent Scholars  
**Virginia Connell**

## Intersections

Number 39 Spring 2014

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# From the Publisher

As you read this issue of *Intersections* and explore the reviews of influential books about national trends in higher education, I invite you also to consider the implications of the widely used phrase, “the model is broken,” to describe the current reality of higher education. The phrase has its merits and utility. It gets the attention of trustees, administrators, and faculty and causes them to face up to the problems of our enterprise. And the phrase is difficult to ignore when the powerful and influential Association of Governing Boards touts it loudly, but “the model is broken” has its problems.

First, it tends to generate an atmosphere that blames the victim. Hence the rush to blame colleges and universities and their supposedly profligate ways for “breaking” contemporary higher education. Even worse, it generates recommendations for whole-sale change in higher education. ELCA colleges and universities are not infrequently challenged to abandon our long tradition of educating the whole person so that we can shift to the delivery of technical knowledge in preparation for specific jobs. Such a change would mean losing our integrity as we joined with forces that no longer consider higher education a public good but a private benefit and a commodity.

The mantra of “the model is broken” also distracts our attention from the actual difficulties ELCA higher education faces. First, the phrase tends to hide the truth that the gradual decline since the early 1980s in federal and state governmental support for higher education is a significant factor in the financial complications we face. The declining trajectory of public financial support for

higher education reflects the growing acceptance of the perspective that higher education is a private benefit, to be purchased by individuals, and not a public good worthy of public investment. Second, “the model is broken” assertion masks that demographic changes are primary drivers of the enrollment, and therefore revenue, challenges troubling our schools. Nothing in our model created these demographic changes or the decline in financial support from government, but the wide use of the phrase implies otherwise.

To say it differently, the constant refrain of “the model is broken” mitigates against the development of wise responses to the challenges facing ELCA higher education. Yes, a wise response will inevitably require changes in what we do. But in the spirit of “there is nothing so practical as a good theory,” ELCA higher education will find its best response to demands for demonstrating the practical relevance of our education by modifying our existing model (our “theory”), not by discarding what we do in favor of an entirely new model.

Our style, form, or model of educating the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—in the liberal arts attuned to pre-professional education has educated leaders for church and society since the cathedral schools of medieval Europe grew into the first iteration of universities in Spain and France a millennium ago. Nothing is broken. To assert otherwise is fear-mongering masquerading as analysis. The “model” has successfully adjusted through the centuries to new situations, and we will do so again in early twenty-first century America.

**Mark Wilhelm** is Program Director for Schools, Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, ELCA.

# From the Editor

Last July, I was included in a working group of administrators, chairs, chaplains, and faculty members from our 26 ELCA colleges and universities called, “People of Wondrous Ability: Introducing Faculty and Staff to Lutheran Higher Education.” Under the direction of Samuel Torvend of Pacific Lutheran University, we shared creative ways of introducing colleagues to what Marty Stortz calls the distinctive charisms of our tradition. Here are some ideas tried out on our campuses:

- Host off-campus faculty retreats where participants discuss the theological roots of Lutheran higher education, the specific history of the school, and the vocation of a teacher-scholar. Some schools have traveled as far as Italy and Germany.
- Invite alumni working in diverse fields to reflect on the intersection of faith, work, family, and service in their daily lives at a faculty seminar.
- Survey faculty, administration, and staff about their religious affiliations (or not) as well as their impressions and understandings of the church-relatedness of the college.
- Identify experienced faculty “allies” who can lead conversations and share personal stories about their calling to and within a Lutheran college.
- Offer faculty seminars about Lutheran institutional identity, with readings spanning from history and theology to contemporary analyses of higher education.
- Publish a “Lutheran Reader,” with essays about the college’s church-relatedness written by administrators and faculty from ecumenical, interfaith, and no-faith perspectives.

I returned to Augustana excited about so many of these ideas that I essentially rolled the last three into

one. With funding from the President’s office and the Center for Vocational Reflection, we initiated “Augustana as Lutheran Education” (ALE). Throughout the year the group of ten discussed Andrew Delbanco’s *College*, Ernie Simmons’s *Lutheran Higher Education*, and a handful of essays over good food and German beer. We plan to repeat ALE for the next few years before publically presenting written reflections in conjunction with the 500 year commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. The initiative brings together “allies” of Lutheran education (many of whom may tend to “cheerlead” for it, in Torvend’s terms) beside those who too easily ignore or discard it, asking each—and the many in between—to think critically about the nature of Lutheran education.

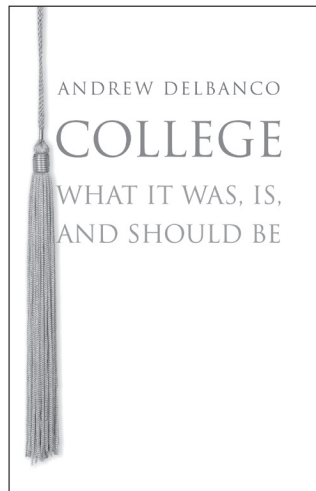
The present issue of *Intersections* tries to do the same. It is comprised of reflective reviews of eight well-known books on higher education, written from the perspectives of faculty teaching at our Lutheran colleges and universities. Like ALE, these essays move from national trends—many alarmist and foreboding—to homegrown conversations, negotiations, and initiatives. Readers will learn about the religious roots of liberal arts education together with what Lutheran liberal arts might mean; about integrative and transformational education together with initiatives that ask faculty to practice what we teach; about the opportunity to make college into a prophetic counterculture beside the ongoing proclivities to conform to careerism and the marketplace.

The authors here report on the state of the college without either cheerleading or disparaging. Certainly, the state of Lutheran higher education is strong. But you will find here more weighted reflections about a raging national debate about college from an institutional tradition called “Lutheran.” May it inspire you to discuss books such as these with others rooted in that tradition.

**Jason Mahn** is Associate Professor of Religion, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

# The Religious Genealogy of College: Interrogating the Ambivalence of Delbanco's College

Andrew Delbanco opens his *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* with a bold statement of five “qualities of heart and mind” that all colleges should instill in their students. At the top of Delbanco’s list stands “a skeptical discontent with the present, informed by a sense of the past”. That phrase holds as an apt epigram for Delbanco’s work as a whole, which devotes almost half its length to telling the story of the development and then partial eclipse of college as a distinctly American educational institution. On the basis of the ideals articulated in an opening philosophical chapter (“What is College For?”) and two historical chapters (“Origins,” which traces the American college from the founding of Harvard in 1636 to the Civil War, and “From College to University,” chronicling the rising dominance of research universities following the Morrill Act of 1862), Delbanco subjects contemporary higher education to considerable “skeptical discontent.” While his critiques are sharp, they are those of a committed insider. In the name of what he calls “the college idea” (what college was and should be), Delbanco calls the higher learning (what college now is) to account, challenging readers to recover a sense of what is “precious” (171) about this distinctive if vulnerable educational arrangement.



## Delbanco, Nussbaum, and Concordia's Vision Statement for Humanities

As a statement and defense of liberal education, Delbanco’s book retraces familiar apologetic pathways. During Spring Semester of 2012, I led a discussion and drafting process leading to a Vision Statement for the Humanities Division at Concordia.<sup>1</sup> As we prepared our statement, I saw advance publicity for Delbanco’s book and preordered it, hoping to find fresh ways to articulate our shared sense of the enduring importance of liberal arts in general and the humanities in particular. The book arrived late in our drafting process, and I felt a mix of confirmation and disappointment when I saw that Delbanco organizes his opening chapter in terms of the familiar tripartite apologia that we had adopted to frame our statement. Our statement speaks of preparing students for *Lives of Vocation*, for *Lives as Responsible Citizens*, and for *Lives as Whole Persons*. Delbanco speaks directly of the first two lines of argument, labeling them respectively Economic (which he frames in much narrower terms than our notion of preparing students for lives of vocation) and Democratic (which closely parallels our notion of responsible citizenship). But he is much more

**George Connell** is Professor of Philosophy and Division Chair of Humanities at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. He is in the final stages of completing a book on Kierkegaard and Religious Diversity to be published by Eerdmans.

oblique in speaking of the third line of argument, saying that it is “harder to articulate without sounding platitudinous and vague” (31). He variously describes this third rationale as learning “how to enjoy life,” achieving “the fulfilled life,” and, quoting Judith Shapiro, making “the inside of your head to be an interesting place to spend the rest of your life” (32-33). In our Vision Statement, we frame this as preparing students to flourish as whole persons, which we explicate in terms of freedom, wisdom, self-awareness, humility, moral conscience, curiosity, aesthetic delight, quality of attention, connection, and reverence. Readers of Delbanco’s *College* will find celebrations of each of those traits in his picture of the liberally educated person.

Martha Nussbaum identifies the same three lines of argument in her *Not for Profit*, but as indicated by her subtitle, *Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, she heavily emphasizes the significance of liberal arts to civic education. In essence, Nussbaum argues for the usefulness of liberal education by pressing us to expand our understanding of utility beyond the narrow categories of profit and loss to include establishment and maintenance of a democratic social order. Delbanco, more than Nussbaum, defies the spirit of the times by refusing to focus on social and economic benefit, making his case rather by articulating how “learning in the broad and deep meaning of that word” (24) enriches individual lives. Like Cardinal Newman, Delbanco ultimately justifies liberal education in terms of the type of person it gestates.

Nussbaum is well-aware of the power of such a line of argument, but sets it aside for a telling reason:

Education is not just for citizenship. It prepares people for employment and, importantly, for meaningful lives. Another entire book could be written about the role of the arts and humanities in advancing those goals. All modern democracies, however, are societies in which meaning and ultimate goals of human life are topics of reasonable disagreement among citizens who hold many different religious and secular views, and these citizens will naturally differ about how far various types of humanistic education serve their own particular goals. (Nussbaum 9)

I quote Nussbaum to highlight what strikes me as most distinctive about Delbanco’s *College*. Where Nussbaum

shies away from the third type of argument for the value of liberal education so as to avoid potentially divisive religious issues and commitments, Delbanco robustly engages the religious genealogy of “the college idea.” Though he not only endorses but also assumes the modern college as a secular institution (“all colleges, whatever their past or present religious orientation, now exist in a context

“Delbanco says it is ‘a pity and a waste’ that so many academics have such an ‘uneasy relation’ with the religious origins of college.”

of secular pluralism that properly puts inculcation at odds with education” [16]), Delbanco says it is “a pity and a waste” that so many academics have such an “uneasy relation” (65) with the religious origins of college as an educational institution and ideal that they evade and ignore that background. In these passages, we see Delbanco’s striking ambivalence about the religious dimensions of the college idea. As he sees it, religion is both the defining source of the college idea and now an anachronistic irrelevancy to the operation of contemporary colleges.

## The Religious DNA of the American College

At the close of his chapter on the first 230 years of American college education, from the founding of Harvard in 1636 to the Civil War, Delbanco summarizes his message concerning the centrality of religion in that venture:

To anyone glancingly acquainted with the history of American education, it is hardly news that our colleges have their origins in religion, or that they derive their aims, structure, and pedagogical methods mainly from Protestantism, and, more particularly, from the stringent form of Protestantism whose partisans are called...Puritans. (64)

In the following chapter, tracing the rise of the research university as the paradigm of American higher education, Delbanco describes the gradual retreat of religion from



centrality to the point that only “vestiges” such as neo-Gothic architecture and campus chapels remain, especially at the elite institutions that define American academic culture.

But, as Delbanco reads it, genetic material from the religious origins of American college remain within the modern university’s genome, shaping its “aims, structure, and pedagogical methods” in ways that few appreciate. The very idea of college as a place of “lateral learning,” is based on the Puritan concept of church as “a voluntary gathering of seekers who come together for mutual support” (53). The goal of comprehensive, unified knowledge enshrined in the term “university” derives from the conception of all reality as the creation of the one God. Delbanco directly connects lecture as a pedagogical format to the Protestant sermon as well as saying that dialogic pedagogies have their origins in Puritanism’s “proto-democratic conception of truth emerging through discussion and debate among human beings who are inherently equal” (60). Perhaps most strikingly, Delbanco expresses the need to reach back to what he regards as anachronistic terminology to speak of the magical, mysterious moments that make college precious. He writes, “Every true teacher...understands that, along with teacher and students, a mysterious third force is present in every classroom...Sometimes the spoken word is nothing but noise that evaporates into air...Sometimes it can have surprising and powerful effects—yet it is impossible to say why or when this will happen for some students and not for others” (48). The only term Delbanco finds that is adequate to this mystery is grace.

“The religious founders of America’s colleges were addressing deep human realities, realities we are losing touch with as college becomes ‘the anxious pursuit of marketable skills in overcrowded, underresourced institutions.’”

Delbanco acknowledges that his own case for college in terms of character-formation, as gestating an intrinsically valuable way of being in the world, is a secular version of an originally religious project: “College, more than brain-training for this or that functional task, *should*

be concerned with character—the attenuated modern word for what founders of our first colleges would have called soul or heart” (43). This sentence takes us to the heart of Delbanco’s ambivalent relation to the religious roots of American colleges. As a secularist, he celebrates the movement from theologically particular conceptions of the college mission to more general, “thinner” notions. That attenuation makes room for much more diversity among students and faculty, releases the institution from doctrinizing agendas, and allows college to be “true to itself” as a place where students ask and answer fundamental questions for themselves. But Delbanco doesn’t want to simply cut loose the religious past. In speaking of “the continuing pertinence of [college’s] religious origins” (171), he affirms that the religious founders of America’s colleges were addressing deep human realities, realities we are losing touch with as college becomes “the anxious pursuit of marketable skills in overcrowded, underresourced institutions” (7). Delbanco appeals to the religious origins of America’s colleges as a “usable past” whose ideals can be translated into a secular idiom. He speaks of common “educational aspirations...[w]hether expressed in Hebrew, Greek, Roman, or Christian, or the secular terms of modernity” (45).

## Questions from and for Delbanco

While it was not his goal in writing *College*, Delbanco effectively poses fundamental questions for those of us who live out our professional lives within institutions that still affirm denominational affiliation. First, to what extent does Delbanco name our reality? To what extent is he correct when he says that “all colleges, whatever their past or present religious orientation, now exist in a context of secular pluralism that properly puts inculcation at odds with education” (16)? His assumption here and throughout the book is that a college can only sustain the centrality of its religious identity by taking on a catechizing agenda, an agenda that subverts diversity and the autonomy of students and faculty and that claims “spiritual authority” on behalf of the institution (15). Is that assumption warranted or are there non-authoritarian, non-catechizing ways to be a college of the church?

Second, he implicitly asks us whether the things we care deeply about in our Lutheran colleges can be translated effectively into thinner, “attenuated” vocabularies that potentially win wider affirmations. Concordia, for example, has translated the resolutely Lutheran theme of vocation into the idiom of “becoming responsibly engaged in the world,” otherwise known as BREW. Many students and faculty who couldn’t make an affirmation of confessional Lutheranism are enthusiastic supporters of BREW as Concordia’s signature theme.

Delbanco’s questions to those of us who continue to affirm our colleges’ religious identities solicit us to question him in return. To what extent can the concepts and values that grew out of religious conviction and commitment remain effective when cut off from that rootstock? Nietzsche challenged the right of secular liberals to affirm what amounted to Christian ethical commitments apart from Christian religious beliefs. Can “the college idea” that Delbanco celebrates survive apart from the context in which it developed? As I have shown, Delbanco is himself deeply anxious about the condition of “the college idea” in contemporary circumstances. This relates, in part, to the regnant utilitarianism of our day that increasingly demands that education justify itself in terms of cost-benefit analysis. To what extent is the transcendent horizon of a religious worldview an essential context for Delbanco’s “college idea” in which education is more than job preparation? Further, Delbanco bemoans the way higher education has come to legitimate gross inequalities in American life. The meritocratic ideology of the admissions process at elite colleges effectively states that elites deserve their elite status. Delbanco ties this development to the eclipse of religious identity when he writes, “our oldest colleges have abandoned the cardinal principle of the religion out of which they arose: the principle that no human being deserves anything based on his or her merit” (138)—a rather nicely Lutheran point, that.

## Christian Colleges after Christendom

At the end of *College*, Delbanco abruptly turns toward Nussbaum’s stratagem of looking to democracy rather than religion as the source of inspiration for liberal education: “If an old, and in many respects outmoded, religion seems an improbable touchstone for thinking about education today, perhaps a more plausible one is democracy” (172). But that parting denigration doesn’t erase Delbanco’s spending goodly portion of his book calling higher education back to “the college idea” by invoking the religious origins of that idea.

What if, instead of appealing to religiously-identified higher education as a “usable past,” we look to it instead as a “usable present?” *In The Soul of the American University*, George Marsden surveys in much more detail the same arc leading from “Protestant Establishment” to “Established Disbelief.” And yet, unlike Delbanco, Marsden makes a plea for the continuing existence of colleges that dare to depart from homogenized national norms to offer distinctive, religiously-informed higher education. Even if such institutions are in a definite minority, and even if they aren’t numbered among the elite institutions on which Delbanco focuses, they may and I believe they do serve a disproportionate role in keeping Delbanco’s “college idea” vibrant. The challenge, of course, is figuring out how to be a Christian college after Christendom, that is, in conditions of pluralism, skepticism about authority, declining denominational affiliation, and pervasive anxiety about finding one’s place in a “winner-take-all” economy.

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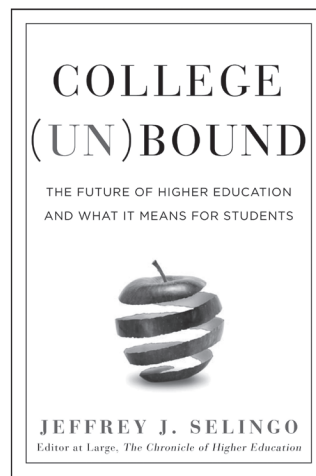
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LAURIE BRILL

# A College Degree or a College Experience? Reflecting on Selingo's *College (Un)Bound*

Jeff Selingo, author of *College (Un)Bound*, suggests that the \$490 billion higher education industry—which employs 3.5 million people and holds \$990 billion in assets—is collapsing under an unsustainable financial model. After the recession of 2008, with continued increases in college costs and the student loan debt surpassing the one trillion dollar mark, families are beginning to question the value of higher education. Most agree that the tuition increase trajectory impacts families' ability and willingness to pay. Selingo implies that the traditional business model within higher education needs to become a more efficient system. The challenges, in part, arise from a new student-centered world. For example, technology provides an array of choices for students, but that might just entail a disruptive force within higher education.

Rather than continue to conduct the "business as usual" approach (including a sixteen week semester), Selingo asserts that higher education is in need of a paradigm shift to meet the needs of this new student-centered world. While degrees have historically been awarded based upon the number of credit hours, Selingo recommends that competency-based options must be explored. Higher education will be forced to respond to the demands of the marketplace because today's students "regard their professors as service providers, just like a cashier at the supermarket or a waiter in a restaurant" (Selingo 20).



Selingo writes: "Prestige in higher education is like profit is to corporations. The focus should be on students and learning rather than reputation and rankings" (12). He is right—we should be focusing on students and learning. While he reflects often in his book on the most selective top one hundred colleges and universities and remarks about the lavish facilities—including Lazy Rivers, "essentially a theme park water ride where students float on rafts" (28)—being constructed on campuses and expresses his frustration with the competitive behavior of college presidents regarding rankings interest, Selingo does not differentiate by sector. Thus, he presents only a broad brush-stroke of what he observed while working at The Chronicle of Higher Education.

While many of Selingo's observations, conclusions, and recommendations are controversial, he offers an opportunity to more critically examine the current state of affairs in higher education and to more effectively resist compromising the college experience. The media narrative continues to circle around the topics of unemployment, student loan debt, accountability, graduation rates, and college affordability. Federal officials are in the midst of developing a ratings system that they believe will provide outcome data that will enable families to more effectively evaluate and compare the "return on

**Laurie Brill** is Director of Marketing, Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) and has served as a college counselor at a public high school and in admissions at Lenoir-Rhyne University.

investment” of a college degree. Performance-based funding is also on the federal agenda. These issues have sparked conversation among parents—students’ primary influencers—and are clearly influencing behaviors. We in Lutheran higher education must respond to these issues of concern with a tactical approach in order to influence today’s conversation.

## College Counseling and Selection

A “college degree” is one outcome of the overall college experience. The question to ponder is this: What is the difference between a college degree and a college experience? If a college degree is perceived to be primarily proof of information delivery by the marketplace, then higher education professionals committed to the importance of the overall college experience must re-frame and re-shape the conversation among college-bound families. Unfortunately, the driving force influencing the initial college choice is cost, which often results in the selection of a college that is not the right fit for the student. If more students had access to informed college counseling, more would find a good fit and degree completion rates would improve. Financial literacy is also an issue when dealing with the prospect of financing a college education. If a streamlined course on financial literacy (including details on money management, retirement, financial aid, student loan options, responsible debt management, etc.) were delivered to students and parents, they would be better equipped to make informed decisions and choices regarding financing college.

The college search and selection process is difficult for many families to navigate, despite expansive use of technology. Many become paralyzed by the wide array of options and an inability to obtain informed and reflective college counseling at the high school level. Nationwide, the caseload of public high school counselors serving public high schools is at an all-time high. It is nearly impossible to work with six hundred students in an engaged and meaningful way; this deficiency within our educational system is profound. At the same time, the independent consulting profession is growing exponentially—those families who are able to pay seek college selection guidance from consulting professionals. Those who cannot afford private counselors typically talk with alumni, peers,

and teachers, searching for an “easier” way to narrow down the list of choices. The same students often place too much emphasis on rating systems like *US News & World Report*. Furthermore, families who do not understand the financial aid process often rule out private higher education due to the lack of transparency of the process.

“When students discuss what they are passionate about and what matters to them, they do so differently than when discussing the majors that their parents deem to be a good fit.”

All too frequently, we ask intimidating questions of prospective students: “What are your academic interests?” and “What major are you considering?” Most high school students cringe at the prospect of being asked about a major of choice. Students can speak quite fluently about the classes they enjoy—that is a better starting point. An even more provocative question may be, “What difference would you like to make in this world?” A college experience offers an opportunity to explore and discover, develop relationships with students and faculty members, engage in leadership opportunities, participate in activities, travel abroad, and formulate career objectives. A Lutheran college experience does all this; it also enables students to integrate faith and learning. When students discuss what they are passionate about and what matters to them, they do so differently than when discussing the majors that their parents deem to be a good fit (typically with strong income potential). Many desire permission to engage in conversation “on the porch” before stepping through the front door to select a major. If the college experience is about more than information delivery, we must shift the focus of the conversation from the beginning.

## The Meaningful Impact of a Lutheran College Experience

In the quest to respond to the marketplace, we sometimes lose sight of our focus on sharing information about outcomes and developing relationships of trust with

students and parents. It is necessary to pay attention to and respond to “the market,” but we must remain grounded in our mission and committed to relationship-building.

The Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA), which consists of 41 member Lutheran colleges and universities, engaged in a collaborative research effort to more closely examine what Lutheran college and university alumni (Lutheran and non-Lutheran) perceived about their college experiences. Graduates of flagship public universities were also surveyed, resulting in a rich comparative alumni study. This research, completed in collaboration with Hardwick-Day, continues to be a valuable resource for LECNA member colleges and universities. The initial survey in 1999 (updated in 2004 and 2011), quantifies the compelling values of the undergraduate *experience*—including mentoring, leadership, internships, study-abroad, participation in athletics, and the integration of faith and learning.<sup>1</sup>

“Alumni reflect not only upon the degree earned but, more importantly, on the emotional, spiritual, and vocational aspects of their college careers.”

The research findings indicate that Lutheran colleges and universities offer opportunities for transformational, intentional development of both the mind and the soul. Students attending Lutheran colleges and universities appreciate that aspect of the experience at different times in their lives. Very few can firmly grasp this transformation during their college experience. And yet, years after entering graduate school and/or the workforce, alumni reflect not only upon the degree earned but, more importantly, on the emotional, spiritual, and vocational aspects of their college careers. Alumni of Lutheran colleges and universities are not equipped to clearly articulate the value of the Lutheran college experience by anything other than their own personal experiences. Their word-of-mouth engagement with prospective families is valuable beyond measure.

Social, economic, technological, and demographic forces are beginning to reshape higher education. Perhaps

Selingo is on to something—we may be in the midst of a paradigm shift, a shift that will threaten the existence of some models of higher education. The traditional colleges that survive will be those that “prove their worth” (Selingo 71). Lutheran colleges and universities can and do prove their worth. Just as Martin Luther gained a reputation for questioning, it may be time for us to engage in the same to more clearly articulate the value of a Lutheran college experience. We are called to question everything and advance knowledge for the collective good. Rather than be critical of Selingo’s predictions, we should embrace the opportunity for meaningful discussion with current research and prospective college families. While there are many options for degree attainment, the process of developing the whole person—mind, body, and spirit—is a critical aspect of the college experience. Enrollment officers, development officers, faculty, and staff must speak clearly about the transformational impact of daily life at a Lutheran college or university.

The Lutheran intellectual tradition is grounded in vocation and cultivated by community. God is present and active everywhere; education in the liberal arts for vocation emphasizes living life in relationship with others and enables students to focus on a life outside of one’s self. The commitment to the exploration of vocation—a calling to learn, to engage this world, to enact change, and to utilize careers in service to others—shapes the Lutheran college experience for students of all faith traditions (Torvend). Parents desire that their children live lives of purpose and meaning and positively impact the lives of others. They seek counsel on ways to assist their children in exploring their unique abilities during this launch to young adulthood, particularly in the midst of our seemingly individualistic culture.

At the 2013 Annual LECNA Presidents’ Meeting, Andrew Delbanco encouraged Lutheran college and university presidents to consider the following question: How can we preserve the college experience as a place where young people enter into a process of discovery, become engaged through an experience with a mentor, and emerge from college an intellectually curious adult? He reminded them that educated citizens are vital for a high-functioning democracy. In his book *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be*, Delbanco writes, “Students have always been



searching for purpose. They have always been unsure of their gifts and goals, and susceptible to the demands—overt and covert—of their parents and of the abstraction we call ‘the market’” [22].

Selingo touches upon the same issue: “I worry at times about what might be lost in an unbound, personalized experience for students. Will they discover subjects they never knew existed? If a computer is telling them where to sit for class discussions, will they make those random connections that lead to lifelong friends? Will they be able to develop friendships and mentors if they move from provider to provider?” [183]. The sacrifices resulting from a mobile-provider model and competency-based approach to higher education will be striking. At worst, newer approaches to degree attainment void of the traditional model will potentially yield *unfulfilled lives*. Preserving and articulating the value of this transformational experience is essential. As Delbanco suggests, to lose that could never be compensated by any gain.

## A Pathway to Purpose

During the 2014 Annual LECNA Presidents’ Meeting, Brandon Busted, Executive Director of Gallup Education, painted a compelling portrait for advocacy of the liberal arts. He reflected upon the details of a research study of 650,000 students in grades 5-12, which highlighted that measures of engagement are predictive of real performance. Busted concluded that our colleges and universities are troubled with unsophisticated ways of measuring and articulating outcomes, thus presenting difficulties in articulating value. Professed outcomes (better job, better life, engaged citizen) are not being measured outside of features in alumni magazines.

An Inside Higher Education survey conducted by Gallup of chief academic officers reported that 96 percent of provosts are extremely or somewhat confident that they are preparing Americans for the workplace. To the same question, only 12 percent of Americans and 11 percent of business leaders answered the same. Moreover, when Gallup asked parents of 5-12 graders what they thought was the best pathway to getting a good job, liberal arts did not surface as important. According to Busted, the words “liberal arts” do not represent effective branding,

although parents do value twenty-first century skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, skill collaboration, and leadership.

“A good job should instead be defined by the opportunity to do what you find meaningful, to believe in the mission and purpose of the organization, and to build up others by your work.”

And yet, the dream for young people, according to Gallup research, is to get a good job. According to UCLA CIRP data, the top reason freshmen cite for going to college is to “get a good job.” Are we certain, though, that Americans understand what it means to “get a good job”? Busted argues that the real definition of getting a good job is much closer to “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” than most of us would imagine. We need to change the way that we define “a good job”—which is often equated to monetary compensation—and help people understand what a good job really means. Rather than focus on the financial benefit, a good job should instead be defined by the opportunity to do what you find meaningful, to believe in the mission and purpose of the organization, and to build up others by your work.

The more students are engaged, get their hands on things, solve real problems, and do real work, the closer they will get to outcomes that are measurable—but not by earning potential alone. According to Gallup research, the number one predictor of an engaged student is an engaged teacher or staff person. The number one predictor of an engaged teacher is his or her own great leader. In high school, that would be the principal. In a college, that’s the president. With such strong leaders and mentors, students will be able to say “yes” to three things, and so embark on a life of purpose: “Yes, I have someone who cares about my development. Yes, I am discovering or doing what I like to do. Yes, I am discovering or doing what I’m good at” [Busted].

How can Lutheran colleges and universities do a better job of articulating their mission in the wake of political and economic headwinds? Selingo, along with Delbanco and Busted, provide insights that enable us to shape and refine conversations with prospective college families and

empower our alumni to speak more intentionally about the contribution Lutheran colleges and universities make in the realization of a life well-lived. We are called to respond by more clearly articulating the value of a Lutheran college experience using language and sharing experiences that resonate with students and parents.

## Endnotes

1. This research required a significant investment from LECNA member colleges and a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, years before specific interest in “outcome” research made its way into the federal agenda. The methodology of the LECNA effort paved the way for additional college consortia to replicate the study, including The Annapolis Group, Catholic College Admission Association, Women’s College Coalition, Minnesota Private College Council, and Council of Independent Colleges. The results of the updated research are on the LECNA website (<http://lutherancolleges.org/>) and briefly recounted in LECNA’s brochure entitled “Your Values, Our Value” (see LECNA below). This brochure is circulated in a wide variety of settings throughout the year and is mailed to those who request specific information about LECNA member colleges and universities.

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- “Enhancing Leadership through Mentoring Students,” Faith Ngunjiri, Concordia College

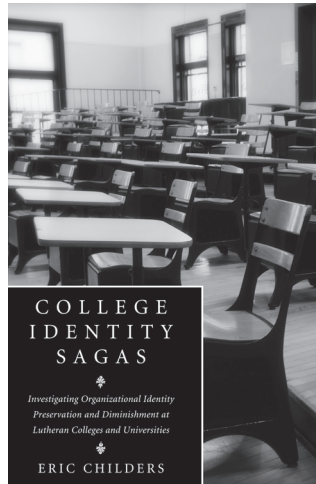
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# Types, Methods, and Sagas in Lutheran Higher Education: Learning from Childers

In 1977, the Association of Lutheran College Faculties published *The Church-Related College in an Age of Pluralism: The Quest for a Viable Saga*. The book was the result of a resolution passed at Dana College in 1969 “to formulate a philosophy of Christian higher education” and to identify “key issues for discussion” (Baepler 9). In a series of annual presentations during the early 1970s, Lutheran college faculty in that era reflected on the current state of church-related higher education, offered an extensive bibliographic review of the subject, and sought to articulate for a new time what it meant to be engaged in Christian higher education. “Pluralism” was the resounding theme of the period, and these authors were keen to engage its ethnic, epistemic, religious, and ethical forms.



of an institution is the most important element of a college’s distinctiveness. Too many colleges, argued Clark, lack distinctiveness and a sense of their unique purpose in American society. Their missions are bland; their stories are not compelling; and they look and act like others as a result.

“We are attracted to Mr. Clark’s category of the ‘saga’ for a variety of reasons,” stated the Association’s authors, and then continue:

The concept fits our experience. Those with positive experiences in church-related colleges can recall, in retrospect, being inspired by the story of the college. Those with negative experiences can recall disappointment in the contrast between the saga and reality. Moreover, the concept provides a “handle” for diagnosing the current dilemmas of our institutions. The state of the story of an institution is a barometer of its health. (Baepler 12-13)

The authors cautioned readers against confusing a college’s saga with the lofty goals and fanciful educational philosophies of “catalog prose,” but how the “rhetoric” relates to the “reality” of the college is itself part of the saga that must be studied to grasp the college’s distinctive mission.

## Valuing an Institution’s Saga

For the Association, the organizing trope that guided their book was “the saga.” Perhaps it had a natural appeal to Scandinavian Lutherans, but its connection to Biblical narrative was not lost on the authors. Its more immediate debt was to another book that few would recognize today. Burton Clark’s *The Distinctive College: Antioch, Reed, Swarthmore* (1970) argued that the “organization saga”

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Most importantly, the Association's authors learned from Clark that the college saga must be told and retold even as it is lived, reshaped, and grown. This too fit their experience because the Biblical saga was never far from their minds:

The narration of Biblical events is never undertaken for merely historical reasons. The story of the Exodus is retold at a critical time as a way of establishing confidence in a new and radically different future. The God who led the Israelites out of Egypt is leading them still. This theological dimension of saga should especially encourage church-related colleges to view their convictional basis—not as a millstone which binds those institutions to past performance and past possibilities—but rather as a charter which inspires them to think through a creative and courageous relationship to the future. (Baepler 13)

The reference to Exodus is especially interesting because the Association did not see the college's saga as something to slavishly follow and measure disobedience against as much as it is (or should be) the way a college's character and ethos is formed and lived amidst rapid change.

## From Sagas to Types and Back Again

This must be the starting point for understanding Eric Childers' *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities* (2012). Based on Childers' doctoral dissertation in higher education at the University of Virginia, the book adopts Clark's concept of the saga to understand three Lutheran institutions: Gettysburg College, Concordia College (Moorhead), and Lenoir-Rhyne University. While Childers seems unfamiliar with the importance of the same idea to the Association of Lutheran College Faculties thirty-five years earlier, he knows Clark well and sees in the institutional sagas of Lutheran colleges an unexplored opportunity.

Childers offers a "thick description" of his three chosen institutions using interviews, documents and observations as his primary resources. The interviews are particularly illuminating because he spoke with presidents at each as well as key faculty and staff leaders, including campus ministers. Two of his important socio-scientific approaches

in this process are isomorphism and critical events theory. Isomorphism holds that organizations facing similar environmental conditions will move towards homogeneity and seek to mimic organizations seen as "leaders" in the field (Childers 16-17). This is why at various times colleges and universities have sought to describe themselves as the "Harvard of the Midwest" or the "Harvard of the South." Critical events theory is just what it sounds like—institutions have "turning points" or important times in the institution's history when identity is reaffirmed or transformed (24). These theoretical approaches also give Childers a way to compare the institutions, and he chose to look at a forty year history for all three. Reflecting on his data collection, Childers concluded "that each school's narrative exhibited striking characteristics of the organizational saga: heroic leaders, villains, institutional struggle, victories and failures, distinctive campus ethics, clear mission and stories of creation, decline and recovery" (47). Each has a distinctive saga that explains the past, shapes the present, and guides the future.

Why these three schools? Childers has a second theoretical foundation that cannot be ignored, and it is decidedly theological. To find the right schools and offer a full range of distinctive Lutheran sagas, Childers turned to Robert Benne's *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges Keep Faith with their Religious Traditions* (2001)—unquestionably, an essential work in the scholarship on faith-based higher education. While George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (1994) and James T. Burtchael's *The Dying of the Light* (1997) focused on colleges that "disengaged" from their ecclesial roots, Benne advanced a different line of inquiry, recognizing six exemplary church-related colleges and universities from several denominations that resisted secularizing trends. Benne asserted that we should see colleges and universities along a "spectrum," ranging from "those with a fairly rich connection to those with virtually none at all who nevertheless persist in claiming one" (x). Seeing things this way would also allow institutions to imagine potential paths for strengthening their faith identity while also recognizing ongoing dangers of secularization.

The result was Benne's "Types of Church-Related Colleges" that named four positions along the spectrum (orthodox, critical-mass, intentionally pluralist, and

accidentally pluralist) with markers that would indicate where a particular college or university might find itself. The markers included the role of chapel in the life of the community, denominational membership requirements for faculty, institutional leaders and trustees, the number and type of religion courses, financial support by the denomination, and the ethos and public rhetoric of the institution

“Some denominational traditions, like Lutherans, may not want to be orthodox because in their theological convictions ‘reason is respected enough that even non-believers can contribute genuinely to the quest for truth.’”

(49). Benne also noted that some denominational traditions, like Lutherans, may not want to be orthodox because in their theological convictions “reason is respected enough that even non-believers can contribute genuinely to the quest for truth” (50). Moreover, for critical mass institutions, the theological paradigm can demand some pluralism to ensure intellectual honesty and to avoid “a coercive smugness that is neither genuine nor strong” (50). In contrast, denominational traditions are “dethroned” at intentionally and accidentally pluralist institutions even though the remaining level of faith-identity will vary with intentionally pluralist still offering some privileged place for the denominational tradition while the accidentally pluralist treats the tradition as just one among many, when it can even be found at all (50-51). The further you go on the spectrum, the more secular an institution becomes.

It is impossible to read Benne’s typology and not seek to place your institution in a category. Few schools fit perfectly into one type or the other, but that is part of the intellectual fun. So, what if you took Benne’s typology and made it into a rubric? You could then assign a score to different colleges and universities and “objectively” assign them a type. This is exactly what Childers does. Specifically, he used six criteria from Benne’s typology: chapel attendance policy, whether the president must be Lutheran, percentage of Lutherans that must be on the

governing board, the percentage of Lutheran faculty, the percentage of Lutheran students, and financial dependence upon the church. My former institution, Wartburg College, earned a 3 for a protected chapel time more than once a week, a 2 for requiring a Lutheran president and 60 percent Lutherans on the governing board, a 3 for having 36.5 percent Lutheran students, a 1 for not tracking the percentage of Lutheran faculty (all schools receive a 1 for that reason), and a 2 for a relatively low dependency upon the church for a total score of 11. This landed Wartburg in the critical mass category.

Studying the scores given in the “Sorting and Analysis Worksheet” of Appendix B, we find that scores ranged from 14 to 5 with Concordia at the top and Gettysburg and Wagner tied at the bottom (215-19). In the final count, ten of the ELCA’s schools made the critical mass list, fourteen were classified as intentionally pluralist, and three were named accidentally pluralist (42). Childers adopted Benne’s theological claim that no Lutheran institution would seek to be orthodox, and the scoring process did not allow for that possibility (43). From the sorting into types, Childers then selected one institution from each category as his sample. This gave him Concordia for critical mass, Lenoir-Rhyne for intentionally pluralist, and Gettysburg for accidentally pluralists.

### Three Lutheran Institutional Sagas

As the oldest of the Lutheran institutions, Gettysburg is an obvious choice for almost any study. It suffered under Burtchaell’s blistering gaze in *The Dying of the Light*, but Childers is more descriptive than judgmental. The Gettysburg saga begins with Samuel Schmucker and a vision for a Lutheran college that was non-sectarian from the start, and this is the founding story that Childers hears repeatedly from his informants. As a result, it is easy for the faculty, staff, and president to describe the college’s Lutheran identity as a “historic relationship” that can only be seen in a few formal rituals (prayer and faculty meetings and official college events) and the presence of a Lutheran campus minister (148). Childers names three “critical events” in the diminishing of Gettysburg’s Lutheran identity: a president with an open hostility to the church, a thrust to be a nationally recognized liberal arts



college, and a decision to form a Center for Public Service and, in so doing, separate the service program from campus ministry. Few if any on campus can articulate what it means to be a Lutheran college and most appear to view it as a curious oddity, but Salvatore Ciolino identified an inescapable fact to Childers: "In an age when church affiliation is not popular, Gettysburg has kept it" (166). It may have been severely neglected but at least it has not been rejected outright.

"If an institution 'cannot achieve critical mass of Lutheran faculty and staff, then the school must depend upon strategically placing the few it does have in key positions, attracting others who will support its mission.'"

Lenoir-Rhyne was the choice for intentionally pluralist, missing the critical mass list because it has chapel only once a week and because its Lutheran enrollment is so low. The college's southern location and the fact that Lutherans are a religious minority in the region are important parts of the saga reported by Childers for Lenoir-Rhyne, and the university fares remarkably well in Childers' analysis with the conclusion that, given the institution's challenges, it has maintained its Lutheran identity. Committed leadership is a critical part of the saga, including presidents, faculty and staff, as well as a commitment by non-Lutherans to support and maintain a Lutheran identity within an ecumenical context. Childers names this later point "the fanning factor." If an institution cannot achieve critical mass of Lutheran faculty and staff, then the school must depend upon strategically placing the few it does have in key positions, attracting others who will support its mission" (127). Professor David Ratke even questions whether simplistic head counting is enough in determining critical mass or whether "intentional institutional dialogue" is more valuable (134).

As the highest ranking critical mass school, the saga of Concordia College in Moorhead tells the story of a mission-focused institution guided by strong leadership. In his interviews, Childers was surprised by the depth of

commitment to the college's mission statement and its impact on the life of the institution, but Concordia has also been guided by strong presidential leadership committed to Lutheran identity. It is that presidential support and vision that led to multiple faculty and staff development programs, including the Dovre Center for Faith and Learning, which keep alive explorations of the mission and its meaning. Paul Dovre served as president of Concordia for over 20 years, and it is impossible to ignore his impact. But even Concordia has changed, and "as Concordia became less sociologically and ethnically Lutheran, the college attempted to become more theologically Lutheran" (89). Dovre has described this as the transition of Lutheran identity from ethos to logos, and it was a commitment shared by former president Pam Jolicoeur as well. Childers concludes that "the Concordia saga is a story of continuity and like-minded administrators" who intentionally and purposefully resisted isomorphism and the potential for secularization that can come with it.

## On Studying Stories

With much talk about being both "mission-driven" and "distinctive" in higher education today, a renewed interest in "saga" by church-related colleges makes great sense. It makes sense not only as a socio-scientific method but also as a potential practice for shaping and forming an institution, its faculty and staff, and its students. We need more storytelling, and that storytelling can and must include an institutional account of "critical events," including heroic and failed leaders, resistance and capitulation to homogenization with other educational models, and an account of how the institution has engaged various forms of pluralism. At Mercer, we tell a story of repeatedly resisting the fundamentalist trends of the Georgia Baptist Convention in order to welcome a full diversity of ideas and people, but only a prophetic remnant still try to connect "Mercer's story" to "God's story"—a critical element if the saga is to maintain a faith dimension.

Childers not only reintroduces sagas, he also makes an important contribution in his use of socio-scientific methods to explore mission and identity at faith-based institutions. This is long overdue, and the use of qualitative research and theoretical approaches like isomorphism and critical events theory have much to offer. While

“We need more storytelling, and that storytelling can and must include an institutional account of ‘critical events,’ including heroic and failed leaders, resistance and capitulation to homogenization with other educational models, and an account of how the institution has engaged various forms of pluralism.”

Childers needed some way to select his schools, the weak link in the study is likely his effort to quantify Benne’s typology to sort the ELCA’s colleges and universities. The project would have still offered great insight if he had picked three schools at random. Childers notes that there are other typologies applicable to Lutheran higher education, including those of Ernest Simmons and Tom Christianson, and doing the qualitative work first may have allowed him to engage multiple typologies later in his assessment of the institutions. However, that may have made the project more theological than intended. At the very least, another talented graduate student in higher education might turn to a different framework as a way to begin a similar project.

What may be the most startling aspect of reading Childers’ study is how fast things are changing in Lutheran higher education. Childers did much of his research using 2005 data, and the transitions since then have been dramatic. Gone is the ELCA Office of Vocation and Education. Gone are the requirements at two of the “critical mass” schools that the president be Lutheran. Gone altogether are Waldorf College (critical mass) and Dana College (intentionally pluralist). Most surprising of all, Lenoir-Rhyne has now “merged” with Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, making the seminary part of the university.

No typology of church-related higher education that I know has a box for “started or acquired a seminary,” and given the recent hardships most Lutheran seminaries have faced, it is hard to imagine a greater act of institutional faith than doing it. With two more points, Lenoir-Rhyne would have reached “critical mass.” Should they have made it? The fundamental problem with a typology is that you have to make things fit even when your subject resists easily classification. One of the strengths of a socio-scientific investigation relying on qualitative methods should be that the types emerge out of the study rather than being imposed from the start.

In addition to the value of sagas, the wisdom of the Association of Lutheran College Facilities back in the 1960s and 1970s was recognizing that church-related higher education was in a period of rapid change. We would do well to make that wisdom our own. While some change is to be welcomed and some to be resisted, we would also be wise to follow their lead and approach both with a spirit of hope, for it is only hope that makes a faith-based saga truly viable.

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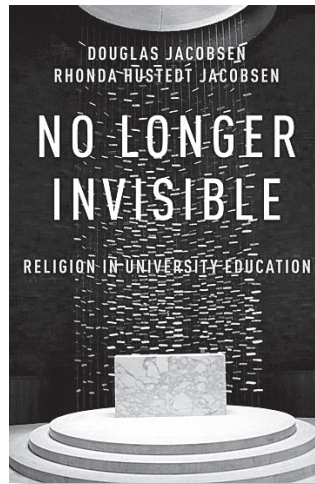
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L. DeANE LAGERQUIST

# Post-Secular Religion on Campus: Conversing with Jacobsen and Jacobsen

That the secularization thesis, once regarded as self-evident, turned out to be false is no longer news. Despite the confident predictions by astute scholars and observers in the mid-twentieth century, religion has not gone the way of the dinosaurs. To the contrary, examples of its presence are easily multiplied from attention to one's own social context and from popular media. These instances illustrate the ways religion can enrich individual lives and play a forceful, positive role in local, national, and global communities. They also demonstrate religion's potential to restrict personal freedom and to generate conflict in families, among neighbors, and between nations.

Similarly, despite the alarm raised in the late-twentieth century by theologian James Burtchaell, historian George Marsden, and others, religion has not disappeared from colleges and universities in the United States. As the book, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*, claims, religion is increasingly visible across the entire landscape of American higher education, from public community colleges to prestigious research universities to small liberal arts colleges, both secular and religiously affiliated schools like those associated with the Evangelical



Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The value of this slim volume is not that it brings breaking news, but that authors Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen help their readers to better comprehend the news and how to respond to it. With exceptional clarity, yet never falling into reductionist oversimplification, they deepen our understanding of what religion is, explore the nature of its presence on campuses today (in contrast to in earlier eras), and offer guidance about how to respond constructively to the

opportunities and challenges of this new situation. The book's title, *No Longer Invisible*, hints at their claim: because the ways religion is present in higher education now are significantly different from how it was present only a few decades ago, faculty, staff, administrators, and students must engage one another in thoughtful, informed conversation. More specifically, the authors articulate and explore six questions about religion that should be discussed on campuses of every sort. This is not a how-to book, providing worksheets or small group exercises. It does, however, invite its readers—whatever their religious affiliations, scholarly expertise, or type of school—to launch conversations about these questions on their own campuses.

**L. DeAne Lagerquist** is Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. She is coeditor of *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation in the Liberal Arts* (Oxford University Press, 2014), and is currently working on a project called, "Locating Lutheranism," which uses GIS and other digital tools to map and investigate the history of Lutheranism in time, space, and culture.

## Launching the Conversation

The authors are well equipped to identify pertinent issues about religion on campuses today. They bring long experience as professors, significant previous scholarship about religion on campus, and wisdom gained from campus visits and numerous interviews. Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen is Professor of Psychology and has given leadership to faculty development at Messiah College. Douglas Jacobsen is Professor of Religion at the same college. His *The World's Christians* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) is an excellent overview of the history and current state of Christianity, well suited to the college classroom. Together they have been reflecting about matters of religion and education for many years. Their previous two, edited volumes anticipated this one: *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (2004) and *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (2008). Both books continue to be relevant, offering insights that inform the conversations the current volume is intended to stimulate. These books also provided a starting point for the authors' Religion in the Academy project. Supported by the Lilly Endowment, the authors visited more than four dozen campuses to investigate how religion is engaged there and what it contributes to higher education. What they learned from those many conversations is the substance of this newest book.

"The authors also invited their readers to identify the particularity of their own traditions within Christianity, a task Lutherans have pursued at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference and in other venues."

In *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, their chapters alternate with essays by six Messiah College colleagues. Although local, the on-campus collaboration expanded conversation about Christian scholarship by shifting its focus. The authors are both appreciative and critical of the integration of (Christian) faith and learning model promoted by Reformed scholars such as philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff and George Marsden, whose 1997 book was titled *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*

(Jacobsen, *Scholarship*, 15-32). Their contribution to the debate is a step back from a heavily philosophical approach in order to ask what other streams of Christian tradition bring to the task of education. Messiah College offers its own Anabaptist perspective. In the Prologue, Rodney J. Sawatsky, then Messiah's president, proposes a focus on "the end, the *telos* of Christian scholarship." Drawing upon a typically Anabaptist and "biblical vision of the future in which peace and righteous will flourish and learning will result in wisdom," he claims the centrality of hope: "Grounded in this spirit of realistic hope, Christian scholarship seeks not only to understand and celebrate the creation as it is but also to participate in God's work of restoring and transforming the world" (9, 10). While exploring theological and other resources of their historic tradition, the authors also invited their readers to identify the particularity of their own traditions within Christianity, a task Lutherans have pursued at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference and in other venues.

The editors open *The American University in a Postsecular Age* by examining the post-secular context of higher education and close with "Talking about Religion: A Framework for Academic Conversation." The fourteen essays between shift focus from Christian scholarship to a more general consideration of religion and higher education and attend to other historic religions, the realities of religious pluralism, and public institutions. The first section explores issues related to faculty roles; the second takes up issues related to student learning. Several studies have highlighted the mismatch between faculty members' cognitive goals for their religion courses and students' desire for personal benefits. The Pew Research Group reports that nearly 20 percent of conventional aged college students claim no religious affiliation and anecdotal evidence points to a large, but uncounted number who assert that they are "spiritual, but not religious."

In their essay, "The Different Spiritualities of the Students We Teach," Robert J. Nash and DeMethra LaSha Bradley present a typology of student spirituality that is unexpected, but helpful for understanding students' expectations and their responses to religion courses and to the larger campus ethos. The types are not based on specific historic religions, either Christian denominations or other traditions such as Hinduism, Islam, or others. Instead, the five types

are based upon students' individual attitudes about their connection (or lack of connection) to any historic religion, thus highlighting the importance of their personal religion. For example, whatever their community, orthodox believers are confident in their beliefs, while spiritual skeptics question all traditions. Thus Nash and Bradley's approach allows a more nuanced analysis of students' religion which anticipates the six questions posed in *No Longer Invisible*.

## Mapping the Landscape

*No Longer Invisible* continues the enterprise begun in the previous volumes. This time Jacobsen and Jacobsen are the sole authors, but the scope of their investigation is large, drawing upon comments from students and major scholars in humanities and social sciences. Their partners are evident in references to published materials and quotations from interviews. Readers who have been following these issues over the past quarter century will recognize both its contours and major participants; those who are new to the topics will be gently brought up to speed and directed to further sources. Addressed to their colleagues in higher education most widely conceived, the book assumes a high level of general cultural knowledge, but not specialist understanding of either religious studies or the history of higher education.

The book is divided into two parts. The first four chapters examine the current context; each of the following chapters explores one of the six key questions introduced in chapter four. In the conclusion the authors look toward the future, asserting that "careful and nuanced attention to religion can be a source of revitalization for higher education as a whole" (*No Longer Invisible* 154). Those familiar with the context, who know something of the development of American higher education, or who are well versed in scholarly efforts to define religion, may be tempted to skip part one. They should not. Here the authors use clear prose and common sense concepts to build the intellectual table to which they invite their readers. Their straightforward presentation of the current context, how we got here, and what is at stake provides expansive access to anyone concerned about these issues.

The story of religion's presence on American campuses can be told, as it is here, in three acts. In the first act

religion was Protestant; in the second Privatized; and in the third it is Pluriform (17). For decades religion was visible and its importance was assumed at nearly every school, regardless of instructional sponsorship. Even if was not specified, the religion was usually some variety of Anglo-American Protestantism. But then, through much of the twentieth century, at most schools but especially at public institutions and even at some schools once affiliated with Christian churches, religion of any sort was relegated to the margins, privatized, and rendered invisible. Since late in the twentieth century, religion has begun to reappear. Telling examples introduce the book. Ordinary observers and expert commentators notice that the religion they see is different from what was once so ubiquitous.

"The story of religion's presence on American campuses can be told...in three acts. In the first act religion was Protestant; in the second Privatized; and in the third it is Pluriform."

If religion never disappeared from most Lutheran college campuses, nonetheless the general contours of the plot can be traced in their history, perhaps lagging behind the trends by a few years. The difference now is both a matter of more kinds of religion, that is descriptive pluralism, and a changing conception of what constitutes religion. Lists of the historic religions represented on campuses are longer. At the same time, what continues being religious is no longer a simple matter of membership in a community. Like some of the students described in Nash and Bradley's essay, "most Americans now assume that a person can be spiritual or religious to varying degrees without any connection to a particular religious group. The differences between religious and nonreligious lifestyles are not always obvious, and the line between public and private has also become blurred" (27).

After decades of avoiding any notice of religion or giving it only shallow, polite attention, many American are ill prepared to engage religion of any sort, either the old style or the new. After reviewing four ways educators have reacted to the reemergence of religion in public, Jacobsen



and Jacobsen propose a framework for better questions. They propose four “trail markers” to might help guide us in this time of transition: (1) distinguishing spirituality from religion, (2) differentiating teaching *about* religion from teaching religion, (3) signaling the importance of difficult dialogues, and (4) urging exploration of big questions. However, the authors assert that these strategies are not up to the challenge. A more proactive approach and a more robust, yet nuanced notion of religion is needed. Harking back to the final chapter of *The American University in a Postsecular Age*, they offer a revised three-part description of religion: Religion is historic, it is public, and it is personal.

*Historic religion* “names itself and...is organized into observable communities of belief and practice” (49). *Public religion* is more elusive. It “defines what a society takes to be true, provides a rationale for that society’s way of life, and enumerates the values that society strives to uphold” (50-51). *Personal religion* is just that, “an idiosyncratic collection of whatever it is that provides meaning, purpose, grounding, trust, hope, and a sense of wholeness” (53-54). To these three categories of religion, they add a further distinction between two modes: religious ideas and religious behaviors. Belief and practice are present in each of the categories of historic, public, and personal religion. The framework as a whole is serviceable, perhaps because although the three categories and two modes yield six distinguishable sites of engagement, these zones also overlap and interact. That it does not eliminate the messiness inherent in any effort to define religion and allows for religion’s dynamic, living character is a virtue of this framework.

Not only is religion different now than it was in the past, so too higher education has changed. These developments are treated in less detail. Nonetheless, the authors highlight three that significantly inform their proposal for how religion is best engaged on campuses today: “(1) rejection of epistemological objectivity and the embrace of multiculturalism, (2) the growth of professional studies, and (3) the turn toward student-centered learning” (27). The first shift is evident in a difference they notice between older and younger faculty; professors in the younger generation, formed after the mid-century critique of objectivity, often are much more willing to wrestle with religious issues in their classrooms than are their older colleagues. Student-centered learning is fundamental to this book’s agenda.

Commitment to student development combines with a less articulated, but deep commitment to higher education’s obligation to foster civic responsibility in students. These two goals harken back to the earliest era of American higher education. However, this book does not argue for a simple return to the past. It is not a manifesto for reinstating Christianity on campus as it once was, but instead a plea for thoughtful, constructive grappling with the messy, pluriform reality of religion as it is already reappearing.

“Professors in the younger generation, formed after the mid-century critique of objectivity, often are much more willing to wrestle with religious issues in their classrooms than are their older colleagues.”

## Engaging the Questions

The six questions Jacobsen and Jacobsen pose, one for each site of engagement, are relevant in all sectors of higher education, though the conversations on any campus will be informed by local history and current conditions. At ELCA colleges and universities, the common historic religion, namely the Lutheran tradition, provides theological resources, informs practices, and sets the institutional structure. At their founding, these schools’ missions included some version of nurturing Lutheran students’ personal religion so that they would continue their participation in Lutheran communities and that some would assume leadership in congregations and the larger church. To a large extent the campus community of students, faculty, and staff was religiously (and often ethnically) homogeneous. There was little, if any, difference between historic Lutheran religion and the schools’ public religion. Students took religion courses that treated Christianity, not infrequently with special attention to Lutheran teaching. They were offered opportunities for Christian worship, or they were required to attend. In recent decades these schools, in varying degrees, have experienced the same changes described in this book and have altered their stance toward religion, including Lutheran Christianity, other traditions,

public religion, and personal religion. All the questions posed in the volume can guide conversations on these campuses and inform responses to the changes. Here I highlight two topics that may be of particular interest on Lutheran campuses, rather than discussing each question.

*“What are appropriate ways to interact with those of other faiths?”* This is the guiding question in the zone defined by historic religion and behavior. This discussion and the behaviors a community regards as appropriate will be shaped by institutional structure as well as its attitudes and ethos. Half-a-dozen structural models are described in the chapter on Interfaith Etiquette. Perhaps some Lutheran college faculty and alumni remember a Homogenous Model fondly, but the “State Church” and the One-Party Rule models are more common. Colleges which operate with One-Party Rule are in company of Notre Dame and Brigham Young University. Here the school’s historic religion is dominant in its full particularity. Yet members of other religious groups are welcomed and respectful accommodations are made. The State Church model “acknowledges the particularity of the institution and intentionally welcomes religious diversity on campus, but it also provides a structure that allows the spiritual needs of the campus community as a whole to be named and addressed” (86). Institutional resources provide staff, space, and programming. Nonetheless, the historic tradition may be muted or generalized in order to function as public religion for a more diverse community. As ELCA colleges continue to recruit students, faculty, and staff from a wider range of historic religions and with fuzzy notions of personal religion, serious reflection on these structures is an urgent matter with consequences for curriculum, student programming, budgets, and public ceremonies such as graduation. When the discussion turns to curriculum, the discussion of the goals of religious literacy in the previous chapter will be instructive.

In recent years Lutheran colleges have reclaimed the traditions’ commitment to vocation with enthusiasm and profit. The chapter on Civic Engagement offers valuable insights for our continued reflection on how the notion is grounded and the ways students’ vocation is fostered. *“What values and practices—religious or secular—shape civic*

*engagement?”* This is the guiding question for this exploration of public religion and behavior. Of course, vocation is a topic which spans all three categories of religion. One perennial challenge is how to articulate a Lutheran theology of vocation while also taking account of other religious and secular understandings. The chapter helpfully places this ongoing conversation in a larger frame that points toward overlap between a specifically Lutheran approach and public debates about the relative importance of activism and community service. It also addresses the potential conflicts between various definitions of “civic” when promoting civic engagement. Vocation is addressed directly in the chapter devoted to personal religion and behavior. Here the key question concerns how colleges and universities help students develop lives of meaning and purpose, particularly students emerging into adulthood. The authors draw upon studies of student development as they explore this question. Pacific Lutheran University’s “Wild Hope” program receives praise for doing this well, drawing on Luther’s teaching in a way that invites everyone into the enterprise.

## Conclusion

In this book, Jacobsen and Jacobsen pose pertinent questions about religion in higher education, provide useful background, and offer a clear framework for engaging those questions. Their book will reward solitary readers, but it will be most valuable when its insights are part of actual conversations that address the messy realities of religion newly visible on local campuses.

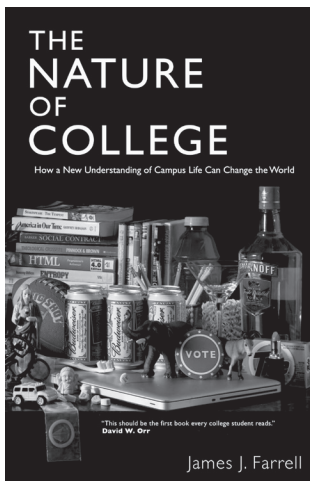
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# The Prophetic Vocation and the Nature(s) of College: Reimagining College with Jim Farrell

The vocational grounding of Lutheran higher education traditionally stresses an education that focuses on calling rather than material success or individual fulfillment. Yet one difficulty becomes finding ways to articulate this pedagogical frame within a world that frequently sees college as a means to a good paying job. For instance, on the St. Olaf website, under the “About” tab, one finds: “A St. Olaf College education develops the habits of mind and heart that enable students to embrace the challenges of a changing world, leading to lives of professional accomplishment, financial independence, and personal fulfillment.” Though a list later adds “academically rigorous” and “guided by our Lutheran Faith tradition,” this external marker stresses independence, wealth, and fulfillment as the explicit outcomes of one’s years at St. Olaf.

This view drips down into the various ways that St. Olaf directs students towards life after college. For instance, much pride has gone into a new center dedicated to “vocation and career.” Surveys detail where students, shaped by the St. Olaf mission, end up, including jobs at 3M, the Minnesota Vikings, and Apple, as well as service agencies such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Internships at major corporations, alumni networking meals, and recruiting visits all give



students a sense of what “professional accomplishment” looks like.

More to the point, this claim appeals to contemporary expectations about a “good” education. “About St. Olaf” markets the value of the education St. Olaf offers as giving the student the path to material success as well as greater clarity about one’s unique nature. Ever general, “fulfillment” reminds each student that a personal sense of what matters and is meaningful will be attended to while at St. Olaf.

So what? Isn’t such gainful employment a successful learning outcome? Aren’t we responsible for educating students to become productive citizens within a market economy, measured by material success and later an eventual contribution to the endowment of the college? In fact, in order to thrive, institutions must defend their existence within the educational market place. Higher educational institutions do close (Dana College, for example), and each college must ensure that students and their parents are confident that a comfortable life lies on the other side of the financial burden of a private education. But are these outcomes in continuity with the vocational foundation that shapes what we do and how we do it?

One means to meander into a conversation with these questions is to reflect on *nature*, both as something

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accepted as normal and intuitive (what is *natural*) as well as ecological nature itself that makes human life possible (the *natural world*). Higher education itself has a cultural nature, of things we do and beliefs we hold without thinking, and is part of the natural world. It is this dual nature that Jim Farrell's text, *The Nature of College*, passionately addresses. He deconstructs college as a culture, one taken as natural by students, faculty, and administrators, while placing collegiate life within an ecological frame that reminds us that college is a place dependent upon water, land, and air. Constructively, he then re-envisioned college as modeling "Anthropocene Responsibility," as Larry Rasmussen calls it, by restructuring the nature of college such that it practices a sustainable ethos that forms students for life after college (Rasmussen 1). As such, Farrell's argument provocatively points to a central vocational dimension within Lutheran higher education—namely, the prophetic responsibility to critique the contemporary ethos by affirming higher values such as justice, responsibility, and the good of the commons. Doing so, he asks us to reflect on the dangers, in terms of the ecological crisis but also for our Lutheran identity, of explicitly linking contemporary values with the nature of our colleges.

## The Nature(s) of College

For Farrell, who passed away last summer, college has two natures. The first relates to the socio-cultural habitat that students inhabit as they forage for their identity within college. Here, culture is a socially constructed system of symbols, practices, and beliefs taken as normal and natural. Working through such a culture within each chapter, he describes how students assume that collegiate culture is "natural," a given that cannot be changed. Thus, students strive to fit within this culture, learning from other students the rules that lead to success within the wilds of college life. For instance, it is normal that students today bring a vast assortment of electronic gear to college, including iPads, smart phones, and TVs as standard college equipment. It is normal that students largely dress in similar ways, especially since savvy marketers realize that many college students, free from parental limits for the first time, have their first credit card that allow them to spend freely. So "Joe and Jo College,"

as Farrell terms them, strive to perfectly fit into the nature of things within college. The normal routines of college parties, of religion and spiritual development, food, cars, and sex all shape the cultural geography of college.

But there is a second dimension to the nature of college: the campus as habitat, dependent upon a broad, complex ecological web. A college uses water, land, and air in order to function. Students take showers and flush the toilet; faculty use high-tech gear and electricity to help with research and teaching. The screen I am looking at to write this essay is made up of a myriad number of mined materials from all over the world. Too often, we ignore *this* nature amidst the comings and goings of the collegiate "nature," meaning we ignore "the complexity of our relationships with the natural world, and our complicity with commonsense patterns of thought and behavior that don't make sense anymore" (Farrell 6). We are ever part of a world of dirt, plants, air, water, and the like, but rarely pause to reflect on the ecological obligations this participation entails amidst the everydayness of college life.

"Amidst academic specialization, worries over grade inflation, and high-paying jobs as the measure of success, students—but also faculty and administrators—largely avoid seeing this nature of college, instead passively accepting things as they are."

In fact, amidst academic specialization, worries over grade inflation, and high-paying jobs as the measure of success, students—but also faculty and administrators—largely avoid seeing this nature of college, instead passively accepting things as they are. For instance, he discusses how "shit happens" (18). Everyone on campus naturally shits, and though students (and others no doubt) often use the word, very few people pay attention to what happens to our shit. We generally ignore how it reveals an ecological circle of the consumption and return of natural elements as well as the cultural constructs (example: indoor bathrooms) we've invented to help us move beyond our bodily natures.

In Farrell's view, contemporary American cultural ethos strives to hide the natural, with colleges often reflecting this ethos, rather than critiquing it.

Farrell's aim is then to re-imagine the nature(s) of college such that the structure of the institution itself normalizes a sustainable way of life. In short, the outcome of this education is students who strive to live sustainably both on and off campus, both in the present and future. Consequently, his pedagogical model is decidedly constructive. A "Commons Sense" ethic describes his ecological vision. Within this social structure, the average student wakes up to a monitor that reveals their water and electricity usage. She eats food made from sustainable and local sources, and pays attention to what she eats off campus as well. She can participate in religious services that explore simple living, and the political discourse on campus shapes informed citizenship, rather than "sitizens," as in people who sit and complain about the state of politics. [234]

The success then of higher education is the formation of eco-sensitive student natures.

As such, Farrell reveals a vision of college as both within but outside of contemporary culture. As he puts it, "college is the right time to establish regenerative routines for the real world, developing habits that enrich habitats" (257). Thus, in a manner analogous to the Lutheran "Two Kingdoms" concept, rather than merely accepting the preconceptions of students, the deeper vocation of college is to re-form student assumptions such that the values of the contemporary ethos no longer function as the de facto basis for acting in the world. Such a transformative education is vital because of the current ecological crisis. College must model eco-responsible lifestyles such that it becomes the student's lived educational outcome after college.

## The Prophetic

In a number of ways, the heart of Farrell's argument relates well to the critical prophetic thrust that energizes the Lutheran higher education tradition. And it is this prophetic vocation that requires us to be mindful of the values we state as the identifying marks that shape our educational practices. Walter Brueggemann, a Bible scholar, is a helpful conversation partner here. Some thirty-five years ago, he

critiqued the church as being "so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism" that it lost its power to act (Brueggemann 11). In short, the church defined success in light of the values of the free-market, individualism, and material prosperity, rather than justice and community responsibility. In response, he called church leaders to bring a "prophetic task" to church life that would "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us" (13). Finding in the Bible a clear call

"To participate then in the life of Lutheran higher education means critically surfing the tension between the prevailing winds of worldly culture and revealing to the world a richer sense of what is true and meaningful."

to resist consumption, he envisioned an alternative vision of community that stressed mercy and justice as central. More importantly, as prophetic, this vision reframed the debate about what was possible. It transcended particular issues by emphasizing the stakes behind particular human choices, thereby energizing the creation of new ideas for human community by re-imagining what should be.

Because of the Lutheran tradition, such a prophetic re-imagining is also a dimension within the vocation of Lutheran higher education. Independently of one's particular faith commitment, the vocational roots of a place like St. Olaf rest in a belief that there are greater goods than those offered by the world. Ideas like justice, freedom, and service are thus the proper outcomes of an education that is about transformation, rather than worldly conformation. To participate then in the life of Lutheran higher education means critically surfing the tension between the prevailing winds of worldly culture and revealing to the world a richer sense of what is true and meaningful. It does not deny the reality of the contemporary context, but sees its aims as limited and narrow, something to be critically kept at a distance as something that fails to reflect humanity's deepest longings and hopes.

It is this prophetic vocation that requires us to critique "About St. Olaf." Rather than a prophetic critique of contemporary ideas of success, this identifying marker seems entangled with an ethos of consumption and self-centeredness. It accepts that education is a commodity, a "thing" rooted in "the habits and dispositions learned in the consumption of literal commodities" that sees education merely as a means to other, more important "things" such as material prosperity, career success, and individual well-being (Miller 32). Indeed, as about 'personal fulfillment,' autonomy and individual realization become key values, a view that values "the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security" as reflecting the success of the educational experience (Lasch 7). Students are "potent customers," as Mark Edmundson notes in "As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students," that must be "pandered to from day one until the morning of their final kiss-off" (Edmundson 46-47). In this view, purchasing a St. Olaf education allows one to buy the things that the contemporary American ethos values most highly.

Though I likely put too much weight on such a statement, the danger here is that it can begin to change the nature of a place like St. Olaf. It changes how we see ourselves over time, and thus becomes our nature. Here, Farrell's distinction between expressed and operative values offers a further means of critique. Operative values are those values that we actually live by, whereas the expressed values are those we make explicit; in his view, in ecological matters, our operative values (for example: efficiency, expense, and convenience) often trump our expressed values (equality, ecological concern, justice) (Farrell 7). Yet, this reasoning suggests that "About St. Olaf's" expressed values (material and personal success) actually don't reflect well the operative values within the college. The St. Olaf education *actually* values critical thinking, community engagement, and discerning one's calling as operative assumptions. The *actual* outcome of the education St. Olaf offers then is vocational: it shapes students that understand that there are greater pursuits than those offered by the consumptive world. But there then needs to be a greater intentionality between what we actually do and what we say we do, especially in relation to the prophetic vocation within our Lutheran identity.

## Practicing a Prophetic Pedagogy

Because of this lack of harmony between expressed and operative values, we need to rethink both. As Farrell points out, in particular we need to re-form the nature of college to better model practices that sustainably place humans within the wider ecological web. This is the greatest prophetic calling for a college today, as it tasks colleges to lead in re-envisioning the wider culture. And it is also innate to the vocational identity within Lutheran higher education. Our tradition asks us to prophetically re-imagine the world, and shapes students who will contribute to making this re-imagined world possible. There are then a number of pedagogical implications that arise out of Farrell's claims as such.

"Too often, we accept such things as academic specializations, the necessity of the major system, a focus on grades, and our collegiate brand as the 'way things are.'"

**Challenge Nature:** Farrell asks us to think beyond such normalcy and see the deeper commons behind what we do in college. As a whole, college culture works to enable students, post-college, to make connections between a variety of worlds (scientific, medical, spiritual, economic, etc.). By implication, shouldn't college culture be more intentional about making these connections? Too often, we accept such things as academic specializations, the necessity of the major system, a focus on grades, and our collegiate brand as the "way things are." Our students take this organization as natural, realizing their success depends on successfully navigating this wild. Might we do a better service to our students by revealing the translucent walls to the structure of college? For instance, why not rethink the major system. Students could "major" instead in a worldview (science, art, humanities) that is rooted in a contemporary issue (for example, ecological justice). Teams from different disciplines could teach general education classes, thereby making college more interdisciplinary. As a result, the nature of college would reveal a transparent intellectual commons, encouraging students to recognize the deeper questions behind college as a whole.



**Model Vulnerability:** We model what good conversations look like. For Farrell, we must model eco-logical conversations, with each discipline being a distinct piece to thinking of human life as intertwined within nature. But the deeper implication of his argument is that modeling requires respecting the notion that none of us have all the answers. Rather than a top-down hierarchy or the professorial voice, we should shape participatory conversations, such that both students and professors recognize that all are learners and teachers to some degree. As he notes, "we're all in this together." Admitting the limits of our power, knowledge, and individual wisdom can free us to create impactful learning communities (259). And acknowledging that one is a learner (as well as a teacher) can also allow greater revelation about how one's work fits within the whole form of life, including family, religious, and political commitments. One is not the powerful voice in the front, but a shared voice in an animated conversation about important questions.

**Practice Seduction:** The Latin roots of "seduction" include *se*, meaning "away," and *ducere*, meaning "lead." For Farrell, a good education leads a student away from assumptions about what is normal and natural to recognizing that human choices create cultures that ignore our interdependence with the ecological world. As a consequence, a college should focus on operative values that task students to grow to critically evaluate the contemporary ethos as the primary source of value. It should teach the prophetic vocation throughout the curriculum and lead students away from pre-conceived notions. College should be about helping students claim their callings as participants in a variety of different communities.

**Semper Reformanda:** A hallmark of the Lutheran tradition is the call to "always be reformed." As such, the college must resist the ossification of its nature. For Farrell, accepting the status quo risks negating the transformative power of education. He thus reminds us of not only the constructive task of college (to produce responsible eco-citizens) but also the deconstructive dimension (to examine, critique, and care about what, why, and how we do what we do). His aim, in particular, calls us to pay

attention to the operative and expressed values that guide a college. And understood broadly, it means shifting the nature of college in response to the urgent issues within one's context. For Farrell, the issue is the contemporary ecological crisis. But his thought also opens up the possibility for re-forming college culture to address other problems, such as income inequality, structural violence, and race and gender issues. This modeling is essential to the prophetic vocation of Lutheran higher education.

## A Natural Calling

Farrell's argument helpfully articulates the two nature(s) of college. It thereby seems fitting to conclude by re-imagining "About St. Olaf" such that it reveals an explicitly prophetic calling, particularly one with an ecological sensibility. Such a statement would claim that students are: vocationally accomplished, as in they will hear the call of nature as the place of human responsibility; ecologically dependent, as in aware of the deep ecological web that shapes their nature; and leading a life of personal involvement, as in caring about the shape of their ecological communities. Such is the nature of college.

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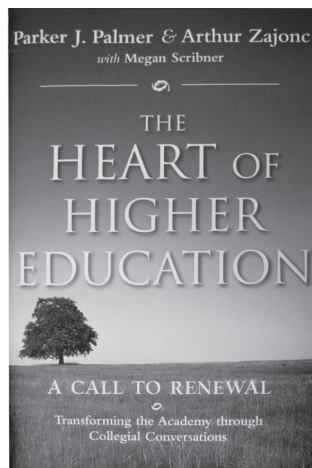
# The Courage to Change: Creating New Hearts with Palmer and Zajonc

I write from the landscape of Lent, where Christians beg for “new hearts.” The same plea rolls around at the same point in every liturgical year. Apparently, the beat of last year’s hearts goes on. Creating new hearts takes work, even for God.

Educator Parker Palmer and physicist Arthur Zajonc write from the landscape of higher education. They beg for a “new heart” in higher education; they argue that it draws its life force from educators; they propose to create new hearts through collegial conversation among educators.

The authors’ insights illumine. They practice what they preach: they are in conversation with each other throughout. More importantly, they are in conversation with an appendix of educators, showcasing experiments in integrative education at their own institutions. What objectivist pedagogy dubs “name-dropping” here emerges as the necessary complement to collegial conversation: naming one’s conversation partners. My chief critique is that too much of the book proceeds in classic academic style, defining terms, delimiting scope, identifying counter-arguments and dismissing them point by point, tackling potential challenges and dismantling them protest by protest (compare Stamm).

In this review essay, I too return to the old ways of academic peer review for a descriptive analysis of the arguments. But then, in a second, appreciative section,



I lift up the authors’ insights as pieces of a new creation. Finally, I examine one of the challenges these insights raise for the hearts of educators. A rich array of strategies in the appendix target students—not their professors. If we educators are to teach for transformation and integration, how can we teach what we don’t ourselves know? More positively: what strategies might help educators experience the integration we’re asked to teach?

## Descriptive Analysis: Breaking the Argument into Pieces

A book that commends conversation began with one. Long committed to holistic learning, The Fetzer Institute targeted higher education as a crucible for change. In a foreword to the book, program officer Mark Nepo identifies three elements of “transformational education”: educating the whole person by integrating the inner life with the outer life, actualizing individual and global awakening, and participating in compassionate communities. The “urban press of the future” (viii) demands transformational education, because cities are microcosms of global communities. How can higher education respond?

To address the question, The Fetzer Institute sponsored a conference in 2007, “Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education: Integrative Learning for Compassionate Action

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in an Interconnected World.” Two years in the planning, the conference drew over six hundred educators, administrators, student life professionals, chaplains, and students from around the world. Institutional representation ranged from high school to community colleges to four-year colleges to universities. The conference put Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc in conversation. This book is the issue of both conference and conversation.

The book presents three chapters by each of the authors followed by an appendix of individual institutional experiments in integrative education. However, the book begins with a shift in language from “transformational education” to “integrative education,” a step away from radical to more incremental change. Palmer’s keynote address forms the foundation for the first two chapters. Making a case for “integrative education,” he employs an old academic tactic: taking on the critics and dismantling their arguments one by one. He identifies five critiques: integrative education is a grab-bag of techniques with no philosophical foundations; it’s too messy; emotions have no place in the classroom; academic culture never rewards collaboration; and academics and spirituality don’t mix (chapters 1 and 2). Old ways die hard; the old heart beats on.

Yet, dismantling a traditional “objectivist education,” Palmer presents the philosophical infrastructure for a new model. Integrative education reflects the ontological reality that everything is connected. Further, it is an epistemological necessity, a pedagogical asset, and an ethical corrective. “The new sciences” and “the social field” challenge objectivist assumptions about the nature of being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology) that undergird traditional learning (pedagogy) and its moral purchase in the lives of students (ethics) (25, 32). “The new sciences” present the world as a web of relationships and dynamic processes rather than a machine that can be taken apart and studied. The very presence of an observer alters what’s being observed. Objectivity proves to be a myth. The scientist can never know things as they “really are”—she’s always implicated.

Similarly, “the social field” emphasizes that humans are social animals (Aristotle). Not only do we find identity in community, but our very existence depends on the flourishing of others: “I exist because of you,” as Desmond

Tutu put it. Living out this interdependence intentionally and in conversation creates a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Individualism proves to be a myth; we are the company we keep. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the citizen-educator and citizen-student always impact a common good for better or for worse; they’re always implicated.

“Whether they acknowledge it or not, the citizen-educator and citizen-student always impact a common good for better or for worse; they’re always implicated.”

In a final chapter, Palmer returns to an argument more reflective of objectivist pedagogy. He takes on those water-cooler and coffee pot conversations among colleagues about why integrative education will never work. We’ve all heard them, and they throw water over every new idea: “I’m a scholar; not a reformer!” “Even if we wanted to do this, professors have no power!” “I’m the only one who wants to innovate; no one would join me” (131).

To counter these protests, Palmer offers a model for fostering conversation. Not surprisingly, it comes from community organizing, reflecting his training in sociology and his experience as an organizer. Adopting the work of Marshall Ganz, fellow organizer and lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, Palmer commends a narrative model for “transformative conversation.” Participants are invited to tell first “the story of self,” the story of hurts and hopes in a way that helps deepen a commitment to integrity. Then, they relate “the story of us,” a narrative that connects personal hurts and hopes to those of others. Finally, the group narrates “the story of now,” a narrative that draws the individual and collective hopes into a narrative of action in the present context (compare Ganz). Oddly, Palmer’s chief illustration of the impact of transformative conversation comes not from the academy—or the appendix!—but from politics. Camp Obama used Ganz’s strategy to energize and train volunteers for the first campaign.

## Integrative Synthesis: Out of These Pieces, a New Creation

Zajonc's interior chapters form the heart of the book. Through narrative, example, and anecdote, he demonstrates the transformative impact of integrative education. He begins with his own story. As a student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he could not reconcile his dual passions for learning, on one hand, and for civic engagement, on the other. The press of the civil rights movement and the anti-war protests beckoned him beyond the quad. Divided between activism and study, he presented his dilemma to a physics professor. The man became a model, as he shared with this torn student his own struggle to live with integrity as a scholar and a citizen. This is Zajonc's "story of me."

His "story of us" comes decades later, when, in 1997 with five other scientists and the Dalai Lama, he explored the intersection of Buddhist philosophy and the new physics at the His Holiness' residence in Dharamsala, India. The experience gave Zajonc a glimpse of what genuine faculty conversation could be, and he has been on the hunt ever since.

Genuine conversation proves an elusive goal, perhaps more easily enjoyed outside the academy than within it. Perhaps the biggest barrier is not external constraint, but internal fear of stepping outside hard-won areas of expertise. Zajonc alludes to this in his cautionary words about interdisciplinary teaching: in itself, it is not necessarily integrative, but sometimes merely "juxtapositional." Team-teaching then reduces to "tandem-teaching," as each "expert" proffers her expertise on a common topic, with little engagement among the other experts. Students are left with multiple perspectives on a problem, but little sense of how they relate.

After he had so acutely diagnosed the balkanization within the academy, I expected a story of how a group of faculty members through genuine conversation broke out of their silos of specialization to a corporate "story of us." But Zajonc supplied instead the story of how one psychology professor at Emory University used music in her classroom to create contemplative space for her students. It's a great strategy for students, but what of their teachers? The sudden shift gave this reader whiplash, and left her wondering: what if faculty or departments

began their deliberations with music to create a common contemplative space? Would that practice move people from "me" to "we?"

Zajonc's "story of now" comes out of "the new sciences," particularly new developments in physics. As noted, the method of scientific inquiry alters the phenomena under investigation; the presence of an observer changes the experiment. Try as we might, we cannot study a mirror while ignoring the image reflected back at us. The reflected image becomes part of the experiment. Further, reality is not summative, but relational. Synergies between the parts and the whole, between the observer and the phenomena observed, combine to create a world.

"Contemplative pedagogy commends the practice of attention, which demands 'the time to look, the patience to hear what the material has to say to you, the openness to let it come to you.'"

Zajonc defers to the framework Palmer introduced to unpack the implications of this "story of now." An ontology of being becomes an ontology of interbeing because reality is relational. An epistemology of love seeks not simply to investigate how we know other objects, but works to behold the other as a subject whose existence cannot be separated from our own. Contemplative pedagogy commends the practice of attention, which demands "the time to look, the patience to 'hear what the material has to say to you,' the openness to 'let it come to you.' Above all, one must have 'a feeling for the organism'" (28, quoting Keller 198). Finally, what emerges is an ethics of compassion rather than an ethics of rights and duties.

Zajonc thereby puts some meat on the conceptual skeleton that Palmer develops in his initial chapters. Absent his contribution, the volume would be a call for experiential education, with little actual experience involved. It would be a call for integrating mind and heart that only scratched the surface; it would be a push for bringing theory and practice together, where no one's

hands got dirty; it would be an unimaginative call for imagination. The book begins with theory, continues with the practical reflections of a physicist, and concludes with an appendix of actual on-the-ground strategies. That old heart beats strong.

## Beyond Conversation

Language runs in a straight line; experience doesn't. Neither does integrative education. What would the book be like that began, not in the ionosphere with conceptual frameworks and counter-arguments, but on the ground, with strategy and story? We might be moved to ask other questions: To change the heart of higher education, what strategies do we need—and for whom? Whose stories need to be told?

The strategies in the appendix, whether designed for curricular or co-curricular purposes, all target the student. There are some brilliant ones: using music to create a contemplative space for students to enter; service learning opportunities, some of them suggested by students; civic engagement projects and the undeniable contributions they make; study abroad trips that foster intercultural competence. But if changing the heart of higher education lies in changing the hearts of its *educators*, what strategies effect *that* transformation? And until we change the hearts of our *educators*, they teach an integrative pedagogy that they have not experienced. How can we teach what we do not know?

“To change the heart of higher education, what strategies do we need—and for whom? Whose stories need to be told?”

I'm persuaded by Palmer and Zajonc's arguments and illustrations: we reach for a knowing that goes beyond books, articles, or pedagogical strategies. We need to know integrative education deep in our bones. But again, what are the practices of integrative education *for educators*? Let me give two strategies—with stories!—each with implications for Lutheran higher education.

### **Strategy 1: Faculty Formation Groups**

As part of a follow-up grant for a Wabash Mid-Career Colloquy (2003-2005), I proposed a faculty formation group for my colleagues at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. We'd long been teaching formation groups for our students. At one point, they were called "Integrative Growth Groups," then, simply "Formation Groups." But every faculty taught one, and none of us had ever been in one. We'd had several new hires; we were in that terminal season of curricular revision; it seemed a propitious time to think together about what we were up to in these "Formation Groups." If my follow-up grant had a thesis, it was this: faculty doing formation need to be in formation themselves. All I had to do is figure out what that looked like.

We committed to meeting for a catered dinner every month throughout the academic year. Each time, one of us would open with a "best practice" we'd used in our own student Formation Group. Then, two faculty would present "vocational autobiographies," short 2000-3000 word papers we circulated in advance that explored how we'd been called to our craft, what the challenges were over the course of our calling, what called us still. We closed with a common meal.

A few brief observations: First, the opening "best practices" often took as much time as the discussion of the vocational autobiographies. Doing as a faculty the spiritual practices we'd used in our student Formation Groups proved enormously illuminating. We not only built a catalogue of practices for use with our student groups, but we also worshiped together in ways that simply didn't happen during our community liturgies. To borrow the language of Palmer and Zajonc, we created a common contemplative space that informed the discussion that followed.

Second, the vocational autobiographies were stunning. We packed so much care and imagination into them, I wondered if we were all hungry for the invitation to write in this more expressive genre. We learned something new about colleagues we'd been teaching alongside for years. I can only conclude that teachers who love teaching also love writing and talking about why they love teaching.

Third, the fact that faculty too were required to attend Formation Group earned us "street cred" among the students. They were, of course, enormously curious about what went on in the Faculty Formation Group, but they

also took more seriously their own participation in the whole process of formation. We were all working toward that elusive goal of “integration.” Whatever it was, we were all in it together.

Fourth, the meal was important. It was as extravagant as budget could support and imagination could conjure. But eating together, we stepped out of business and into conviviality.

Finally, along with the work of curricular revision we undertook at our regularly scheduled faculty meetings, we faculty reached a point where we were no longer talking about “my course in *the* curriculum” but “*this* course in *our* curriculum.” When we noticed the shift in language, we were all caught up short. We’d broken through from “the story of me” to “the story of us,” to use the language of transformational narrative. It was a holy moment.

### ***Transferability to Lutheran Higher Education***

A strategy like this would transplant easily into the soil of Lutheran higher education. For starters, whatever their religious background, faculty at a Lutheran institution are used to talking about teaching as calling rather than simply as a career or a platform for scholarship. It would be easy to gather a group of colleagues across the disciplines and around the college and ask each to prepare a brief piece on how they see their craft: what called them to teaching, what challenges they encounter along the way, what holds them still.

As for the spirituality component, I know that many of my colleagues at Augsburg College do this in their classrooms, without calling it a “best practice” and without thinking of it as “creating contemplative space.” What are the centering practices we do with our students that we might profitably share with our colleagues?

Cap the whole discussion with a catered meal, and you have a Faculty Formation Group. Palmer and Zajonc bring together the sciences and the humanities. At St. Olaf College, Kaethe Schwehn and DeAne Lagerquist brought together faculty and administrators from across the liberal arts institution to write a series of essays on their callings (see Schwehn), even if the authors worked largely on their own. At my institution, the synergy sparks between the liberal arts and the professional studies

faculty. We are giving each other a new language for thinking about what a “practical liberal education” looks like in the twenty-first century.

### ***Strategy 2: The Ignatian Colleagues Program***

Several educators working in Jesuit institutions, lay and religious, young and old, got together a few years ago to wrestle with a pressing issue: how could they pass on the charisms of Jesuit education to a generation of faculty, staff, and administrators who would certainly not all be Jesuit, probably not even Roman Catholic, possibly not even Christian? With the encouragement of the Association of Jesuit Colleagues and Universities (AJCU), an association of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, they formed the Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP), directed by Ed Peck and run out of John Carroll University (see “About the ICP”).

The Ignatian Colleagues Program is basically boot camp for up-and-coming new administrators and faculty leaders at Jesuit colleges and universities, taking them through mini-Jesuit novitiate. Each institution sends a cohort of faculty, staff, and administrators to an opening cohort, where they are introduced to the charisms of Jesuit education and form learning communities that are mixed by institution and discipline. These learning communities spend a semester doing on-line course work in the history of Jesuit education and meeting periodically by Skype or conference call to check in and discuss assignments.

The next phase of the program involves an immersion trip to El Salvador or Nicaragua that is undertaken as pilgrimage and engaged according to an “action-reflection” model. (For connections between immersion trips and the ancient practice of pilgrimage, see Fullam.) The president of the Jesuit University of San Francisco, Fr. Stephen Privett, identifies the importance of the immersion experience this way: “The underlying question of higher education today should be: ‘How does what our institutions are doing with 1 percent of the world who are our students affect the other 99 percent? What is our role in helping our students be humanly in this world?’” (Privett).

The next phase of ICP involves doing an eight day retreat at a Jesuit retreat center. The retreat typically focuses on the life of Jesus as outlined in *The Spiritual Exercises* of



Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, but the program adapts to the individual spiritual orientation. I asked the Muslim director of the nursing program at Seattle University what she did on her retreat, and she replied: “I was happy to learn about the life of Jesus.” A Jew teaching in the business department at Regis University said he worked with his director on the life of Moses. Basically, the flexible format of the *Exercises* draws on the senses to invite people to imagine themselves into the life of Jesus, seeing the sights, smelling the smells, and so forth. The entire experience encourages busy faculty, staff, and administrators to find a practice of prayer that works for them.

Finally, people from the same institution join together for an action project that engages with a particular issue they’ve identified on campus. A group of colleagues at Xavier University in Cincinnati put together a dictionary for new faculty and staff, “Do You Speak Ignatian?” The book used wit and humor to introduce newcomers to the distinctive way of speaking about Jesuit mission and identity. Another group at Boston College formed a Task Force for High Financial Need Students called the Montserrat Project.

Each cohort runs for eighteen months; participants are selected and sponsored by their colleges and universities. Each new cohort is mentored by on-campus faculty and staff from prior cohorts. Not all of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States participate, but those that do have developed a critical mass of faculty, staff, and administrators who understand and value Jesuit mission, even though they do not necessarily share the Jesuit and Catholic identity.

### ***Transferability to Lutheran Higher Education***

The separation of mission and identity seems important to faith-based institutions. Faculty and staff can share the mission of an institution without sharing—or feeling like they have to share—the identity (VanZanten). What are the charisms of Lutheran higher education? How do we pass them on to educators who may not be Lutheran—indeed, may not even be Christian?

At the 2009 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference, I identified what seemed to me four important charisms of Lutheran higher education: a commitment to flexible, responsive institutions by virtue of our response to be

“always in the process of reforming” (*semper reformanda*); a spirit of critical inquiry grounded in the freedom of a Christian; the call to see the other as *neighbor*, not stranger, enemy, or Other; and finally, entrance into a world of need as a “priest” within a “priesthood of all believers”—with the primary role of a priest as caring for the poor (Stortz). What I did not present was a program for inviting a new generation of Lutheran faculty, staff, and administrators into this unique way of thinking about mission. What might that invitation look like? What would be the Lutheran analogue to the Ignatian Colleagues Program?

“What are the charisms of Lutheran higher education? How do we pass them on to educators who may not be Lutheran—indeed, may not even be Christian?”

We have some of the key pieces already in place: an annual Vocation of a Lutheran College (VOLC) program targeting key faculty, staff, and administrators that studies a variety of pressing issues through multi-disciplinary perspectives; a cohort of teaching theologians that meets annually, exploring at times the same issues as the VOLC from a distinctively Lutheran theological perspective; and the Lutheran Education Conference of North America (LECNA), a consortium of 40 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, similar to the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). We lack neither the opportunities and venues nor the resources.

Possibly we lack only the imagination—and the desire for new hearts. But, again, how will we pass on our charisms to a new millennium that so desperately needs them?

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## Interfaith Understanding at ELCA Colleges and Universities: A Working Conference for Campus Cohort Teams

June 1-3, 2014

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- **Bishop Elizabeth Eaton**, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA
- **Kathryn M. Lohre**, Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, ELCA
- **Jason A. Mahn**, Associate Professor of Religion, Augustana College, and Editor of *Intersections*
- **ELCA College and University Presidents**

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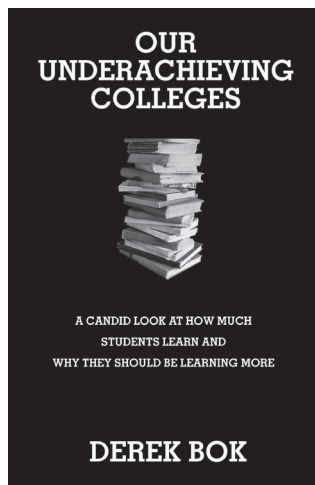
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DAVID RATKE

# Learning Across Campus: Hearing Bok's Call to Conversation

If anything, Derek Bok's book, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More* is more current today than when it was published in 2006. Bok is worth listening to. While Bok's entire career has been at Harvard University, where he was also the former president (1971–1991), much of what he has to say is relevant to the readers of *Intersections*.

The argument of *Our Underachieving Colleges* is, in many ways, summed in its subtitle. At the time of its publication much of the criticism leveled at American institutions of higher education had to do with their politicization ("colleges and universities have become enamored with left-wing political and social causes!"), with the decline of the liberal arts and the rise of professional degree programs, with the upsurge of postmodern theories (especially in the humanities), and with the lack of a moral or philosophical compass. Bok suggests that these critiques are too narrow. There needs to be, he argues, "a serious look at how much students are learning" and at "what is actually being accomplished in college classrooms" (Bok 8). Actually much of this research has been conducted. The problem is that nobody has taken a long, hard look at the whole forest. Much of the research and reflection has focused on individual trees. Bok aims to remedy that problem. He proposes that we examine



and consider undergraduate education more holistically and deliberately as well as dialogically. That is, more conversation about the big picture and how the moving parts work together is needed. Of the moving parts (teaching, student life, international or global awareness, moral development, etc.), Bok is most invested in what actually goes on in the classroom although he does not overlook other areas of undergraduate education and the undergraduate experience.

## Historical Perspective

Bok acknowledges that there is much that is true in most critiques of American higher education. At the same time, he argues that history "offers weak support at best for the reports of a decline in the quality of undergraduate education. Loose allegations to that effect have little foundation in fact but instead rest on fanciful visions of some previous golden age" (29). Students "have always arrived on campus deficient in their ability to communicate" (67).

To find an era in which colleges and universities perhaps did *not* struggle with these concerns, you would have to go to the period prior to the Civil War when only the wealthiest could reasonably afford to attend college. Bok notes that these institutions often aimed to build

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character and train the intellect. Colleges, he writes, were “united around a classical curriculum aimed at mental discipline and character building.” That may sound enticing and attractive to those of us who teach in the liberal arts. However, he also notes that teaching in this era was characterized by “student recitations, ancient languages, and rigid disciplinary codes” (24). This hardly seems like the kind of education any of us would advocate. Indeed there were numerous complaints about

“Bok’s point is simply that the problems we face in the twenty-first century are not new.”

lecturers who were inaudible, who relied on outdated and yellowed notes, who were unresponsive or unavailable to students, and so forth. That could be me talking about some of my colleagues!

Bok’s point is simply that the problems we face in the twenty-first century are not new. In fact, in many ways they are the same challenges, including: the need for quality instruction and a common sense of purpose for higher education, increasing specialization to the point of esoterism and irrelevance in both teaching and research, and a rise in vocational or professional education. Bok doesn’t intend to pooh-pooh these concerns and challenges. But if things haven’t really become worse, can we say that they’ve become better? Many of us would be hard pressed to answer “yes.”

## Faculty Attitudes

Bok addresses the accusation that faculty members are more interested in research than teaching. He notes that some faculty members are, but there is considerable research that suggests that faculty find teaching more satisfying.

My own sense is that it depends. My experience at Lenoir-Rhyne suggests that it depends partly on the department and on the individual faculty member. We have some departments that emphasize teaching as part of our activity. In the School of Humanities and

Social Sciences, we begin our monthly meetings with a “teaching moment” in which a faculty member shares a problem, idea, or strategy as a way to highlight teaching.

I also know that there are a number of professors who attend to their research and scholarship at the expense of teaching. Some of this, I think, has to do with their socialization in graduate school at research institutions with mentors who were rewarded for excellence in research. How many of us did our graduate work at institutions where success was measured by success in the classes we taught as teaching or graduate assistants? How many of us were measured by our success in classes that focused on developing undergraduate teaching skills? How many of us even took classes that trained us to be teachers of undergraduates?

The socialization of professors is important in another respect. Many of us, particularly in the arts and sciences, love our disciplines. And we expect our students to share that same love if not for the discipline then at least for learning. But many students come to college for the opportunities it brings for providing a more secure career and future. To be vulgar, students come to college to make more money. It’s an investment. As Bok puts it, “useful skills matter more than ever” (36).

## Skills Students Seek

Students are looking for courses and majors that will help them achieve material success: “Most students (and the organizations that employ them) are increasingly preoccupied by a need for skills—not just critical thinking and writing skills but oral communication, listening, quantitative reasoning, and ... interpersonal competence” (223; see also 36). Students look for majors that will clearly and intentionally help them with these skills. The problem, however, is that “Arts and Sciences professors ... tend to be wary of these [skills] and often balk at including them in the curriculum” (36; see also 251). I disagree.

This may indeed be the case at some institutions. But I don’t think it’s the case at Lenoir-Rhyne or at most—if not all—of the institutions where readers of *Intersections* work. At Lenoir-Rhyne, our core curriculum emphasizes these very skills. We have a six credit hour First Year Seminar course which highlights written and oral communication.

Many of the instructors of these courses make extensive use of group projects and activities intended to develop interpersonal skills. Our core curriculum requires that students take a “global learning” elective. Students are required to do service learning and community service which seek to develop abilities to communicate with people from other cultures as well as in leadership. In the “teaching moments” that begin our meetings in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences that I mentioned above, often the topic has to do with precisely these topics. I’m proud of our curriculum because it intentionally and consciously addresses these skills. Our achievement in developing these skills is still a work in progress, but we’re committed to it. Moreover, in all the years I’ve attended the Vocation of a Lutheran College conferences, I’ve heard people from other Lutheran institutions wrestle with and address these same challenges. In fact, often the themes of these convocations are centered on these very challenges. I know that Lenoir-Rhyne is not alone among colleges in thinking hard about these skills and how students learn them.

“Church-related institutions still ‘attempt to teach their students to think about ethical questions of the kind that commonly arise in private and professional life.’”

One of the important themes in *Our Underachieving Colleges* is the importance of faculty dialogue, especially across disciplinary boundaries. I’ll come back to this later. First, I want to examine Bok’s argument that students are interested in ethics and values and the failure of colleges to address ethics and values. Bok freely admits that church-related institutions still “attempt to teach their students to think about ethical questions of the kind that commonly arise in private and professional life” (41). He argues further that “most colleges ... fail to make any deliberate, collective effort to prepare their students to be active, knowledgeable citizens in a democracy, even though civic apathy and ignorance of public affairs are widely regarded as serious

problems in America.” I can’t comment on the reality at state-funded institutions. However, that Bok says that church-related institutions are the exception in the United States is worth considering. ELCA colleges and universities consider ethics and train for active citizenship pretty well. I know that many of our institutions work hard at getting the word out that we care about developing ethics and values. Of course, sometimes our message falls on deaf ears. Or sometimes it falls on willing ears, but, to paraphrase a parable that most of us know well, this message falls among the thorny weeds where it is choked out by other competing demands for prospective students’ desires: attractive residence halls and recreational facilities, competitive athletic programs, vibrant social life, appealing location, and cost. Given the economies that most ELCA colleges must work with, we are hard pressed to compete on all those fronts.

## Core Curriculum and Majors

Much of the debate within colleges about the skills just mentioned focuses on the general education curriculum and how it achieves those goals. This is wrongheaded, says Bok. The majority of the courses students take often will be in their major. The proportions that Bok mentions don’t altogether mesh with the reality at Lenoir-Rhyne, but I think his point is worth considering. Students can’t write effectively? Have them take another composition course. Students lack quantitative analysis skills? Have them take another math course. Students lack oral communication skills? Have them take a speech class. You get the idea. Sometimes that has been the solution that Lenoir-Rhyne has resorted to. They take a computer literacy placement test in their first semester. If they don’t pass, they take a class (really a tutorial). When students lack knowledge or skill in some silo or another, we have them take a class in that silo.

At the same time, at Lenoir-Rhyne we have attempted to do things a little differently. The six credit First Year Seminar course that I mentioned above takes three credit hours that formerly belonged to composition so that students can develop writing skills in a class that matches their academic interest. All First Year Seminar courses have different titles and content ranging from “friendship, love, and film” to “forgiveness” to “racism

and other controversies” to “the science of magic.” Our core curriculum seeks to teach these skills and content areas in holistic ways. Sometimes we’re successful.

Bok makes a further point about expecting the general education curriculum to fulfill all these objectives and outcomes. Too often majors and concentrations aren’t held accountable for developing these skills in students. Is there any reason students can’t write in science classes? Is there any reason that students can’t present their work orally in their majors? Is there any reason that students can’t consider the ethical and moral implications of questions and challenges and innovations within their majors—whether they are science or business or nursing students?

“Is there any reason that students can’t consider the ethical and moral implications of questions and challenges and innovations within their majors—whether they are science or business or nursing students?”

To do this, Bok argues, faculty would have to have ongoing and intentional conversations across disciplinary boundaries. Recently I was in a meeting in which faculty from program X wanted to tell faculty Y what courses should be in major Y. Colleagues were talking to each other across disciplinary boundaries. This was, in its way, a good start. Unfortunately the conversation wasn’t about skills such as critical thinking and so forth, but rather about which courses from silo X the students in major Y needed. A more fruitful and constructive conversation might have taken place had the topic been about skills. Instead, an argument ensued in which disciplinary territory was at stake.

To be sure, these are hard conversations to have. Faculty at Lenoir-Rhyne teach four courses per term, which doesn’t leave them much time for conversations like this. After all, they have committee meetings to attend, assessment plans and reports to write, and student papers to grade. If the conversations take place

at all, they do so when the clock is running. They occur during the extremely compressed hour of a school meeting when there is other business to take care of. They also occur institutionally during the end of year “workshop”—which used to be called a retreat. The change in nomenclature is telling. Retreats suggests an easy-going refuge from the busyness of academic and institutional life. Workshops are about getting stuff done. People who know me as a chair know that I’m all about getting stuff done. However, even I recognize the need for Sabbaths and the valuable time and space they offer for unfettered creative reflection. They’re also valuable for spending time outside our disciplinary (or administrative) silos with people who have left their own silos. The needed conversations simply won’t occur unless lovingly tended and cared for like a gardener cares for a garden. They take time and commitment.

## Extracurriculum

Bok notes that for many students the defining moments of their undergraduate experience often take place outside the classroom (52). These moments occur while acting in drama productions, belonging to a fraternity or sorority, participating in student government or other campus organization, or competing with athletic teams. That can be a bitter pill to swallow for those of us who are professors. But faculty members overlook the importance of the extracurriculum at the peril of student development and formation.

At Lenoir-Rhyne, we pay attention to the extracurriculum. My sense is that many other ELCA colleges do the same—Augsburg College especially comes to mind. Students are required to earn “convocation credit” in order to graduate. Such credit can be earned by participating in these extracurricular activities as well as attending chapel, doing community service, and attending special events on campus such as lectures and concerts.

Bok makes the further point that faculty should be involved in such activities. Unfortunately, many faculty “equate what an undergraduate education should accomplish with what professors can achieve in their classrooms” (60). I wouldn’t say that this is the case at Lenoir-Rhyne. Many faculty members are advisors to



student organizations. Of course, some are more active than others. Furthermore, at Lenoir-Rhyne, faculty are on the convocation committee which considers many, but not all, extracurricular activities. That being said, I think that student life is a world about which most faculty have only a superficial knowledge. I would also say that many student life staff members don't have deep knowledge about the aims, objectives and outcomes of student learning. More campus-wide conversations and dialogue between these groups would surely open some eyes.

## Concluding Thoughts

*Our Underachieving Colleges* is wide-ranging and ambitious book. Bok examines many issues, but, as I stated at the outset, has two important aims: (1) to think about undergraduate education holistically, and (2) to encourage dialogue and conversation across disciplinary boundaries and the entire campus (student life, athletics, libraries, institutional research, etc.).

While at least some of his accusations seem misplaced in institutions like those represented by the readers of *Intersections*, there is much to chew on. Lutheran colleges

and universities, in my experience, are doing much to address the challenges that Bok examines. Often our success is limited by our resources—human, financial, and temporal. Certainly at Lenoir-Rhyne, while it is in no danger of closing its doors any time soon, these limitations often mean that many of our conversations are about whatever is on the immediate horizon. In our case, these conversations are also limited in that we have three “main campuses”: an undergraduate campus in Hickory, a graduate center in Asheville, and a seminary campus in Columbia, South Carolina. Distance is a challenge!

Our faculty, staff, and administrators are frequently stretched beyond the boundaries of human capacity to attend to all that needs attention. The call to commit and dedicate ourselves to conversation and dialogue about a holistic vision of undergraduate education is one that we've already committed to, but also one that deserves recommitting ourselves.

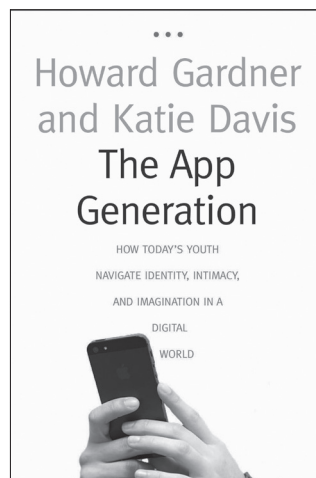
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# The Information Deluge: Navigating the Digital Age with Recent Scholars

As denizens of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves inundated with information, data, and opinion at every turn—in our email correspondence, in our exposure to news, and in our online social relationships. We often find ourselves perplexed about which information sources are trustworthy, about what the data means, and about the boundaries between public and personal information online. For many of us, this seems to be a uniquely anxious time.

In the last few years, a number of authors have addressed this issue of information overload as it affects interpersonal information sharing, individual reading habits, and undergraduate research habits. While everyone in the digital age is dealing with the consequences of changes in the information environment, those of us working in higher education must acknowledge the impact of information overload while striving to build good critical thinking skills and research habits. As an academic librarian, I worry about these issues while helping students learn about information literacy—teaching them to apply thoughtful evaluation of the sources and of the content of information. Looking at several recently published books on the subject, we see that “information overload,” while not new, can now be all-engulfing, and so requires our careful navigation.



## A Sea of Information: Navigating with Ann M. Blair

Worries about having too much information to absorb are actually quite old. In her meticulously documented *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, Ann M. Blair looks to history and finds numerous complaints that there were too many texts to read, and that finding the correct, most trustworthy texts was becoming increasingly difficult. Many thinkers like Seneca

thought it best to limit what one read to the authoritative canon, preferably re-reading the “good” texts in lieu of reading a new author’s work (Blair 21). As early as 1000 in the Islamic world, scholars felt students were not becoming properly educated because they were depending on compendia for their studies (27). Chinese scholars from 1000 to the 1100s thought students’ dependence on written texts instead of on their memories meant an inevitable diminution of knowledge—and that un-corrected errors in printing would result in increased errors in understanding (32). Faced with copious text, others, like Pliny, decided that limiting what one reads was not the solution to information overload; rather, organizing information was the key (21).

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The aforementioned compendia were actually early attempts to control the flood of information in a manageable way. Blair documents numerous tools and techniques to accomplish information management. Summarizing and compiling were developed in ancient times, and “literary miscellanies” were produced in the second century by Latin, Greek, and Christian writers (20). Note-taking began in the ancient world, and Constantine found value in arranging notes and quotations by theme to increase ease of access for users of texts (21, 28). In eleventh century China, Confucian scholars began putting together anthologies, commentaries, and compilations to assist memory and to help those taking required civil service exams (*CliffsNotes* and *SparkNotes* are nothing new, it seems) (28). In the western world, many readers began to keep personal *florilegium*, in which they recorded “the best” passages from the works they were reading. Though these personal collections were originally intended to ameliorate a scarcity of texts (so that a reader might keep a copy of those best passages, even though required to return a book to its owner), *florilegia* would evolve into useful tools to deal with too much information (34). We inherit many of these and many other organizational tools, and use them to shore up our research today. However, the anxiety of the prior age seems to persist.

## Life on the Shoal: Worrying with Nicholas Carr

Most authors discussing the impacts of the Internet and the World Wide Web harken back to the abrupt change in the production and dissemination of texts in Gutenberg’s day as precedent (Tooby 60). Both these old and new technologies support a democratization of information by increasing access while lowering the price of access. However, with the beginning of the digital age comes complaint and worry about too much information to absorb too quickly. Nicholas Carr, in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, covers some of the same historical eras as does Blair, but he quickly moves on to describe consequences of the present flood of digital information, including observed information-behaviors, overviews of neurological studies, and comparisons of pre- and post-digital interactions with texts. In doing so, he chronicles complaints being repeated

in academic circles: researchers no longer read whole books; rather, they skim texts and hyperlink their way to cherry-pick passages for their papers (Carr 9). Non-linear reading, which has become a characteristic of researching in digital environments, challenges our comprehension and shortens our attention span (9, 63). Texts, to be made searchable, are inevitably broken up, bereft of contextual cues (165). While attention is decreased, lower-level mental skills such as hand-eye coordination are reinforced (139), increasing the likelihood that these areas of the brain will

“Non-linear reading, which has become a characteristic of researching in digital environments, challenges our comprehension and shortens our attention span.”

soon supersede those areas used for extended reading (35). Critics, including Carr, disparage both the fleeting nature of our contact with in-depth information (Carr 9) and the permanency of postings in an information environment with seemingly infinite memory to store what is best forgotten or forgiven over time (Mayer-Schönberger 118). In analyzing the difficulties surrounding information production, access, and use in our time, critics have looked at both the information environment and the information user.

The information environment has become both too simple and too complex, most critics charge. Many difficult concepts or diverse resources become “homogenized” on the web: journal articles, book chapters, textbook materials, newspaper articles, and digitized diary entries all have a similar “look” when researchers no longer have the visual cues of the print world to signal the origins of a resource (Bawden 181). This homogenization encourages a “shallow” understanding of the original material, as researchers grab bits of information here and there, not recognizing the bits are far-removed from their origins (186). The information environment has also become too complex for most users. Researchers struggle to find a coherent argument when faced with a wide diversity of perspectives, and this diversity comes to them through myriad formats: blogs, email, YouTube, and other social technologies. Many information

seekers come to see much of what they find as equally valid or acceptable. While we librarians know they should be evaluating a source thoroughly to determine the author's credentials, on the egalitarian web, this is often a step information-users skip (182).

"The distractibility that results from always being 'connected,' hearing texts 'ping' at all hours, obsessing over social media interactions, or worrying that those last few tweets haven't been re-tweeted enough will ultimately diminish the quality of researchers' work."

Researchers become caught up in the tide. The consequent feelings of frustration and confusion will often result in what some experts call "information pathologies," including information avoidance, information "withdrawal," "satisficing" (accepting whatever is on the first two pages of the search results list, for example), multi-tasking, accepting or creating an interruption-prone work space, and increased impatience (Bawden 183, 185). In this context, one main conclusion of critics is that we can no longer discretely separate the use of social technologies from academic work in college. The distractibility that results from always being "connected," hearing texts "ping" at all hours, obsessing over social media interactions, or worrying that those last few tweets haven't been re-tweeted enough will ultimately diminish the quality of researchers' work because they have not allowed themselves to be absorbed in the task.

## The Flood of Memory: Learning from Viktor Mayer-Schönberger

Even while we worry about researchers' current information-related behaviors, a number of authors encourage educators to think about the future consequences of such substantial digital immersion. In addition to the worries voiced by Carr and others, some authors have found deeper

concerns regarding power and control within community structures. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, in *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, notes the dangers of an Internet where information can be "sent out" for public viewing, but can never really be withdrawn. Mayer-Schönberger approaches the power of the Internet from a different vantage point: instead of touting the great advantage of gigabytes of information at one's finger tips, he explores the disadvantages of never being able to forget any of those bytes. His book provides a brief context of those aids for memory developed early in human history, and then moves to an in-depth discussion of Internet memory capacity and structure. While some of the specific details about file sizes and digital storage have become dated since his book was published in 2009, his explanations of the digital information ecosystem layers are key to understanding how we are all participating in a huge information shift. The majority of the book focuses on the nature of memory, its uses and abuses, in the Internet age. Many of his observations compel us to think about our values and our relationship to information, both as commodity and tool.

Mayer-Schönberger reveals that our decisions about what to keep and what to let expire are central to our movement forward in the digital age. He articulates numerous concerns about the staying-power of what we place on the Web. Be it personal information, such as an embarrassing tweet, or intellectually fraudulent material, such as the now-debunked "study" that claimed vaccines cause autism, texts posted to the Internet can then be used by anyone for any purpose—retaining control over the material is next to impossible (Mayer-Schönberger 101). Another fundamental cause for concern is the increased likelihood of "group-think" about societal structures (121) or, in college, about research ideas. A very large bibliometrics study of citations in scholars' papers revealed that increased digitization of scholarly articles doesn't mean people use a wider variety of resources. Counterintuitively, the same articles were cited repeatedly—most likely due to the auto-filtering that some search engines and databases are programmed to do, so that the "popular" articles always rise to the top (Carr 217). The consequence is a narrowing of intellectual exploration. Indeed, all forms of exploration may be at risk.

Having been born into sharing so much of life online, young people are more likely to avoid posting their true

feelings about a topic, lest their friends disagree. They are more likely to avoid a controversial topic at which a future employer might look askance, and they are more likely to assume that everyone should self-censor as a matter of habit (Mayer-Schönberger 109). When digital information cannot be controlled, even by the poster of that information, and where digital memory never forgets, the resulting atmosphere of caution “stifles societal debate” (127). William Powers, in acknowledging that a main function of the constant use of online platforms is to avoid ever being alone, points out that “deep, private reading and thought have begun to feel subversive” (135).

“This dystopian air of caution and self-censorship is completely antithetical to the Lutheran tradition of reform.”

This dystopian air of caution and self-censorship is completely antithetical to the Lutheran tradition of reform. Hans-Peter Grosshans, in an essay in *The Global Lutheran: A Theologian for Modern Times*, emphasizes the need for reason, but in the context of freedom of ideas:

We can learn from Luther that a right use of reason in today’s world is an exercise of freedom. When we are confronted with the task of solving the many problems we have on a daily basis in the various areas of life, we find that preestablished answers, laws, norms, values or ways to order the world are not helpful or applicable. In these instances, we can appeal to reason to develop in freedom our own answers, laws, norms, values, or ways of ordering the world... (183)

Most authors arguing about the impact of life-online hover somewhere between an instrumentalist approach and a determinist position. Instrumentalists argue that Internet “technology enables [pre-existing] behaviors, but it doesn’t cause them” (Shirky 98); platforms in the digital world just provide a space where people can express their needs to be social and to communicate (190). Determinists claim technology has become so pervasive, so intricately

entwined with the information that it delivers, that the two cannot be separated (Carr 207) and that the pairing has come to “embod[y] an intellectual ethic” (45). Though their emphasis is on moving forward from this debate, Gardner and Davis concede, at least implicitly, to the determinist argument—young people submerged in waves of technology cannot help being influenced. Whether we adopt the instrumentalist or the determinist position, our commitment to teaching the liberal arts in the Lutheran tradition of reform urges us to claim the changes before us and shape them.

## Plotting a Course: Moving Forward with Gardner and Davis

Howard Gardner and Katie Davis advance the discussion of information overload beyond a merely descriptive analysis toward a proactive set of options. In *The App Generation: How Today’s Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World*, the authors suggest a new metaphor for young people’s interactions with the digital information environment. They describe two options for our present use of technology: we may use technology to restrict our choices (and become app-dependent) or to support our creativity and exploration (and thus, become app-enabled). Couched in a substantive discussion of theories of consciousness and original research on creativity, Gardner and Davis provide a framework that acknowledges current concerns and prepares us to move forward.

“Students entering college now will have spent most of their lives negotiating virtual space for their public personas alongside their fundamental understandings of themselves.”

In their development of the app metaphor, Gardner and Davis confirm the deep connection of students’ social behaviors and academic habits in the digital environment. The authors acknowledge that the mixing of self-perception, digital tools, and information use does point to worrying trends. Almost a third of students today feel “overwhelmed”

by all that is required of them in their first year of college (Gardner and Davis 77), and most students are adding these first-year stresses to an already-packed schedule. Students entering college now will have spent most of their lives negotiating virtual space for their public personas alongside their fundamental understandings of themselves. The result is an odd mixture of self-focus (69) and a strong tendency to objectify the self (66). The list of accomplishments, internships, and service projects educators often marvel at can be a reflection of this need to project a certain image of self—and the time devoted to creating this persona has left many students little time for deep reflection on their own values or core identities (74).

“Liberal arts colleges will be significant actors in counteracting the current negative trends in the digital information environment.”

This lack of reflection may, in turn, result in an inability to engage deeply with class discussion of texts. Gardner and Davis observe young people working hard to avoid vulnerability (so, young people would rather text than call, and they feign lack of interest in important matters like developing personal relationships). This translates, the authors argue, into an unwillingness to take intellectual risks (103, 141). Ultimately, the authors conclude that more young people today are app-dependent than app-enabled (45), and thus score lower on the Torrence Test of Creative Thinking than previous generations. In measurements over the last twenty years, the authors note declines in: the ability to come up with several ideas at once, in-depth thinking, creating original ideas, employing a range of reactions (including humor and passion), and maintaining curiosity (127-128).

For educators encountering these deficits, Gardner and Davis urge embracing technologies that enable open-ended, creative thinking rather than ones which reinforce dependent, circumscribed conclusions. The authors provide examples of several technologies which encourage original ideas, ones which allow students to create their own knowledge in a constructivist manner, and ones which can appeal to multiple forms of intelligence (Gardner and

Davis 142-43, 180-81). Though also the domain of families, communities, and K12 educators, liberal arts colleges, Gardner and Davis emphasize, will be significant actors in counteracting the current negative trends in the digital information environment. This in-person and immersive undergraduate education comes at a transformative time for students (175-76).

## Around Prexy's Pond, or, Community of Practice at Concordia College

Part of the Mission statement of Concordia College in preparing to send forth “thoughtful and informed men and women” is to embrace Luther’s curiosity and sense of wonder, where there is “freedom to search for truth, with nothing off limits for inquiry and critique.” Faculty members create many opportunities to help students explore what it is to be an engaged citizen of the dawning digital age. I will speak primarily of projects I have helped with in my role as librarian. We see many of these research anxieties expressed by students in the library and classrooms. Librarians support students in their work, helping students find resources for their projects and listening to their worries, their brainstorming, and their evaluation of sources. Because we have a robust program of Information Literacy instruction, many students feel comfortable approaching a librarian with questions and requests. This comfort creates opportunities for moments of person-to-person interaction that Gardner and Davis recommend.

Because we are a small institution, we have flexibility to try smaller assignments that allow students to do hands-on learning, often with collaboration across disciplines. In many departments, librarians and faculty members work together to create stair-stepped assignments for library research within a course; this breaking up of a project into manageable pieces helps students feel more in control of the research process. For a number of classes, students are asked to work mostly with primary sources; this reduces research anxiety because fewer secondary sources are required. Using primary sources exercises students’ critical thinking skills and emphasizes evaluation of the source content; both activities help mitigate the “shallow” understanding of information that Carr laments.



Intuiting Gardner and Davis' idea of an app-enabling use of technology, a number of faculty members have conjoined high-level evaluation and interpretation of primary sources with use of several open-access digital tools, such as *Omeka* and *TimelineJS*. This kind of assignment affords students the opportunity to look at information structures from the point of view of information creation. In building online exhibits for others, they need to think about information access, about the role of metadata in quality control, and about the decisions needed to provide good information via the Internet. For the *Omeka* assignment, students were also asked to think about rights management for their work, increasing their understanding and control over their public persona on the web. In history classes, information-creation considerations overlay the historical interpretation required as a part of the discipline, and students see professors, archivists, and librarians working together as a team to help support the assignment's success.

If, as instructors, we can adopt Gardner and Davis' positive approach to the changes before us, bringing Luther's passion and curiosity with us, our role as a small liberal arts college can be as an anticipatory community, ready and able to help students feel more confident of their work as the first truly digital generation:

The birth of writing did not destroy human memory, though it probably brought to the fore different forms of memory for different purposes. The birth of printing did not destroy beautifully wrought graphic works, nor did it undermine all hierarchically organized religions. And the birth of apps need not destroy the human

capacities to generate new issues and new solutions, and to approach them with the aid of technology when helpful, and otherwise to rely on one's wit. (Garner and Davis 192)

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