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intersections

Fall 2013



in this issue

Challenging the Commodification
of Education

Purpose Statement

This publication is by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-six colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is published by the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA. The publication has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, which has generously offered leadership and physical and financial support as an institutional sponsor for the publication.

The ELCA has frequently sponsored conferences for faculty and administrators that have addressed the church-college/university partnership. The ELCA has sponsored an annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference. The primary purpose of *Intersections* is to enhance and continue such dialogue. It will do so by:

- Lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities
- Encouraging thoughtful dialogue about the partnership of colleges and universities with the church
- Offering a forum for concerns and interests of faculty at the intersection of faith, learning, and teaching
- Raising for debate issues about institutional missions, goals, objectives, and learning priorities
- Encouraging critical and productive discussion on our campuses of issues focal to the life of the church
- Serving as a bulletin board for communications among institutions and faculties
- Publishing papers presented at conferences sponsored by the ELCA and its institutions
- Raising the level of awareness among faculty about the Lutheran heritage and connectedness of their institutions, realizing a sense of being part of a larger family with common interests and concerns

From the Publisher | Staying Connected

Creating and sustaining meaningful relationships in our personal and public lives challenges each of us. This challenge extends to higher education and the community of ELCA colleges and universities. *Intersections* was established as a tool for maintaining relationships among leaders in ELCA higher education. Under our now not-so-new editor, Jason Mahn, *Intersections* remains a vibrant vehicle for sharing ideas, research, and reflections on the vocation of our institutions. Jason has recently brought new voices to serve as an editorial advisory board for the journal. We welcome Laurie Brill (LECNA), Jacqueline Bussie (Concordia), Darrell Jodock (St. Olaf), Lynn Hunnicutt (PLU), Tom Morgan (Augsburg), Kathi Tunheim (Gustavus), and Ernie Worman (Newberry). Your suggestions for *Intersections* are welcomed by Jason and the advisory editorial board. It is my hope that over the next few years, the journal will become a more widely utilized tool for a conversation about our shared ELCA identity and our congruent mission as colleges and universities.

Coming together for face-to-face conversations has and will continue to be—even in this digital age of virtual meetings—important for maintaining relationships among the people who work at our institutions. The annual Vocation of a Lutheran College conference remains an important in-person gathering. We will next meet July 21-23 at Augsburg College to discuss Leadership as informed by vocation, service, and mentoring. In the summer of 2014, teams from our colleges and universities are also invited to attend a special conference on the expanding work of interfaith dialogue and understanding on our campuses. With support from the churchwide organization, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois is hosting this conference June 1-3, 2014, on its campus. (See more information on page 7.) ELCA colleges and universities are invited to send presidents, faculty, students, and chaplains to discuss best practices and experiences in interfaith dialogue and understanding. Eboo Patel, president of the Interfaith Youth Core, and the new presiding bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton, will speak at the conference. The conference promises to help us all better claim that the vocation of an ELCA college or university includes the promotion of interfaith understanding among students and all within our communities of learning.

Maintaining our community of shared identity and mission is an ongoing task, but the task is made all the easier with this fine journal, our annual Vocation conference at Augsburg College, and special events like the 2014 interfaith understanding conference at Augustana or the conference in summer of 2013 at Pacific Lutheran University on introducing faculty and staff to Lutheran higher education. Join the conversation!

MARK WILHELM | Program Director for Schools, Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, ELCA

intersections

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From the Editor

In his recent *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, American political philosopher Michael Sandel points to hundreds of cases where encroachments of “the Market” on goods that used to be priceless corrode our civic values and our sense of civic togetherness. Some of the Market’s expansions are irksome but perhaps morally inconsequential: the trend toward monetizing gifts through those once-tacky gift cards, the scalping of campsite tickets for Yosemite National Park, or the corporate renaming of professional baseball parks. Others are ethically alarming: the sale of the right to immigrate, cash to female drug addicts if they undergo sterilization, or the rise of the viatical industry, through which a terminally ill person sells his or her life insurance to a third party who then makes money when the terminal person dies—the sooner the death, the bigger the profit (Sandel 35-37, 62-62, 136-49).

Sandel’s primary objection to the expansion of market forces into the civic realm is that putting a price on public goods or “incentivizing” consumers to choose the right thing to do (lose weight, stop smoking, care about the environment) does not simply add external motivations to internal ones but actually corrodes the latter. We no longer do what is good because it is good or right or helpful to “our neighbors.” We do it because we are paid. And when those payments cease to be worth our effort, we stop doing it altogether (Sandel 84-91).

While shared goods presently sell off at surprising rates, Sandel’s concerns are not new. Some twenty years ago, Larry Rasmussen foresaw how the Market beguiles us into believing that obligation to others is fulfilled through calculated self-interest (Rasmussen 61-76). Some two centuries before that, Adam Smith himself insisted that capitalism could help humans flourish only so long as nonmarket civic virtues restricted the domain and curbed the temperament of economic exchange (Smith in Rasmussen 41-45).

A parallel trend is already upon church-affiliated colleges and universities. Language of vocation can seem ubiquitous these days even outside of Lutheran higher education—especially since 1999 when Lilly Endowment, Inc. began giving millions of dollars in grant money to schools to examine the link between faith and vocational choices. The fact that a leading pharmaceutical company financed a good deal of vocational reflection over the past decade does not in itself degrade it. But the fact that, in these trying economic times, church-related colleges increasingly point to education-for-vocation as a distinctive “trademark,” as that which might *sell*, may raise some scruples.

“Adam Smith himself insisted that capitalism could help humans flourish only so long as nonmarket civic virtues restricted the domain and curbed the temperament of economic exchange.”

Indeed, the trend toward the commercialization, “incentivization,” and commodification of what were once shared, public goods poses real risks for the goods and aims of education. Martha Nussbaum, for one, traces our expanding Market’s corrosive effects on education. Her book, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, documents the particular corrosion that worldwide pursuits for profitability have on humanistic education and its promise to educate for citizenship and democracy. When education becomes exclusively or primarily for economic growth, we lose the skills and dispositions that are at the center of humanistic education and that are necessary for human flourishing. Certainly we at Lutheran colleges and universities feel this trend with

every meeting about enrollment and endowment numbers. Most of us have ceased to resist the temptation to market the liberal arts by showing prospective students and their paying parents statistics about how many of our students open their own businesses or go on to law school. One small but important instance of this trend is the place and function of “vocation” within Lutheran schools.

Two short examples: First, at a recent Vocation of a Lutheran College conference at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, I attended a breakout sessions led by a staff person of the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) entitled, “Marketing the Concept of Individual and Institutional Vocation.” After chatting with Laurie Brill, the LECNA representative and session leader, I know she shares healthy reservations about how or whether the idea of vocation can be marketed without commercializing and corrupting it. But the fact that tough economic times in Lutheran higher education seemingly “necessitate that we *pitch* vocation as part of the Lutheran *brand* remains disconcerting.

Second and closer to home, Augustana College, my own institution, has incorporated the Center for Vocational Reflection within an overarching Community Engagement Center so that it can communicate more efficiently with the study abroad office, internship coordinators, and the career center. This—like marketing vocation to prospective students—*makes all kinds of institutional sense*, but the danger is that aims to discern God’s call or to find meaning in the whole arc of one’s life now principally buttresses the institution’s retention rates or the student’s career exploration. I am not claiming that anyone intends to relegate “vocation” to sound career planning in the face of economic necessities—quite the opposite, we intend to promote it. But if Sandel is right in noting how incentives often dis-incentivize us toward nobler ends, we should be careful about how we promote vocation.

How might emphases on the liberal arts and on the goal of discerning one’s calling survive and maybe even thrive in an economic culture where fear of unemployment and of not paying back student loans increasingly drive student expectation and exploration? How can vocational discernment—a practice which is, at bottom, ethical, maybe even theological and pastoral in concern—resist getting absorbed or eclipsed by careerism, the pursuit of professional advancement as one’s chief or only aim? How might we articulate *both* the “value added” of vocation *and* the ways vocation’s value resists quantification? And finally, how might we characterize human callings and the Caller behind them in ways that do

not wholly separate vocation from the investment in a career, on the one hand, but do not eclipse the first by way of the second, on the other?

“How can vocational discernment—a practice which is, at bottom, ethical, maybe even theological and pastoral in concern—resist getting absorbed or eclipsed by careerism, the pursuit of professional advancement as one’s chief or only aim?”

These questions are my own, and I’ve pursued them in a theological way in an essay called “Called to the Unbidden: Saving Vocation from the Market.”¹ The presenters of the 2013 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference, “Vocation: A Challenge to the Commodification of Education,” whose papers comprise the bulk of this issue of *Intersections*, come from different academic and professional backgrounds and pursue their own questions in different ways. Yet undergirding each is this shared concern to rearticulate and revalue education-for-vocation and other “distinctives” of Lutheran higher education in an economic climate that threatens to erode their most important features.

In “Welfare of the City and Why Lutherans Care about Education,” DeAne Lagerquist (St. Olaf College) takes us on a historical tour of Lutherans engaging education, with an eye toward how we got to today, can weather the present, and thrive in the future. She asks us to resist collapsing a distinction central to the Lutheran Reformation—that between a closed system of economic exchanges (whether commercial or spiritual) and “economies of the gift,” where receiving a gift enables and impels one to pay it forward through worship of God and service to those in need. While the history of Lutheran higher education was not immune from *quid pro quo* exchanges between benefactors, rulers, administrators, teachers, and students, preserving this gift economy—with its focus on the welfare of the city—will continue to remain invaluable.

In “The Value of Evoking Vocation and the Vocation of Evoking Value,” Mark Schwehn (Valparaiso University) also turns to history, this time to uncover what has been valued in the liberal arts by Lutherans and why. While “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” and cultivating a “life of the mind” remain popular reasons for valuing liberal education, Schwehn convincingly argues that Lutherans have or should have more

of a stake in education-for-vocation, that is, education “for the sake of empowering and equipping human beings for various kinds of work in the world.” He makes a case for the practicality of the liberal arts, assuring educators at Lutheran schools that they need not feel guilty about “selling” their programs by holding up such practical results. While some of this pulls in an opposite direction than does Lagerquist’s essay, one notes that Schwehn includes within liberal arts’ “practicality” dispositions often unrelated to earning potential: fidelity to family, finding joy in daily work, and responding to neighbors in need.

The 2013 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference next included a keynote address by Lynn Hunnicutt, (Pacific Lutheran University) entitled, “Can Higher Education be Commodified? And Why Does it Cost So Much?,” which explained the rising costs of higher education and offered an economics-based model for thinking about the challenge to and by education-for-vocation. Unfortunately, because Hunnicutt spoke from notes, we were able to reproduce her talk here.

Next, Karl Stumo (Pacific Lutheran University) and Tom Crady (Gustavus Adolphus College) lean on their experience directing recruitment and enrollment offices to convey realities shared by all our colleges—that of supply and demand, of a decline in the perceived value of college and in “willingness to pay,” of “messaging” and “leveraging,” and of the diminishing role of church-relatedness as a reason to enter one of our schools. As they admit, many of the strategies they offer to face these realities will appear to underwrite “the commodification of Lutheran higher education.” Yet, the authors insist that without becoming increasingly strategic in marketing and recruitment, fewer students will benefit from our institutions.

A short sermon preached at the conference by Patricia Lull offers a word of hope in these trying times. It gets us to hear anew the promise of being valued in a world of collegiate worry and woe. We are happy to reproduce it here.

Finally, we are able to include an essay about the scope and aim of a recent valuable research project that considers how ELCA and other liberal arts schools are strategically reinventing themselves to deal with today’s challenges: Project DAVID by Ann Hill Duin and Eric Childers. Neither author currently resides at a Lutheran institution but both come from them and have spent their recent years analyzing them. Specifically, Project DAVID asks how ELCA schools create *distinction*, use *analytics*, articulate *value*, foster *innovation*, and explore *digital* opportunities to ensure future success. We include some of their initial findings because the project highlights the resolute reclamation and recreation of Lutheran institutional identities while facing the pressures of our market economy.

Please send along any letters to the editor, essay ideas or submissions, or suggestions for future topics to me (jason-mahn@augustana.edu). In the meantime, may our ongoing conversations about faith and learning and Lutheran higher education prove to be priceless.

Endnote

1. This editorial repeats several paragraphs from that longer essay (citation below); used with permission by the editors of *The Cresset*.

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SAVE THE DATE!

Interfaith Understanding at ELCA Colleges and Universities: *A working conference for campus cohort teams*

AUGUSTANA COLLEGE, ROCK ISLAND ILLINOIS

June 1-3, 2014

Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois invites you to a conference for presidents, students, faculty, and chaplains at ELCA colleges and universities to discuss best practices, tools for, and real stories of exploring interfaith engagement. This conference will help cohort teams from each campus plan for interfaith engagement on their own ELCA campuses.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS

Eboo Patel of Interfaith Youth Core

Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA Presiding Bishop

A panel of ELCA College and University Presidents

More speakers to come!

PARTICIPANTS • Each ELCA college or university is invited to send a campus team to the conference. Each campus cohort will have time to make plans for their particular campus, and there will be special times for students, chaplains, faculty members, and presidents to gather as cohort groups. Presidents will also have a chance to meet with Eboo Patel about national interfaith initiatives.

COST • Due to a generous grant from the ELCA Churchwide Organization and support from Augustana College, program, food, and housing costs will all be provided. Travel costs will need to be covered by each campus sending participants.

More information coming soon!

QUESTIONS • Kristen Glass Perez • kristenglassperez@augustana.edu • 309-794-7430

L. DEANE LAGERQUIST

Welfare of the City and Why Lutherans Care about Education

Most readers of *Intersections* have two characteristics in common: We are associated with Lutheran higher education and we do our work now, in this decade, in this culture. However, our degree of affinity with the Lutheran tradition of Christianity varies more than it would have done fifty years ago.

Even those who have worked at Lutheran schools for a rather long time may still have questions about this tradition. They may wonder why Lutherans cannot just give a simple, straightforward explanation of themselves or why they insist on asking the same questions over and over. Others are committed to the mission of their college or university, they admire its heritage, and are able to give a subtle account of the tradition, but they do not share it completely. A third group is composed of those who are relatively new to these places and are still a bit perplexed about what they have gotten themselves into. They may be uncertain which campus customs are merely local and which are part of a larger tradition—which can be traced to the school’s Lutheran identity, which to Christianity more generally, which to the liberal arts? What is the relationship between those? Finally, there are some formed by this tradition of Lutheran, liberal arts education who have thought about it quite a lot with pride, occasional anxiety, and lively imagination.

These are not vague, made up, ideal-types. I have specific people in mind and I can recall actual conversations with them. Whichever type comes closest to describing you, I have no doubt all these types are present on your campus as well

as on mine. As you think of your colleagues of these various types, you may also recall some whose presence on your campus is now fond memory. A tradition is like that—at least this tradition is. It keeps us living with the dead whose legacy to us includes buildings, dated college hymns, and conversations about our work that we must keep having over and over.

When I began my association with Lutheran higher education as a student at California

Lutheran it was still “CLC”—college not university—and neither the current library nor the statue at its entrance existed. Today students approaching the library are greeted by a statue of Martin Luther, a gift from the first graduating class installed in the 1980s. This two and a half ton Luther is abstract, more like Gumby than the man himself. Looming over the

plaza, as the man’s reputation seems to do among his spiritual and ecclesiastical heirs, “Enormous Luther” prompts us to ask: What legacy do we receive from Luther—the university professor, theologian, parish pastor, and church reformer? Lurking inside the theme of this journal and the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conferences is another, related question



Brian Sletten / CLU

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about each individual's personal participation in the institution's mission. Our interest is not only in the schools, but also in the people. More to the point, having acknowledged our jobs, we are interested in the possibility that the jobs are part of our own vocations.

Commercializing College

Which brings us to the second characteristic uniting us, namely, we all work at Lutheran colleges and universities *here and now*—in the early twenty-first century in the United States. In our shared context there is notable public confusion, not to say conflict, about the purposes and worth of higher education and about its worth. In one way of looking at them our schools come close to the romantic ideal of college. Indeed most were founded on a venerable American model that served the pre-revolutionary schools beginning with Harvard and that dominated well into the nineteenth century: smallish, residential, associated with Christianity (usually Protestantism), concerned with forming personal character and preparing students for responsible engagement in religious and civic community life. But from another angle our schools may seem outdated and elitist. They lack the economies of scale available to larger institutions, private or public. Even their programs that lead toward employment usually require courses that seem to wander from that practical goal. Most have neither nationally ranked sports teams nor huge endowments. While we are not the most expensive, many assume that we are unaffordable. Less than five percent (maybe only two percent) of American college students attend schools like ours.

“The challenge might be stated this way:
Does a Lutheran notion of vocation
add value to higher education today?”

The organizers of the 2013 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference have presented a theme that turns our situation on its head. They invite us to consider “Vocation as a *Challenge* to the Commodification of Education.” I suspect this is because we share the experience of having our vocations—both institutional and individual—challenged by the commodification of education. The challenge might be stated this way: Does a Lutheran notion of vocation add value to higher education today? Or a bit more fully: What does the Lutheran contention that God's primary mode of relationship to human beings is as the giver of grace that generates neighbor directed action (i.e. vocation) offer to the work of higher education when education

is increasingly regarded by Americans as something to be bought and sold, something to be judged on the basis of its immediate, individual, practical value as measured in financial return? Hold this question in mind as we visit sixteenth century Germany, the formative decades of Lutheran higher education in the United States, and then return to our own time. In addition, given our shared identity we must ask: Does this matter not only to the self-identified Lutherans, but also to the fellow travelers, the skeptics, and the newcomers?

We are all aware of the commodification of higher education, what we might also call its commercialization or, worse, monetization. We encounter it on radio talk shows, in the newspapers, and among our friends and family members who ask us why college costs so much and who ask their kids, “So, what can you *do* with that degree?” We who get our paychecks from colleges know that money changes hands in the “delivery” of learning, and not only to pay us. Each July, Target stores begin to replace lawn furniture and garden hoses with school supplies and dorm décor. Soon campus food services will be to full, and the food, the fuel to cook it, and the water to wash the dishes all cost money—as do library books and academic support services, and other services and supplies. We are not here to deny that buying and selling are involved in formal education. We are to think about the value of education and about how that intertwines with its economy.

Luther and the Commodification of Salvation

Given these realities, how useful is Luther? Of course life in early sixteenth century Saxony was different from ours. The list of material and cultural differences could be multiplied. In his discussion of early Protestants and education, historian of American religion Mark Noll details the chronological chasm: infant Martin was born nine years before Columbus sailed. When Dr. Luther declared himself captive to the word of God and unmovable, Puritan migration to New England was more than a century off. But, then Noll explores the ways that Luther's focus on grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the authority of the Bible informed his educational agenda (Noll 97). Introducing a collection of essays on Luther and learning, Reformation historian Marilyn Harran highlights continuities that compress the passage of time between then and now (Harran 19-20). Noll and Harran and many others thereby point toward intriguing resonances between pressing questions of our own time and the debate Martin Luther was part of nearly five centuries ago. Let me begin by concentrating on the particular: Luther's experience, his theological insight, and the programmatic consequences for education.

Luther and we ask big questions such as these: What makes a person valuable? Where do I belong? What can I accomplish? What makes life worth living? How does one come by those goods? Given our theme, we might ask about what can (and cannot) be bought and sold, about which human goods are properly regarded as commodities and which are not. Bound up in these questions are fundamental assumptions about the human condition, God, the character of community, and the nature of religion. Luther despaired that he would ever be worthy of God's love. His experience was shaped by the nearness of death from disease or natural disaster, by the politics of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, and by the theology and ritual practices of late medieval European Christianity. Our questions—and our students' questions—about our own worth and our place in the world are shaped by the environmental,

“Luther and we ask big questions such as these: What makes a person valuable? Where do I belong? What can I accomplish? What makes life worth living? How does one come by those goods?”

political, and religious circumstances of the early twenty-first century. Carl Dennis's poem, “The God Who Loves You,” exposes one contemporary anxiety—the fear of making the wrong choices and missing out on a perfect life. It suggests vocational questions such as these: What sort of freedom do I have to determine my life? How much depends upon me reading the signs correctly and how much is beyond my control? Is picking the right college the way to insure my happiness and success?

Luther's question was deeply personal, but his spiritual struggle was not unique. If his despair about his inability to meet God's demand for righteousness has become legendary, it was in keeping with the religious ethos of his time and place. Luther was acutely aware of his inability to earn forgiveness and God's favor. He joined an Augustinian monastic community where he made fervent efforts at righteousness, including scrupulous confession of his smallest failings. Although these efforts did not gain him peace, they prompted his superior to assign him to teach Bible at the recently founded university in Wittenberg. There Luther's personal, spiritual experience was closely intertwined with the ordinary, daily work of scholarship and had consequences far larger than his own religious life.

We are approaching the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Reformation with Luther's 1517 posting of the 95 Theses. There, Luther challenged the commodification of

salvation. He questioned the theological premise behind the sale of indulgences, and concluded (1) that if the Pope had the authority to release sinners from their obligation to perform acts of penance in punishment for their sins, then he should grant it freely, not sell it; and (2) that no human being had the authority to remit that sort of religious debt because God offers forgiveness freely on the basis of Christ's actions. These conclusions denied the existence of a “treasury of merit” that the church could exploit for its financial advantage. Salvation, God's loving forgiveness, is not something believers can buy with money or earn by their efforts; rather it is a gracious gift. Beyond rejecting an understanding of salvation based in market economy, Luther's theology was more like what scholars call a gift economy. This is not merely a matter of removing money from the system of exchange, but of positing an entirely different logic in which giving, receiving, and giving to others replace the market exchange.

Calling on Gifts

In his book, *The Gift: Imagination and Erotic Life of Property*, Lewis Hyde introduces gift economy by drawing upon anthropology, mythology, and modern poetry. He observes, “unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges” (Hyde xiv). Gifts circulate according to a set of three obligations: to give, to receive (or to accept), and to pass on (or to reciprocate). The value of a gift is in its use. Holding it, rather than passing it on, will kill the gift or render it toxic. A gift's generative power (or what Hyde calls its “erotic” power) is released, even increased when it is given away. This dynamic is expressed by a colleague in a recent Facebook post: “People who help a person pack to move across country do so for love, because this work is too hard to do for any other reason except more money than he can pay. Thank you. You know who you are.” Money and the market have nothing to do with gift economy. And yet, Hyde probes artists' overlapping involvement in a gift economy as they create and in the market when they sell their work. Artists, like college professors, need to eat. Like artists, educators inhabit both economies.

Discussing the “The Ethics of Gift,” theologian Oswald Bayer notes that the biblical “conception of a willing, open-handed, generous and incessantly giving God,” which Luther revived, contrasts with the late medieval image of Christ as

judge (Bayer, “Ethics” 452). Immediately this shift reverberated in the spiritual arena where, having received grace, the human being stood before God, clothed in Jesus’ righteousness and then offered the reciprocating “counter gift” of thanks and praise. The full implication of the gift exchange extends further. It leads, Bayer suggests, to a reorientation of all of life, not only in the spiritual realm, but in the temporal as well. He writes, “Not only the vertical *retribution* of praise to God in prayer and in faith belongs to the thankfulness of the human being, but also equally fundamentally the horizontal *distribution* to our neighbor in love” (Bayer, “Ethics” 459).

Now we return to the notion of vocation I offered early on. A Lutheran conception of vocation declares that God’s primary mode of relationship to human beings is as the giver of grace and that divine grace generates neighbor-directed action. In the logic of gift economy, this is the generative passing along of the gift that faith has received. In standard Lutheran-speak: faith active in love. Contemporary baptismal liturgies highlight the dynamic relationship between entering into the body of Christ and sharing the work of God’s love for the world. All of these echo Luther’s firm conviction that divine grace levels spiritual status. The office of priest is not abolished, but its significance is rendered functional as a mode of service to others. Before God there is no distinction to be made between priests and pipers, cobblers and cardinals, nuns and nephews.

“A Lutheran conception of vocation declares that God’s primary mode of relationship to human beings is as the giver of grace and that divine grace generates neighbor-directed action.”

All Christians are equally members of the spiritual estate who carry out their work in various places of responsibility. This is the priesthood of all believers, which along with justification by faith and the authority of the Bible Mark Noll identifies as the central commitments of the early Reformers. This notion of vocation begins with being (or identity) and moves into doing. Its attitude stirs action in every aspect of life, in all one’s roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

Taking Luther to School

Among the consequences these teachings had in early modern life, we are concerned with their effect on education: its purposes, its funding, and its practice. Already in his 1520 treatise, “To the Christian Nobility of Germany,” Luther called

for educational reforms. He advocated changes that would make educational practice responsive to his new understanding of Christian life, both how it is received and what it entails. In a later sermon he announced his intention to address what is at stake regarding spiritual, eternal matters and temporal, worldly ones (“Sermon” 219). One purpose of education is cultivation of personal faith; a second prepares learners for service to the neighbor (i.e. vocation). In keeping with the way that biblical study informed his own faith, Luther insisted that Christians “get” the gospel both by right knowledge of God and by true experience of grace. Over the centuries, this concern for the partnership of objective and subjective knowledge—for religion of the head and religion of heart and hands—weaves through Lutheran educational endeavors with one or the other taking the lead, but with the other still part of the dance. Similarly, concern for the personal spiritual good of education intertwines with commitment to the practical, temporal benefits that result and that flow into the community.

Even children should be given the opportunity to encounter God’s word in their own language. Luther’s translation of the Bible was a partial response. However, in order to read the Bible, children need to be taught and that requires schools. He urged princes and city councils to support schools for both boys and girls and parents to send their children so that they might know and understand God’s grace. After the Saxon visitation revealed the stunning ignorance of many ordinary Christians, and even parish pastors, Luther prepared the Small Catechism setting out the rudiments of the gospel for their instruction. This is one reason Lutherans care about education, particularly about basic literacy but also about ongoing, life-long learning that supports mature faith.

If the first, personal purpose concerned the vertical dimension of faith, the second coincided with the horizontal dimension, faith active in love. Here vocation and the first part of my title come to the foreground. Most famously in “To the Councilmen of All Cities of Germany that They Establish and Maintain Schools” (1524) and in “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School” (1530), Luther addressed temporal authorities, both political rulers and parents, all of whom he assumed were Christians. He admonished them to do their duty and to prepare children for their own duties toward their neighbors. Certainly preachers and pastors would be needed, but the good of all requires teachers and lawyers and physicians as well. In Luther’s own, often quoted, words:

Now the welfare of a city does not consist solely in accumulating vast treasure, building mighty walls and magnificent building, and producing a goodly supply of

guns and armor. Indeed, where such things are plentiful, and reckless fools get control of them, it is so much the worse and the city suffers even greater loss. A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consists rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens. They can then readily gather, protect, and properly use treasure and all manner of property. ("To the Councilmen" 712-13)

Education's vocational purpose concerns individuals, but its value is public as well as personal. Lutherans care about education for this reason too, that it contributes to the well-being of their neighbors and of their communities in this world, indeed to the well-being of the whole world. Educating religious leaders is important, but doing so is a special subset of this larger vocational purpose.

The theology behind this evangelical view of education's purposes grows out of a gift economy that resists commodification and the logic of the market. Again and again Luther reminded his readers of what God has given them, both salvation and worldly goods, and urges them to receive it gladly by giving what they have. Most particularly, he urged parents to educate their children to be instruments of God's care for the world. He acknowledged that wealth and honor may follow and couched his appeal in terms of investment; however, he always warned that avarice and excessive concern about one's belly turns humans into beasts. We too participate in the overlapping economies of the market and gift exchange. We must not lose sight of the fact that the day-to-day work of education—whether for personal spiritual purposes or for temporal public ends—requires material resources.

Sponsoring Education

In the sixteenth century funding for education came increasingly from the pockets of territorial rulers, though both the church and the nearly coincident civil community benefited. An earlier shift toward princely, instead of church, sponsorship for universities accelerated. Children's education followed a similar trend. New church ordinances, drafted by Johannes Bugenhagen for several German and Scandinavian cities, included education among the social welfare concerns worthy of community support. Such support might be construed as service to neighbor, a counter-gift in the exchange initiated by divine grace, but those who provide financial support for schools and aid to students are also likely to expect tangible returns on their investment.

Benefactors' motives were mixed. They gained prestige, financial advantages, and a supply of well-trained civil servants, other professionals, and pastors. For example, when

he founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502, Elector Frederick the Wise hoped that it would "produce graduates who, more than anything, were useful to society," but he was not unmindful of his reputation (Appold 73). Similarly, when he assented to humanistic reforms at his university, Frederick may well have taken account of the ways those would make the school more attractive to students and increase enrollment. At least initially the temporal rulers' interests and the Reformers' goals overlapped enough to allow a productive collaboration. By the seventeenth century the relationship was more strained.

“Such support might be construed as service to neighbor, but those who provide financial support for schools and aid to students are also likely to expect tangible returns on their investment.”

Despite the change in the source of university support, much of university life was relatively unaltered in the first decades of the Reformation. Administrative structures and academic organization remained stable. If a territorial ruler was now the patron, his scope of influence seldom extended to ordinary, internal matters, although his approval was required for changes in the universities' statutes. Frederick the Wise approved adding the Greek professorship which brought Philipp Melancthon to the University of Wittenberg in 1518 and his successor agreed to the reforms Melancthon drafted in the 1530s and 1546. Most professors still were, or had been, clerics. They were still organized into four faculties with arts or philosophy providing the foundation for advanced study in law, medicine, or theology. Students followed a similar route through the stages of their study which could take several years. While these aspects of the university changed little, more dramatic reforms were made in the content of the curriculum employed to achieve the university educational goals which—at least in the theology faculty—centered on cultivation of personal piety supported by right belief.

Reformation scholars debate about the scale of curricular changes and proper credit for them; however, for our purposes, attention to the general contours will do. In his writings Luther suggested modifications, but Philipp Melancthon was the architect of the reforms in town schools and universities. As far as the Reformers' agenda coincided with Humanism, they capitalized upon a movement that predated them rather than devising a novel program. The Reformers sympathized with Humanists' expectation that education would produce practical results. Their evangelical

commitment to the authority of the Bible was well served by Humanists' return to the sources. Biblical exegesis, the centerpiece of the theological curriculum, was supported by increased study of ancient languages, particularly but not only Greek and Hebrew. More attention was given to early Christian writers and to historical study. Philosophy in general and Aristotle in particular, if not rejected completely, were initially given reduced importance.

From Piety to Orthodoxy and Back Again

My equivocating in that last sentence points to the scholarly dispute about the degree to which Luther and Melanchthon agreed about the value of philosophical study and the role of human reason in theology. Luther's rejection of reason is infamous, and yet we should not forget that his own faith was nurtured by the mundane work of scholarship. He expected the Holy Spirit to be active even in such ordinary activities as learning Hebrew vocabulary and Greek grammar. This expectation echoes the way Christ is present in the ordinary water used in baptism and the everyday bread and wine consumed at the Lord's Supper. Moreover, Luther recognized the usefulness of human reason in its proper place which

“Luther's rejection of reason is infamous, and yet we should not forget that his own faith was nurtured by the mundane work of scholarship.”

had more to do with daily bread (a placeholder for all that nourishes earthly life) than with the means of grace. Even if Melanchthon was in essential agreement with Luther about the purposes of theology, he was more open to using reason in pursuit of pure doctrine. To that end he introduced a modified use of Aristotle in his loci method. In addition to its limited utility in theology, Melanchthon also recognized the philosophical value relative to the civil law that governs society. Once again we are reminded of the horizontal, vocational dimension of education (Bayer, “Philipp Melanchthon” 149-52).

As the Reformation movement consolidated in the late sixteenth century and developed in the following decades, its universities also changed. Noteworthy educational developments include the effects confessional territorialism on university governance and shifting emphases in educational purpose and theological method. The territorial principle (introduced by the Peace of Augsburg and reinforced by the

Peace of Westphalia) further tied German universities to the “particularistic interests of emerging territorial-confessional states” (Howard 68). By 1701 the number of German universities grew to an overabundant thirty. Every territorial ruler wanted a university and, insisting on confessional conformity, they became more intrusive. Professors resisted assaults on university autonomy; nevertheless, theologians were committed to orthodox teaching that preserved the gospel. They relied on Melanchthon's loci system to guide their work preparing pastors. Many leaned noticeably toward the objective pole of faith, though Johann Gerhard maintained a robust view as evident in his comment on the outcome of theology: “By this theology a person is prepared by his knowledge of the divine mysteries through the illumination of his mind to apply those things that he understands to the disposition of his heart and to the carrying out of good works” (Howard 77 n.116) Overall the pedagogical focus shifted from away from students' own piety to the pure doctrine they would teach their parishioners.

By the late seventeenth century the balance was shifting again. At the University of Halle, founded in 1694, Elector Friedrich III's political interest in a more tolerant religious stance was reinforced by Herman A. Francke's commitment a “supraconfessional practically oriented spirit of pietism” and by his rationalist colleagues, though on different grounds. (Howard 93-94). In addition to his university post, Francke launched a full range of charitable institutions: an orphanage, Latin school, pharmacy, and publishing house. His religious program had enormous influence through the work of men such as Bartholew Ziegenhagen who traveled to India in 1709 and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg who came to colonial Pennsylvania in the 1740s. If you visit the Franckesche Stiftungen today, you will see evidence of this global engagement; its museum houses one of the few intact cabinets of curiosities, filled with artifacts and specimens sent back to Halle by its former students.

Although not every Lutheran college founded in North America had direct links to Halle, the enterprise as a whole owes a great deal to Francke's educational ideals and to his institutional model. The Halle legacy included its conception of Christian faith. Without repudiating intellectual knowledge or purity of doctrine and while engaging in serious study, it emphasized personal piety and assumed that true faith bears fruit in good works on behalf of others. Support for the largely autonomous Francke Stiftungen and its missions came from a variety of sources, including the King of Denmark, voluntary organizations, and private donations. This pattern anticipated funding for Lutheran colleges in the United States.

Before we leave Europe behind, I offer a list of four lessons from this history about vocation and the commodification of education. Please take them as propositions for discussion, rather than firm conclusions.

1. If vocation directs us to consider education as the means to enter more fully into faith, then it is part of a spiritual gift economy and certainly resists the reduction of education to something that can be bought and sold.
2. If vocation directs us to consider education as the means to prepare ourselves for service to others, then it challenges the notion that education is something one can own, particularly if ownership is merely for one's own benefit or pleasure.
3. If vocation reminds us of the necessity for practical knowledge and its usefulness in the service of others, then it allows us to acknowledge our participation in market economies and the ways in which buying and selling are required as we engage in education.
4. The history of temporal sponsorship of Lutheran education hints at how easily something can be perverted; the good work of sponsoring education is easily diverted away from pious ends or even public good.

Coming to America

Now we travel across the ocean to the United States where we consider, much more briefly, how the Reformation era educational purposes were pursued in the early decades of Lutheran higher education and what questions those purposes raise today. Lutherans arrived in the colonial era, but began to found colleges only in the nineteenth century. The first, Gettysburg College, opened in 1832 and the last ELCA intuition, California Lutheran, graduated its first class in 1964. Other schools are independent or associated with church bodies. Each one has a lively and distinctive history. I encourage you to learn as much as you can about the stories of your own school. My account of how Lutheran theology and prior educational experience were adapted to the new setting is more schematic than thick.

Education for piety and education for vocation remain foundational for American Lutherans, though their resources and strategies for addressing them change. A brief comparison of primary level education in nineteenth century Scandinavia and the United States is instructive. According to the territorial principle, because their rulers were Lutheran, so were the citizens of these northern nations. The church was a part of the state; pastors were civil servants. Primary education included religious instruction based on Luther's catechism and

prepared pupils to be both good Christians and good citizens. By mid-century, immigrants to the United States could send their children to state-funded, primary schools that addressed literacy and citizenship. Unlike the schools they left, however these were not explicitly religious in a sectarian way. In so far as they were Christian, it was of a type informed by Calvinism

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and the Second Great Awakening rather than by the Lutheran Confessions. Thus Lutheran parents had two options: (1) send their children to the common schools for secular education and supplement it with spiritual education or (2) organize schools that did both. Most Scandinavians went with the first option despite the possibility that public schools would undermine students' religious commitments and ethnic identity. The theologically conservative Germans associated with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod went with the second option of parochial schools.

Like the primary schools and supplementary classes Lutherans sponsored, the colleges of all ethnicities and synods were intended for their own children. College founders ranged from entrepreneurial individuals, to groups of congregations, to church bodies. While this resulted in a variety of legal and financial relationships between colleges and their churches (in its denominational form), generally there was a strong affinity between a college's supporters and its related religious (frequently ethnic) community. Some degree of confessional agreement and similarity of piety was assumed. The college, often referred to simply as “our college,” served as a powerful symbol of community identity and generated a great deal of what we now call social capital. This was so even though only a small percentage of the churches' members were enrolled and without excluding either students or supporters from outside the church. Such supporters were sometimes drawn from the local business community, as was the case at Gettysburg College.

In the 1830s Gettysburg was an example of one sort of Lutheran college or university: institutions founded to prepare potential pastors for their theological training. In contrast, a second set of schools had a broader view of their vocational purposes. If the first group's mission, which focused narrowly upon the office of public ministry, bared

women, it did not prohibit male students with other occupational aspirations. The second, usually co-educational, group's mission was wider, but did not preclude courses with quite specific occupational goals: programs such as teaching, nursing, and business. At both sorts of schools, as at many American colleges in the nineteenth century and in keeping with Luther's earlier scheme, the humanities were the foundation of the curriculum. Along with what I have called the public, temporal, vocational goals, the spiritual goal to foster personal piety was generally assumed. At some schools it was stated explicitly. An early St. Olaf document, for example, promised to "preserve the pupils in the true Christian faith as taught by the Evangelical Lutheran Church and nothing taught in contravention to" the Confessions, specifically the three ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and Luther's small Catechism (Shaw 17). Perhaps it goes without saying that these were generally small operations, often on the verge of financial collapse. Indeed there may be more closed schools than active ones. Among the survivors, none developed into a full-blown university on the old medieval model with faculties of theology, law, and medicine or on the modern, research model, though some now offer a comprehensive program and are called universities.

Our Colleges and Universities Today

Since the mid-twentieth century much has changed at these schools, in the arena of higher education, in their associated churches, and in the larger society. Without any attempt at narrative, here is a list of some changes: institutional mergers reduced the number of Lutheran churches bodies and movement into the mainstream of American culture weakened members' ethnic affiliation. Both developments lessened the college's value as symbols of group identity. Some schools grew larger. Motivated by necessity, or by social trends such cultural inclusiveness, or by pursuit of academic excellence, or by religious commitments—likely by some mixture—Lutheran colleges and universities welcomed more non-Lutheran students, staff, and faculty. More professors had undergraduate degrees from large, and often public, universities where the ethos and mission are dissimilar from those at Lutheran schools. The types of post-secondary education have multiplied, though the general public is seldom well informed about the significant differences between them. Information and communication technology is ubiquitous. These schools receive less financial support from the ELCA and are subject to more regulation by the federal government and accrediting agencies. Lastly, in the midst of American economic recession, there are fierce

public demands to justify the cost of this sort of education on the basis of immediate, financially measured return on individual investment.

We wrestle with this year's conference theme in this context. What challenge does vocation bring to the commodification of education today? Or, as I put it at the outset: What value does a Lutheran notion of vocation add to education? Try to imagine a conversation between that Enormous Luther at California Lutheran University and the man in Dennis' poem who imagines God "Knowing as he does exactly what would have happened / Had you gone to your second choice for college" (lines 7-8). How would Luther respond to that man's anxiety that he chose the wrong college and ended up with a less perfect life? First, I think, Luther would assert the greater importance of the eternal, spiritual gift God offers.

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Next, he would remind the man that everything he has—wife, job, friend—all that he has received, spiritual and temporal blessings, are gifts from God. Then he would admonish the man to gratitude and urge him to pass the gift on to his friends and neighbors. Finally, he would caution against any expectation of perfection in this life since human efforts are always flawed and subject to perversion.

This personal response is based in a historic religion, in Lutheran understanding of divine grace and Christian vocation. Vocation in this tradition, as we have observed, grows from a gift economy in which the spiritual benefits of God's reconciling love generate human gratitude and love of neighbor, gratitude and love that are expressed though ordinary, material, and temporal means. That said, as we respond to the commodification of education at our Lutheran colleges, we must notice that not everyone shares this tradition. If vocation is to inform our collective, public response, then I suspect that we need to be open to Lutheran theology and to other ways of nurturing a gift economy. (Here I am drawing upon the distinction between historic, personal, and public religion that Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen make in their very instructive book, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*. I commend it highly.)

Educational practice grounded in gift and informed by the history we have so quickly considered may take various forms that share important characteristics. The logic of gift allows us, on the one hand, to recognize that education requires material resources and generates temporal benefits and, on the other, to insist that education cannot be reduced to the exchange of money for information and skills or even to individual satisfaction. By analogy to the spiritual purpose for education, it attends to the enduring and big questions of life. A liberal arts approach is well suited to this work of encouraging students' understanding of themselves and their place in the world. By analogy to the temporal, public, vocational goal for education, this practice also equips students to be responsible and responsive neighbors. This may include teaching practical skills, but it insists that the value of the training is not primarily to be evaluated by immediate, individual reward. I suspect that each of you could identify ways

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these characteristics are present on your campus. Certainly they are at St. Olaf, though not without some tensions about programmatic implications. They are central to the essays included in our forthcoming collection of essays on vocation, *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation and the Liberal Arts*.

Lastly, there is one other set of changes to notice. In the sixteenth century universities became secular institutions that retained their ecclesial missions and served the civic good. In the nineteenth century Lutheran colleges were largely religious institutions with religiously defined missions that had civic dimensions. Now these are religious institutions with religiously grounded and secularly expressed missions. This arrangement does not fit neatly into mid-twentieth century notions of the secular and the sacred, but it is consistent with my understanding

how Lutherans view God's way of being active in the world. These schools certainly serve Lutheran churches and Lutheran students, but their educational work is not contained by the church any more than God's love for the world ends at the church's exit. Their institutional vocation (or mission) is to accept all the gifts that come to them and to pass those along to all their students and neighbors and the well-being of the world. Among the gifts that come to our schools are all the faculty, administrators, and staff without whom the mission would be impossible.

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MARK SCHWEHN

The Value of Evoking Vocation and the Vocation of Evoking Value

The deliberately convoluted title of this talk was inspired by my growing sense, as an administrator at a Lutheran University, that we have over the course of the last decade suffered from a diminished capacity to talk about the *value* of the education we provide even as we have increased our ability to discuss thoughtfully cost, pricing strategies, financial aid matrices, disruptive innovation, MOOCs, and a growing list of hot topics within the discourse of higher education. I intend my remarks as a small corrective to this tendency. However, I do not wish to encourage equally alarming tendencies to circle wagons around an unsustainable educational model or to hanker after a real or imagined Golden Age of Lutheran higher education informed by timeless ideals with little or no regard for the specific context within which those ideals must have life and pertinence. In other words, any compelling articulation of the value of Lutheran higher education must be mindful of the turbulence of our academic times.

My consideration of the value Lutheran higher education will consist of four parts. I will first present a recent analytical description of a college education that should provide both another dimension to the central problem of the commodification of higher education, and a direct challenge to the value of a Lutheran education, rightly understood. I will then, in the next two parts, consider two of the most important implications of the Lutheran concept of vocation for higher

education, its invitation to re-conceptualize the hallowed distinction between liberal and professional studies and its insistence that we are all called simultaneously to multiple vocations. Finally, in a short final section, I will turn to certain practices that are central to all institutions of higher learning that Lutherans need to re-think and re-formulate in order more fully to realize the distinctive character of Lutheran higher education informed by the idea of vocation.

Disaggregation or Disintegration?

About a year ago, Michael Staton, the co-founder and CEO of Inigral, a company that offers a variety of technologies to enhance educational practices, answered the question, “What is College?” as follows:

College is a packaged *bundle of content, services, experiences, and signals* that result in an education with both inherent and transferable value to the learner. The end goal of this educational package is to prepare learners for the job market, as well as to instill the knowledge, procedures, and values that make individuals effective at navigating, succeeding within, and adding value to our society. (Staton 4-5)

To construe college as a bundle of contents and services rather than as an integral whole comprised of parts is to invite the kind of activity described by the title of the

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address in which Staton's definition of college appears, "Disaggregating the Components of a College Degree."

The major aim of Staton's address was to demonstrate that the internet was already providing and would continue to provide many of the components of a college degree much more effectively and much more cheaply than the on-campus experience at the average college. He thus sought to unbundle those components from others that could not so easily be provided through the internet, inviting colleges to focus on the latter while relying on new technologies to provide the former. So, for example, content authoring, production, and transfer need no longer be left to faculty members, given the enormous resources already available free of charge on the internet, whereas mentoring and the supervision of metacognitive processes could not so easily be replaced by technology and should be left to faculty members.

Though most of us, including me, will find the vocabulary of disaggregation, commodification, and bundling repugnant, we should not be too quick to dismiss Staton's analysis altogether. Indeed, I suspect that most of us have already applied his analysis to some degree or another, perhaps without realizing it. Faculty members, for example, are constantly engaged in improving their pedagogy, so many of them have long since used resources available on the internet to supply content or to provide out of class exercises to sharpen skills so that classroom activity can be addressed to collective endeavors to solve problems, apply concepts, and consider the content delivered on the internet in fresh ways. This is what flipped classrooms are all about. In sum, Staton's analysis can be used as a kind of roadmap to help all of us enhance the distinctive education we provide through various technologies.

However, Staton's message is finally deeply disturbing, and it is inimical to the concept of a Lutheran education informed by the idea of vocation. He really is recommending disaggregation, i.e. farming out completely some of our most vital learning activities to service providers outside of our colleges and universities. So, for example, he writes that colleges should allow their students to "go through their general education courses online" (16). At Valparaiso University, this recommendation, if taken seriously, would be catastrophic. Our Freshman Core course that runs the entire year and that is the foundation of our general education program introduces students to college life, forms them into small and enduring communities of inquiry, cultivates within them a number of pre-disciplinary skills, imbues them with the ethos of the institution, gives them a common vocabulary including an understanding of the Lutheran idea of vocation, and provides nine months of common experience during

their first year for the students in all of our several colleges and schools. Would we dare to turn this vital enterprise over to one or another of the several external service providers?

"We must, as part of our effort to articulate the value of a Lutheran education, recover and strengthen those implications of our common vocation that require us to insist upon an education that is integral and whole, possessed of a distinctive kind of integrity."

Enhancements and economies, hybrid courses, on-line offerings as part of a larger integrated curricular program are one thing; complete disaggregation of the services, content, experiences, and "signals" (to use Staton's terminology) is quite another. Lutheran colleges and universities, in order to be faithful to their mission statements and their callings as colleges and universities of the church, seek to form as well as inform, to shape character as well as to cultivate arts and skills, to show forth every day, in the way that community life is ordered, that the moral, the social, the intellectual, and the spiritual virtues are inextricable and mutually reinforcing. *Disaggregation*, if carried to extremes, becomes *disintegration*. A call or summons, whether to an institution or to an individual, is addressed to a whole school or person, not to some truncated version of the same. In these days and times, we must, as part of our effort to articulate the value of a Lutheran education, recover and strengthen those implications of our common vocation that require us to insist upon an education that is integral and whole, possessed of a distinctive kind of integrity, if you will.

Practicality of the Liberal Arts

One such implication involves a reconceptualization of the relationship between liberal and professional study as warranted by the Lutheran understanding of vocation. Note that Stanton stipulated that the first goal of a college should be to "prepare learners for the job market." Though such a claim used to dismay defenders of the value of liberal education, we have witnessed over the course of the last couple of years a decided apparent shift in both the attitude to such claims and in the rhetorical strategies used to defend the value of liberal learning by its strongest proponents. Friends of liberal education have increasingly defended the liberal arts on instrumental or utilitarian grounds: "The job market

is rapidly changing; therefore, college graduates need to be prepared for jobs that have not yet been created. Moreover, most people will change jobs three or four times at least during the course of their lives. Therefore, students need the arts and skills and habits of mind that only the liberal arts can cultivate. Students need to learn how to learn, to be enabled to be flexibly responsive to the global market, and to be secure enough in their own identities and convictions to endure the hardships and disappointments they are bound to face. So if you want to be practical, get a liberal arts degree. Narrowly technical training makes no sense.”

Although this defense of a liberal education has much to recommend it, many of those who advance it do so grudgingly or with a guilty conscience. Guilt stems from the conviction that liberal education is diminished whenever its proponents stress its instrumental value over and above its intrinsic goodness. Knowledge for its own sake! Liberal education as an end in itself! To advance the cause of liberal education in any other terms than those that these battle cries suggest is to debase the currency of the liberal arts, thereby contributing to the narrowly practical mentality that has led—so the story goes—to the progressive demise of liberal education in our times.

“Lutheran educators who are and who should be friends of liberal learning should be more suspicious of claims that liberal education is an end in itself than of claims that the liberal arts are good for the sake of empowering and equipping human beings for various kinds of work in the world.”

Friends of the liberal arts should not be plagued by these doubts and self-recriminations. The history of liberal education provides ample warrants for defending it on instrumental grounds. Moreover, Lutheran educators who are and who should be friends of liberal learning should be more suspicious of claims that liberal education is an end in itself than of claims that the liberal arts are good for the sake of empowering and equipping human beings for various kinds of work in the world. Or, to put matters more positively, Lutherans should be guiltlessly disposed to use instrumental arguments to defend liberal education. Both the Lutheran concept of vocation and Luther’s and Melancthon’s own defenses of what we today call liberal

education demand that we understand, defend, and promote liberal learning in terms of its proper uses, not in terms of pure self-cultivation.

Bruce Kimball’s *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Ideal of Liberal Education* still remains, after twenty-five years, the most authoritative source on the history of liberal education. As the title suggests, Kimball identified two separate, sometimes competing, sometimes complementary versions of liberal education that began to develop in ancient Greece and that continue to the present time. The two arose simultaneously in the fifth century BCE. The first, the philosophical tradition or the “liberal free” ideal, stemmed from Socratic notions of inquiry as a path to individual excellence, of self-examination as indispensable to human flourishing, and of contemplation, not action, as the most choice-worthy human activity. Contemporary defenses of liberal education that stress critical thinking, intellectual virtues, knowledge as an end in itself, the importance self-reflection, self-cultivation, and self-knowledge, and the never-ending project of disciplining and furnishing the mind to enable and secure the full realization of one’s own humanity all can trace their lineage to Socrates.

The oratorical tradition stemmed from the rhetorician Isocrates and came into full flower three centuries later in the work of the Roman philosopher Cicero. Liberal education, as it unfolded within this tradition, stressed speech and language, the moral virtues, good character, and knowledge for the sake of action in the world of public life. Contemporary defenses of the liberal arts that stress character formation, the primacy of inter-subjectivity over private thought, community, usefulness, civic engagement, and public service can trace their lineage to Isocrates and Cicero. Those who defend the liberal arts by stressing their usefulness for a life of action in the world, including professional life, can draw upon this tradition without a bad conscience.

Education for Citizenship

As Kimball insists throughout his book, the two traditions he identifies were never really present in their “pure” forms; rather, they more often represent two intertwined strands of a single tradition. When he published his book in 1986, however, he believed that the philosophical or liberal free strand was definitely in the ascendancy. Over the subsequent quarter century, the rhetorical strand has gradually overtaken the philosophical strand in the discourse about liberal education. Kimball himself came to believe, during the course of his work on American pragmatism, that in the United States at least, public, pragmatic philosophers, like the late Richard Rorty, shifted the discourse of liberal education

away from the liberal free tradition and toward the rhetorical tradition. Moreover, the largest national association devoted to liberal education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, has for about twenty-five years stressed “education for democracy” as one of its major programmatic emphases. AAC&U has definitely come to understand liberal education as education for citizenship above all else.

Such a conception is far from an innovation. Rather, as the (then) Archbishop Rowan Williams reminded the Oxford University community seven years ago in his Commemoration Day Sermon (June, 2004), the medieval universities in Europe, the places that supplied the context for the Protestant Reformation, arose primarily from the practical need for lawyers, doctors, and clergymen, especially for trained canon lawyers. The Arts faculty was from the beginning a part of a larger educational enterprise devoted to the preparation of “public people,” in Williams’s words, people who were equipped to go forth into the world enabled to distinguish between good arguments and bad ones, to honor the importance of reasoned speech, and to contribute to the common good through the exercise of their professional skills. For example, what later became a mere class marker or an avenue to historical and cultural understanding, the study of Latin, was initially a very “practical” undertaking. Latin was the language in which legal and ecclesiastical business was transacted. Thus, those who today scorn language courses that “merely” prepare, say, social workers to deal with growing Hispanic populations on the grounds that such study is not really liberal learning may have forgotten the principal rationale for language study in the medieval university.

“Lutheran educators today should be defending liberal learning in a way that honors this ‘medieval practicality.’”

Lutheran educators today should be defending liberal learning in a way that honors this “medieval practicality,” as Williams called it, not only because the medieval university arose under decidedly Christian auspices but also because Lutherans should agree, along with everyone else, that the quality of public action and public discourse has been steadily declining for years. Almighty God gave to human beings the gift of reason, which, when disciplined through the arts of the *trivium* (we today would call these arts and skills of critical thinking, interpretation, and clear expression in writing and in speech), equip men and women not only to read the Scriptures

(which was the principal reason why the Reformers defended a liberal arts education) but also to elevate the level and the tone of public life. Historians of higher education in the United States will someday ponder the question of which came first: the abandonment by some English departments (to name only one field of study that should cultivate the arts of the *trivium*) of careful attention to close reading, careful writing, and good argument for the sake of the study of critical theory and the pursuit of fashionable publication, or the decline of liberal arts majors. Surely the two developments, widely reported and increasingly lamented, are deeply connected. Defending in a persuasive way, in word and deed, the liberal arts as “practical” skills should be one primary strategy for reviving them in our time.

Life of the Mind as Religion

Should nothing be said to elevate in the public mind the “liberal free” ideal, the idea of a liberal education for its own sake? Is it not a good thing to invite men and women to examine fundamental questions through the study of great texts in order that they might become more fully human? Is it not good to strengthen and furnish the mind through the practice of the liberal arts? Is the capacity to think critically not a noble end in itself? Perhaps the most eloquent defense of the idea of liberal education as its own end was mounted by Cardinal Newman in his *The Idea of a University*. No book on higher education has been in our own time so widely revered in theory and so little honored in practice. Though Newman recognized very well that a liberal education would inevitably have all sorts of practical results, he refused to defend it on those grounds. Rather, he insisted that general knowledge (what we would today understand as a combination of general education and liberal education) disciplined the mind through the cultivation of intellectual virtues like sound and balanced judgment, careful reasoning, and synthetic comprehension. To be able to bring to bear upon any subject the several perspectives of the academic disciplines in a thorough, careful, and fair-minded way for the sake of understanding the subject both steadily and in all its various dimensions—this was the ideal of a general, liberal education. It was, and it remains, an exalted and even a compelling ideal, since Newman insisted, unlike most of today’s educators, that theology had to be a part of the circle of learning (the *encyclo-paedeia*) that constituted general knowledge. Properly circumscribed and qualified, Newman’s idea of liberal education remains as worthy of defense by Christians today as it was in the nineteenth century. And needless to say, the ideal propounded by Newman depended upon a face-to-face collegial life, a context that would be difficult to disaggregate.

The qualifications and circumscriptions are critically important, especially if the liberal arts are being defended within the precincts of a church-related academy. Newman distinguished the intellectual virtues of a liberal education very sharply from moral virtues on the one hand and from saintliness on the other. No amount of general knowledge and no amount of liberal learning could by themselves make a man morally virtuous. Newman famously writes, “Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man” (121). It was the Church, not the university, that made saints, Newman insisted. The university at its very best, through the practice of liberal education, could only produce, in the language of Newman’s time, the gentleman. Thus, for example, the university may induce modesty, an intellectual virtue associated with the recognition of the limits of one’s own knowledge, but only the church could form the spiritual virtue of humility based on the understanding that all of the knowledge in the world counts for naught when one stands alone before the judgment seat of God.

Absent the strictures that Newman placed around his own ideal of liberal education, the “liberal free” tradition has become in some places, over the course of the last two centuries, a rough equivalent of the “religion” of the secular academy. As Jim Turner has shown, in his book *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* and in several articles, at the same time that the research university was marginalizing Christianity from the formative role it had played in the antebellum colleges, the liberal arts and various fields of study (especially the humanities) came to replace Christianity as the source of intellectual synthesis, aesthetic cultivation, and moral formation within the academy in the United States. Within this broader context, Norton’s “invention of Western Civilization” (both the course and the concept) was but one of the most durable and successful efforts to shape the souls and moral sentiments of students in a manner that had once fallen within the province of religion. For the secular academy, this development may well be regarded, even by Christians, as salutary. But within the church-related university, unqualified defense of the “liberal free” ideal is problematic.

The replacement of Christianity by some version of the “liberal free” ideal within the secular academy may simply have been the inevitable result of a deep conflict between them. Leon Kass, considering the different ways in which “Athens and Jerusalem” have understood and pursued wisdom, has argued that the “liberal free” ideal may finally be incompatible

with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Three years ago, during a conversation with me about liberal education, he spoke of the incompatibility between Athens and Jerusalem. He argued basically this: “If you rightly distinguish two points of departure: wonder seeking its replacement by knowledge, which makes the perplexities go away, on the side of Athens, versus, on the side of Jerusalem, the fear or reverence for the Lord, which is only the beginning of wisdom but which is never superseded by a kind of full understanding or by comfort in the sufficiency of one’s own powers. The spirit of these two points of departure is very different. Moreover, the wisdom of Jerusalem makes extraordinary demands on how you are to live. What begins with the fear and reverence for the Lord soon issues in a long list of commandments about how to live your life. By contrast, the pursuit of wisdom in the manner of Plato and Aristotle, following the model of Socrates, produces no obligation to family or community, and it seems that the highest kind of life is a private life of self-fulfillment through the pursuit of wisdom and reflection.”

Lutherans and the Liberal Arts

For Lutherans, then, the defense of liberal education in our time represents a vitally important but extremely complicated project. The liberal arts, justified in rhetorical terms, are quite compatible with Christianity, since their exercise belongs to the social and political realms in a way that provides for human flourishing. Christians can readily join with their secular counterparts in extolling the virtues of the contemporary counterpart of the *trivium* in promoting a spirit of public service and in forming “public people” who practice reasoned speech, careful argument, and honest and civil engagement with fellow citizens in word and deed. The motives for such advocacy may differ, but there is no disagreement over ends. As the great monastic Bernard of Clairvaux said in the century preceding the formation of the medieval university, “Some seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. That is curiosity. Others seek knowledge that they may themselves be known. That is vanity. But there are still others who seek knowledge in order to serve and edify others, and that is charity.” Most Christian and many secular educators today would agree with Bernard.

The more “philosophical” tradition of liberal education, the one that promotes critical thinking and self-examination as practices leading to a life of private self-fulfillment and self-sufficiency, can be advocated by educators within church-related academies only if, like Newman, they stress both the powers and the limitations of this ideal. I myself would argue that the philosophical tradition of liberal education can only

become most fully itself, purged of its own inherent tendencies toward a proud and self-sufficient intellectualism that mistakes corrosive skepticism for logical rigor, in constructive engagement with religious traditions like Christianity. It may well be that within the secular academy, the philosophical ideal of liberal education is the very best that can be offered as both a source and a bearer of wisdom and moral formation, and the durability of that ideal offers grounds for recommending it. Even so, the contemporary disenchantment with the liberal arts may be connected in part to the increasingly unappealing character of the good life for humankind as envisioned by the “liberal free” ideal of Athens.

“The Lutheran idea of vocation rightly understood must involve both serious attention to matters of identity and self-knowledge and to matters of faithful action in the world, in other words to a seamless integration of the liberal and the professional, the theoretical and the practical.”

Lutheran colleges and universities at their best attempt to maintain a creative tension between Athens and Jerusalem—and we might add today Benares and Shanghai and many other centers of learning around the globe. The Lutheran idea of vocation rightly understood must involve both serious attention to matters of identity and self-knowledge and to matters of faithful action in the world, in other words to a seamless integration of the liberal and the professional, the theoretical and the practical. Rightly articulated and developed, the Lutheran idea of vocation simply dissolves these distinctions and sets before the higher education community a set of practices that have their meaning, their sense, and their purpose only within a transcendent horizon and only in response to a summons from outside of the self. Liberal education cannot fully be itself unless it is pursued within a religious context.

A Certain Kind of Character

The Lutheran idea of vocation rightly understood and lived out can enhance the value of liberal learning, but it can also enhance and justify the value of the entire Lutheran college experience. I use the qualifier “rightly understood” advisedly here, since two of the many good fruits borne by the whole Lilly Endowment funded Project on the Theological

Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) have been an extension into the public realm of the provenance of the term vocation and the recovery of the contested character of the concept of vocation within the Christian tradition. I want to acknowledge the dynamic character of the concept here, but this is not the place to review and analyze all of the various interpretations of the term. Instead, I want to consider one indisputably Lutheran construal of the concept of vocation, namely that we are called simultaneously to several tasks, i.e. we are multiply stationed in the world as sons and daughters, citizens, educators, partners, and sometimes parents.

Though this teaching is well known among Lutherans, our colleges and universities have been slow fully to develop the implications of the teaching for Lutheran higher education. Perhaps the public fixation over the course of the last decade on efforts to lead so-called “balanced lives” will impel Lutheran educators to realize that preparing young men and women for vocations in the world requires nothing less than a re-description of human excellence that is grounded in the idea of vocation. Such an understanding in turn will require the development of a new moral vocabulary, a way of speaking about what kind of lives are worthy of regard, admiration, and imitation. It will require as well self-conscious and self-critical reflection upon how all of the integral practices peculiar to Lutheran college life can be directed toward the cultivation of this excellence.

Lutheran educators have for many years recognized and valued the kind of excellence I have in mind here, and they have even spent hundreds of thousands of dollars documenting the success of Lutheran colleges and universities in cultivating this excellence within the souls of their students. Several years ago, the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) commissioned a research organization, Hardwick/Day, to do a sociological study that compared Lutheran graduates of Lutheran colleges with Lutheran graduates of flagship state universities and secular liberal arts colleges. The graduates of Lutheran colleges and universities consistently performed more admirably than both comparative groups in multiple domains of human endeavor. They voted more often, volunteered more often, read the daily newspaper more often, stayed faithful to their partners more often, attended church more often, and enjoyed their work more often. In other words, they lived out their several concurrent vocations with great distinction: they displayed a Lutheran form of human excellence.

So far as I know, the publications that reported and interpreted the results of this study made no effort systematically to link sociology and theology, to connect social facts

to theological ideas. I would nevertheless argue today that a primary value of a Lutheran education is its capacity to cultivate this peculiar kind of excellence, integrally connected to the Lutheran idea of vocation but as yet only vaguely described. As I have already suggested, the excellence is hard to comprehend because we lack the vocabulary for doing so. I know this from firsthand experience.

Placing Lives Well Lived

About ten years ago, I tried to pay proper tribute to a Valparaiso University colleague who had died, a man named John Strietelmeier. I realized, as I tried somehow to capture John in words, that I did not have an adequate vocabulary to do so. I had to create a new term of art that I still do not much like, “local genius,” in my efforts to take the true measure of the man and to extol his virtues for the community. I was forced to invent this term of art because I discovered that established categories of honor just did not fit John. So I did the best I could to improvise both a tape measure of ethical assessment and a lexicon of virtue by developing a typology of human excellence that included the idea of the “local genius,” which I have now come to think of as an expression of living well in multiple stations within a local community. Or, to put it differently, local genius summarizes a conception of human excellence *as the unfolding transaction between a place and a person*.

Aristotle famously remarked that in seeking to live nobly there are many ways to go wrong but only one way to go right. And he might have added that the same thing holds true for assessing goodness and nobility in others. Once we have the right tape measure, once we have prepared ourselves rightly to take the measure of our fellow citizens, we can still go wrong—as I discovered in the case of John—unless we distinguish sharply among the following four types that are often confused: the genius, the local genius, the local hero, and the great-souled human being. There are family resemblances among these four kinds of people, but they are finally quite distinct.

Geniuses are those who are both possessed of extraordinary mental endowments and who use those gifts to create great works of human intelligence and imagination—Jane Austen in literature, Einstein in science, Georgia O’Keefe in art. Local geniuses are also extraordinarily gifted. But whereas geniuses are recognized as such exclusively on the basis of the products they create, regardless of the ethical quality of the lives that they lead, local geniuses are recognized as such primarily on the basis of the overall ethical quality of the lives that they lead. The excellence of geniuses does not depend at all on their

local communities. On the contrary, many geniuses are not recognized as such by their contemporaries anywhere. Genius is in some ways to person what utopia is to place. Geniuses arise from somewhere, but their works must finally pass muster everywhere. Local geniuses, by contrast, are defined by the intersection of their lives with their locations.

“Great-souled human beings approach self-sufficiency; local geniuses are most definitely not self-sufficient, since their excellence is continuously shaped in vital ways by their communities.”

This latter fact distinguishes local geniuses from great-souled men and women who share with local geniuses excellence of character but who, like geniuses, do not finally belong to a particular place. Indeed, Aristotle had some doubt about whether those rare human beings who had achieved the full complement of moral and intellectual virtue had any need of other human beings. Great-souled human beings approach self-sufficiency; local geniuses are most definitely not self-sufficient, since their excellence is continuously shaped in vital ways by their communities. All local geniuses are fine and noble human beings, but not all fine and noble human beings are local geniuses.

Nor are local geniuses, local heroes, or heroines. One splendid moment of often self-sacrificial and always courageous achievement defines the local hero or heroine. Entire companies of 9/11 firefighters were local heroes, but only some of them were noble human beings. Local heroism has nothing to do with the overall tenor of a life. Like geniuses, local heroes and heroines are known for what they do or produce, not for who they are. Local geniuses are at least in one respect like local heroes or heroines in that they must along the way do some things that are truly exceptional.

Example of a Local Genius

Local geniuses, in other words, are not “representative” people. John Strietelmeier was anything but a “representative” or typical citizen of Valparaiso, Indiana. In the words of one of his eulogists, one could have seen in John “what a nineteenth century English gentleman might look like if he happened to tumble into the more disheveled and thread-bare twentieth century. John’s gentlemanly traits were a becoming modesty, an instinctive traditionalism, a certain reticence

of feeling, a capacious mind, a fundamental sense of fair play, a robust churchmanship, a firm loyalty to friends and colleagues...charity and respect for the lesser fortunate, and a generous love for all things human.”

“John’s real life genius was a matter of the manner in which these several accomplishments and many others besides were undertaken, woven together, and offered up in service to his community.”

John Strietelmeier fit himself to the contours of the many communities in Valparaiso; his standing as a local genius in the whole, comprehensive community was his own doing. This work of local genius included John’s patient, uncomplaining care over many years for his invalid and increasingly demented wife. It included as well his joint authorship, credentialed with only a master’s degree, of an influential geography text, his twenty-year editorship of a journal of literature, the arts, and public affairs, his service as an academic vice president, and his authorship of the centennial history of Valparaiso University.

But these achievements are mere items in an obituary listing. John’s real life genius was a matter of the manner in which these several accomplishments and many others besides were undertaken, woven together, and offered up in service to his community. This involved thousands of decisions about when to yield to the call of duty, when to sacrifice personal ambition and when to pursue it, when to speak and when to keep silent, when to prefer parody and comedy to plain speaking. This pliable resourcefulness, this almost unflinching ability to know when to scold and when to bless, when to conform and when to dissent, this capacity to shape a life in seamless devotion to the tasks immediately at hand—this was a life’s work.

The measure of that life cannot be a brittle yardstick of absolute standards but instead a flexible tape measure that follows carefully all of the contours of that peculiar piece of the Valparaiso puzzle that John Strietelmeier was for so many years. John was a great character whose genius was constituted by his context, a man who excelled where he found himself stationed in life. His excellence was the direct result of his own construal of his life as the response to a summons from Almighty God.

I am guessing that everyone knows people like John Strietelmeier. I am guessing that many of them are graduates

to your colleges and universities. And if the LECNA study is to be credited, I am guessing further that the people you know who remind you of John have attained a level of excellence that you admire in part *because* they are graduates of the schools you represent. What then is the “value added” to an education at a Lutheran college? It is the formation of a certain kind of character that can be understood, assessed, and celebrated only under the aspect of vocation.

Adding Value Added

I must begin this concluding section by complicating what I have already said. For we do not, after all, respond to our callings alone; we do so in community with others. Thus, we can speak intelligibly about the vocation of a Lutheran college, understanding that all members of such academic communities have different roles to play. John Strietelmeier did not live out his vocation in isolation from others. On the contrary, his flexible responsiveness to the needs of others and his dependence upon the work and the gifts of others were parts of what defined his character.

But do we really want to claim then that John exemplified the only kind of excellence that all Lutheran college students should emulate and that the colleges should seek to reward and celebrate? Yes and no. Yes, because a life like John’s does capture that special quality of Lutheran college graduates that we easily recognize but often fail to try to articulate. No, because it would be absurd not to recognize and celebrate our Pulitzer Prize winners, outstanding athletes, and inventive entrepreneurs on the grounds that such people often fall short of the mark as spouses or children or citizens or volunteers. Real genius often shows itself as part of a team effort. Within a marriage, for example, we might well witness over time one partner devoting herself to the achievement of excellence in a particularly demanding field like medicine while the other partner nobly carries forward familial and civic responsibilities. What we should say here is that the Lutheran college enlarges our conceptions of human excellence just as it enlarges the scope of academic freedom by inviting us to attend to ultimate questions and to matters of faith as well as reason.

With this qualification in mind, let me invite us to consider how we might revise or strengthen our present practices with our academies to make more obvious and more compelling the added value we evoke and provide as colleges and universities of the church. One collection of practices that we should review in light of what I have suggested about human excellence are our memorial services, eulogies, honorary degree conferrals, alumni recognitions, and

all of the other practices we have established in order to set before the community embodiments of what we collectively regard as praiseworthy. Do we, as part of these practices, seek to articulate the special form of human excellence that we should and that we do foster? Or are our choices for awards and other forms of recognition pretty much the same as they would be anywhere?

“The Lutheran college enlarges our conceptions of human excellence just as it enlarges the scope of academic freedom by inviting us to attend to ultimate questions and to matters of faith as well as reason.”

In view of what I have just said about living out vocation in community with others, we should also wonder how we organize our work. For example, are academic departments simply collections of independent contractors that depend upon the department chair to provide all of the advising, student recruiting, course scheduling, etc. that are essential to education? Do we dare think of the task of providing a

good science education as a collective endeavor, encouraging some faculty to provide advising, others to take responsibility for continued pedagogical innovation for the whole department, others to shoulder the burden of collegiate governance, and still others to focus upon research? Or do we prefer to ask each faculty member to take his or her turn regardless of the diversity of gifts and inclinations among them?

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Artist Statement for *The Journey*, by Peter Xiao

Almost always germinated somewhere between observation and imagination, my work began, three decades ago, in quasi-narrative and came to focus on picture-making itself. *The Journey* came at middle age to dwell on my personal past and present, and on future generation. Circling up above are probable callings in my kids—sports, medicine, art, poetry (plus a clown vaguely reminiscent of their grandfather Xiao Qian, writer and journalist)—beneath which are schemes of my youthful pictures. This painting launched my current reflecting on my own life experiences starting with the years of growing up in China.

I was a native of Beijing, China, and turned 10 during Mao’s Cultural Revolution. When President Nixon helped reopen my homeland to the world, I was fooling around with snakes and wildlife on a labor farm where my parents, with hundreds

of other condemned writers and intellectuals belonging under the Ministry of Culture, toiled in the rice paddies. After two years on my own on the people’s commune after high school, I entered Beijing Normal University to study English and later came to Iowa to complete a B.A. in fine arts and English. Following that, I received a Masters of Fine Arts from Tyler School of Art, Temple University, was employed by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and then began teaching part-time and exhibiting my work in Philadelphia and New York. In 1989, I joined the Art Department at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, where I am now professor of painting and drawing and co-chair of the Asian Studies Program. My contact information is Peterxiao@augustana.edu and by office phone: (309) 794-7172.

TOM CRADY AND KARL STUMO¹

“We’re Looking for a College—Not a Vocation”: Articulating Lutheran Higher Education to Prospective Students and Parents Seeking Relevance

American higher education is in a unique time of challenge. This is not a secret. Think of the staggering national economy, the radically shifting demographics of college-going students, the atrophy in many cases of family incomes of our students, the evolving paradigms of teaching and learning through technology, and of course this heightened environment of accountability driven by both the government agencies and disconcerting markets of students. All those challenges have certainly sharpened the ways in which our institutions need to and are providing evidence of outstanding learning. These outcome-based measures affect students on our campuses, but they also can sharpen the message of the long term, post-graduation “benefits” of our students.

The title of this talk is meant to be somewhat provocative. But it is also a title that seeks to address in many cases the clear challenges of articulating the value and nature of the distinctions of our Lutheran higher education institutions. What you won’t receive is some tightly designed set of “best practices” in “messaging” the merits of Lutheran higher education at your particular university or college. Our 26 ELCA colleges are all unique; as a result, there is no one-size-fits-all prescription for expressing the message of our schools—no green or red Lutheran Book of Worship with marketing tactics and standards that we all could consult. That being said, we are encouraged of late by discussions of

the various core elements of Lutheran higher education and how these elements can be expressed within different populations. We will address some of these core elements below.

Our goal today is to share some background to the ways in which our Lutheran colleges are currently expressing their shared Lutheran heritage and Lutheran approaches to learning within our diverse market. As a result, our presentation will ask important “market-orientated” questions.

Given the overarching theme of “commodification in higher education,” we must ask ourselves if our contexts of learning are indeed unique. We will also ask how our “messaging” is perceived by certain students and the marketplace. Finally, we will examine some of the very contemporary understandings and distinctions of Lutheran higher education and we will ask how we might better connect those core elements to the questions, needs, and wants of perspective students.

Recruitment within the Marketplace (Stumo)

From an enrollment perspective, the commodification of higher education is related to differentiation and distinction. If there is no relative quality difference between and among our college options for students, a commodification theory would suggest that those students and their parents will likely choose the lowest cost option if the institution (1) has the relevant

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major, (2) is the right distance from home and—the most difficult to define—(3) simply “feels right.” Given this reality, our institutions have depended on the important distinctions of their location, their size, their majors, their perceived academic reputation, and—forgive me—their “brand,” a word to which many on our campuses have some resistance.

This cost-benefit analysis by students, parents, and recruitment officers alike brings a number of challenges. In a recent publication, Javier Cevallos, president of Kutztown University, a public institution in Pennsylvania, writes:

We are all familiar with the changes the Millennials bring with them. Chief among those is a sense that higher education is no longer a privilege, or even a right, but rather a commodity that can be acquired in many ways and under many delivery systems. Commoditization, thus, means that our stakeholders do not perceive a difference between the “outcome/product/service” we offer, and those offered by our peers or competitors. If we focus only on specific course content or acquiring a specific set of skills, of course they are correct. The rising cost of higher education also contribute to the sense that anyone can simply buy an education. Millennials also bring unparalleled technology savvy, and when combined with a concept of education as a commodity, this creates a totally different environment, one which challenges some of our most dearly held traditions. (Cevallos 14)

This says it well. What makes an institution unique? Certainly there are core elements of Lutheran higher education, but do we know whether these are unique? Or whether those on the outside perceive them as unique? When is the last time you sat through an admissions presentation from a large state university with a robust marketing budget? An online admissions video from Arizona State University highlights students professing to have found meaning and passion in their life, a call to impact the world and the community around them—what Lutherans might call “the neighbor.” These are the messages used by Arizona State, the single largest traditional public research institution in the country.

How does the University of Minnesota articulate its academic experience to prospective students? In a word, they do it *well*. If we peruse their 135 majors, we find everything from finance to neuroscience to Italian. Their materials also speak of finding a great fit *for you*, a university Honors program for students who “have an intense passion for learning,” freshman seminars, small classes, world-class instructors, and unique topics making the freshman seminars increasingly popular among first-year students. We also find four-year graduation rates and also a

guarantee graduation within four years (so important in the mind of the parent), “if you agree to work regularly with an academic adviser, and maintain a positive student record” (“University of Minnesota”). They also highlight studying abroad (300 programs in 60 countries), service learning, getting involved in the community (again, what Lutherans might call serving one’s neighbor), leadership, living-communities, and so on. These are characteristics that are familiar to us, and other schools are conveying them well.

“Students are familiar with characteristics of ‘competitor’ schools that resemble, at least on websites and promotional materials, what we offer.”

So when our admissions counselors and folks “out in the field” work with students, those students are familiar with characteristics of “competitor” schools that resemble, at least on websites and promotional materials, what we offer. This is true not only of flagship institutions but also of strong regional universities and secular private institutions. Lutheran schools in Minnesota compete with Mankato State, St. Cloud State, and more; Concordia University in Moorhead, Minnesota directly competes with Moorhead State and North Dakota State. At Pacific Lutheran University, one of our top public competitors is Western Washington University, which is a very strong regional public setting at Bellingham, right on the Puget Sound, with 15,000 students and 160 academic programs. Western Washington is a nationally recognized institution providing excellent education at an affordable cost. Forbes and Kiplinger’s rank it as a top value in education. That gives you a sense of the landscape, “the market,” and the background for our challenging work to make ELCA schools stand out.

Enrollment and the Market (Cradly)

People often ask me why I left Dartmouth to work at Gustavus. I often say I was insane at Dartmouth and Gustavus is truly a good match for my own core values. About a month after I moved to Gustavus, in fact, my son said to me: “I’ve seen you more in the past two months than I have in the past two years”—and I even lived on campus at Dartmouth. It is good to be working at a small private liberal arts college again.

I want to talk about the current national market landscape and to give some metrics concerned with what we’re facing in enrollment issues. What is most important to us with student application patterns? First, the number of applications prospective students send out to individual colleges went up

by about 10 percent from 2006 to 2012.² Last year, for the first time, Gustavus had a student apply for 24 institutions at once. Consider the price of applying for 24 institutions and that person actually came to Gustavus.

Second, we turn to the national average on yield rate. (“Yield” in college admissions is the percentage of students who choose to enroll in a particular college or university after having been offered admission.) The yield at both public and private institutions has dropped precipitously over the past 10 years. That’s highly concerning. Moreover, because the yield in the 1990s was much more *stable* than now, we could rely on it. The yield at private colleges has dropped from around 37 percent to about 26 percent—a very low yield rate. The Ivy League indicates that their yield is 70-80 percent. Given these realities, the way we shape our strategies for bringing students on campus in order to “meet enrollment” has changed dramatically. For every 1000 students we admitted in 2001, we now have to admit 450 more.

What is more, the average “discount rate” over this same period has increased 19 percent. An institution’s discount rate marks the *price* of an institution (that is, the “sticker price”) in relation to the actual *cost*—what a student and his/her family actually pay for college. The discount rate can be broken down into several different categories, including the first year discount and discount rates that do or do not include state and federal aid (and in some instances that is calculated differently).

The other component of discount rate, which is more difficult to control, is tuition remission. If an ELCA college admits students from other institutions that have tuition remission, that comes right off the top of the financial aid budget. It is also very difficult to predict. All schools are now considering ways to try to regulate discounting due to remission to a certain degree. Many institutions do regulate it; they say if you give us one student we will give you one, or we will take five students this year because that is what is in our budget and so on.

But the most interesting thing when it comes to financing education is that we are seeing families behave in ways that reflect their assumptions about cost. About 43 percent of families rule out an institution simply by looking at the price; 51 percent rule out an institution based on cost at the time applying; 63 percent rule out a college after admission; and 69 percent do so after financial aid. In other words, the timing and manner in which we communicate cost, price, and discounting to families is absolutely essential. At Gustavus, we now bring parents right into the interview with us to try to demystify these terms and explain what they can expect from scholarships, merit aid, and need-based aid. We have to think many steps ahead of where families are at a given point in time.

According to Sallie Mae’s 2013 Summary Report on “How America Pays for College,” attitudes about borrowing money to finance college have changed dramatically over the past several years. While 86 percent of students strongly agree that college is an “investment in the future,” and 62 percent are “willing to stretch financially,” only 58 percent of students (and 49 percent of students’ parents) would rather borrow money than not attend. The number is down 9 percentage points from just 5 years ago (“How America Pays” 13). For institutions with an endowment of more than 300 million dollars, the endowment income into the operating budget allows much more flexibility with financial aid, both in terms of merit-based and need-based scholarships. But for schools with more modest endowments, it is nearly impossible to fund college education without taking out student loans, even as 42 percent of students and 51 percent of parents resist doing so. Clearly, too, the financial crisis of 2008 was game changer in admissions. Many parents were *unable* to borrow against their homes because home values dropped. For all practical purposes that has not changed today; even if it has, the Sallie Mae statistics and many other sources tell us that families are simply *unwilling* to borrow.

“While 86 percent of students strongly agree that college is an ‘investment in the future,’ and 62 percent are ‘willing to stretch financially,’ only 58 percent of students (and 49 percent of students’ parents) would rather borrow money than not attend. The number is down 9 percentage points from just 5 years ago.”

To take one extreme example: The family of a Gustavus applicant had a \$700,000 home and they seemed to be making \$400,000/year. Despite these assets, they didn’t want to borrow anything, they didn’t want to pay their parental contribution, and they wanted financial aid from us. I wanted to say, “I’m sorry—go sell a car or something.” I didn’t say that—but I almost did. And so, even families that have the ability to pay are not seeing college as a value given the cost. This is quite different than what we saw a decade or two ago, and it is incredibly disconcerting.

This trend also affects other students at the college or university. Schools that are tuition-driven often rely on wealthier families to help with net tuition revenue so that the institutions can fund students who don’t have the ability

to pay. Given new reluctances, we have to use new strategies to talk about why it is a value to invest in college.

What are students and parents looking for in a college education? The leading reason students give for attending their particular institution is its good academic reputation (63.8 percent mark it as “very important”). That really doesn’t vary much from regional to national trends. The second reason is to get a good job, with 55.9 percent reporting this as very important. What I hear often is that parents do not want their son or daughter moving back into their house after he or she graduates from college. Actually, the most frequent comment is that parents want their daughters and sons to graduate in four years so they don’t have to pay a fifth year of tuition.

Another leading reported factor in choosing one’s particular college or university is the amount of financial aid offered, with 45.6 percent of students ranking it as very important. This reason can actually undercut retention since financial aid does not necessarily guarantee a good fit between student and institution. So, if the student is basing their decision to go to a certain college based on the financial aid package, it might be her or his third choice and we worry about attrition later on. Other factors include the right size (38.8 percent), access to graduate/professional school (32.8 percent), and preferences of parents (15.1 percent). At Gustavus, we advise against simply following parents’ recommendations; in our experience those students were likely to leave more frequently. Finally, a relatively small percentage of students were attracted to their school for its religious affiliation; only 7.6 percent of students find it very important. Now that may seem disturbingly low. However, the cooperative institutional research program at UCLA, where these statistics come from, is administered before the institutions influence on that student (Pryor 41).

At Gustavus, 52 percent of our students are Lutheran and that has remained with 2-3 percentage points over the last 20 years. And yet, when I talk to parents and families, the church-relatedness of Gustavus rarely comes up. What I think happens is that parent expectations and values assert subtle influence over a very long period of time. If it is simply assumed that a child might go to a Lutheran college, then that child might apply and enroll without explicitly considering its Lutheran-relatedness.

How do we aid students? There’s need based aid, merit aid, loans, external scholarships and so on. Merit aid is particularly important when it comes to financing our colleges. Why? Let’s say that a college’s price is \$49,695. A “full pay” family is still offered \$5,000 in merit based scholarships. They tend to feel fairly positive about that and so, when they enroll, they generate a lot of net tuition revenue. When we award merit aid, we use very sophisticated regression models to determine the aid based on a student’s academic qualifications, their parents’ ability to pay, and a variety of other variables to determine how much it takes to get a student to pay her or his deposit. I would argue that without merit aid—unless you’re an Ivy League school—you simply cannot enroll the class that you need to enroll to make budget.

The Lutheran component is extremely important to many of the Lutheran colleges and universities. We don’t always talk about it explicitly but it’s implied throughout everything one sees on our campus; at Gustavus, our core values are in our dining hall and campus center and they are espoused by different constituencies on campus. But talking about our Lutheran identity directly proves to be a turn off for some students. When students say to me, “I really feel comfortable here,” I know that they can attribute that to our core values.



- Is Lutheran, not sectarian; it favors the Lutheran tradition and Lutheran values, including religious services, but does not seek religious uniformity (all members of the campus community are invited to daily chapel and other religious observances, but participation is voluntary);
- Has as its goal combining a mature understanding of faith with intellectual rigor to the benefit of society, believing faith and education inform each other;
- Purposely explores moral development;
- Honors individuals, but believes that individuals find fulfillment in community;
- Values diversity and welcomes students, faculty, staff, and administrators of other faiths or no religious tradition, yet expects all faculty, staff and administrators to support the mission of the college;
- Appreciates humor, including directing some of that humor toward itself.

Lutheran Identity as Officially Articulated (Stumo)

There are some misnomers about how institutions go about articulating their Lutheran college values. Even if the articulation of college identities has changed over time, conversations about Lutheran higher education still happen in church basements—sometimes over hot dish. Still, it is necessary to articulate our identities in the right way to the right audience, and the first way we do that is through our mission statements. Tom and I spent time looking over the websites of many of our ELCA colleges and picked out what we believe are some representations of expression of mission as well as the expression of our Lutheran values on other webpages.

“Even if the articulation of college identities has changed over time, conversations about Lutheran higher education still happen in church basements—sometimes over hot dish.”

When reading these, we need to attend to the old classic balance of “feature and benefit.” Augsburg College in Minneapolis does a nice job of balancing feature and benefit; the college educates students to be informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders. This experience is supported by an engaged community that is committed to international diversity in its life and work. Augsburg education is defined by excellence in the liberal arts and professional studies and is guided by the faith and values of the Lutheran church. It is also shaped by its urban and global setting. A prospective student might see this missional statement and say, “What’s in it for me?” Luther might ask, “What does this mean?,” as he does again and again in the Catechism writings.

Many at Augsburg have expressed Augsburg’s distinction. I think “The Augsburg Promise” as articulated by President Paul Pribbenow has gone a long way in

articulating this distinctiveness. It unfolds through three components. The first is the *concept of vocation*, inherited from our Lutheran theological tradition and embedded in the Augsburg curriculum. Vocation is not about self-fulfillment but a deeply nuanced way of helping students explore their gifts and commitments, understand the arc of their lives, and embrace how their work in the world has significance. The second expression is academic excellence, or rather, “academic growth and achievement in terms of both access—how our students are welcomed as part of our diverse community—and excellence—the standards we set and the support we offer to ensure that their education is of the highest order” (Pribbenow). The third component is about equipping Augsburg students for the lives that they will lead in the world. An education grounded in the liberal arts must aim at ensuring that our students are educated across a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. At the same time, a college community like Augsburg must consider how students are informed with certain skills and habits that will prepare themselves for citizenship and leadership. There is “feature-benefit” language here and we all need to sharpen that.

We turn now to my own university, Pacific Lutheran University. The middle name of PLU can be both a strength and an absolute challenge. The Pacific Northwest is sometimes referred to as the “none zone,” meaning that when residents are asked about their religious affiliation, the leading response is to check “none.” At PLU, we say that we are proud of our middle name. It speaks directly to our Lutheran heritage and that tradition’s call and commitment to academic excellence, academic freedom, and a learning atmosphere where all perspectives on faith and reason are expressed openly. This is what Lutheran education has been all about since Martin Luther. Obviously, we also try to lift up those elements of Lutheran higher education in an inclusive way.

On the Gustavus Adolphus webpage entitled “Lutheran Heritage,” one finds an interesting balance of missional language and outreach language. The mission insists



Academic excellence, academic freedom and an atmosphere where all perspectives on faith and reason are expressed openly—it's what Lutheran education is all about.

upon freedom of inquiry and criticism in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Now I'm going to challenge the accessibility of one of the descriptions; the site "explains" that the Lutheran tradition "prefers paradoxes to dogmatism or ideological 'certainties.'" I know Gustavus's academic profile is a little higher than PLU's, but that description seems less than accessible to even great students. At any rate, lower on the page one sees articulated the way Gustavus expresses this Lutheran tradition. It has the goal of combining a mature understanding of faith with intellectual rigor to the benefit of society. It believes that faith and education inform one another. I certainly think a student can break through all of that. This is a model website for many.

I also want to commend Wartburg on some provocative language. The main message is that Wartburg is "A Welcoming Place." It highlights the claim that, "Lutheran or not," it is a place for you. Then, consider what we recruitment officers call "positioning": "Just as Notre Dame doesn't apologize for being Roman Catholic, Wartburg doesn't apologize for being Lutheran. While we are unapologetic about our identity as a college of the church, we are equally vigorous in our efforts to welcome and include others." That is compelling. That is language that breaks through denominational backgrounds. I wouldn't doubt that the Wartburg staff uses that language directly in interviews and at college fairs and in their work with perspective students.

Lutheran Identity as Commonly Misunderstood

Our official websites and promotional materials articulate these mission statements and explanations of our Lutheran identities rather well. But it is another thing to ask whether the message is well received—especially by prospective students and their parents. As a way of testing this, we asked the recruitment and enrollment staffs at Pacific Lutheran University and Gustavus Adolphus College about marketing Lutheran higher education. Specifically, we asked our colleagues: "Do perspective students and parents understand the tenets and values of Lutheran higher education? Do you believe that students are willing to pay more [for these tenets and values]?" Here are their responses:

- "In general the students and parents I work with have very little understanding of the tenets and value of Lutheran higher education. They're much more interested in majors, student life, athletics, arts, and especially outcomes that happen as a result of attending our Lutheran college."
- "I believe that even students of parents who attend Lutheran schools are decreasingly willing to pay for it. In fact, my old pastor preached against student debt, particularly referencing 'those expensive Lutheran schools.'"



A Welcoming Place

Lutheran or not, there's a place for you here. Wartburg College is a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Just as Notre Dame doesn't apologize for being Roman Catholic, Wartburg doesn't apologize for being Lutheran. While we are unapologetic about our identity as a college of the church, we are equally vigorous in our efforts to welcome and include others. We recognize God's image within every person. Students, faculty, and staff of all races, ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations, gender identities, and philosophies are welcomed and invited to participate in a process of critical reflection on their most foundational commitments in life. We are committed to diversity and inclusion on our campus, not in spite of our heritage but precisely because of it.

- “I don’t believe that students that choose our Lutheran college do it specifically for the tenets of Lutheran higher education; they choose our schools because it simply ‘feels right.’”
- “Washington State has been recognized as one of the most un-churched states in the United States with a declining church membership. The combination of having Lutheran in your middle name and an un-churched state makes it difficult to recruit perspective students who are not otherwise connected to or familiar with Lutheran higher education. Students pass by our table during college fairs because they think our middle name (‘Lutheran’) makes us a bible school.”

Those are voices “from the field,” so to speak. I (Stumo) too find that the “Lutheran” part of Pacific Lutheran University often presents an obstacle in the minds of our perspective students. And yet, once I articulate what “Lutheran” means in the curriculum and student life, it becomes a point of distinction. But note that distinction happens only *after* I or another articulates what Lutheran means. And many of us agree that that is a really hard thing to do.

What then Shall We Do?

Those in admissions and marketing on our campuses need to dig deeply into the good work that is being done in articulating Lutheran identity in a curricular and collegiate context.

Take “vocation” as a leading example. Many of us in recruitment and enrollment find it difficult to speak meaningfully with prospective students about vocation. Or at least when we use that word, it seems to lose the essential connotations and context that should go with it: critical and humble inquiry, otherness, diversity, service, justice, and so on. In fact, I would argue that Jesuit colleges and universities have done a better job “leveraging” service and justice in comparison to Lutheran institutions. Still, there are exceptions. Paul Pibbenow makes a really nice argument for *semper reformanda* (“always reforming”) as one of the tenants of our common callings (Swanson). In short, the history of the church in higher education is well positioned for ongoing reforms that benefit the common good. And many of the same pieces are articulated by many of us in different ways: critical questioning, freedom of expression, protection of learning, a sense of community, the intrinsic value of the whole creation, the gifts God gives humans, discerning one’s vocation, service throughout one’s life, and so on. And so, we have the tools to be able to “position” vocation well.

Still, communications professionals will tell us that the articulation of our Lutheran identities needs to be based in solid strategies of message development and message identification. We have to do our homework, we have to listen to what our market says and value what it says is valuable. But how do we do that? Many institutions talk about the market research that asks students, parents, alumni, and other constituents those “messaging” questions. We ask current students, “Are you experiencing what we said you would experience in the recruitment process?” That will test the *validity* of an institution’s messages. We also present messages to perspective students through market analysis, asking: “Do these messages resonate with your interests, values, and aspirations?” That tests the *relevance* of messaging. So we spend much time asking which messages are accurate, which are important, and which test well against the interests, aspirations, and values of our perspective students.

“The articulation of our Lutheran identities needs to be based in solid strategies of message development and message identification.”

We need to connect those messages about the needs of the market to the strengths of our Lutheran higher education contexts. This is the “blocking and tackling” of leveraging our identities, although we typically use the terms “credible,” “relevant,” “differentiating,” and “compelling.”

When we ask a family, “Are you willing to pay more?,” we have to have a good set of reasons why they should be compelled to invest in our school over one that may present itself with similar characteristics at a lower price. That is the commodification connection. And then, of course, we need to analyze our communication channels: How do these conversations happen?

What gets the most visibility: print media or electronic conversations through social media? Obviously the media of our stories have changed over the years, and this might change the stories some themselves. Many of our perspective students and their parents are looking for those authentic stories about the nature of our institutions through the voices of our current students, which is probably most likely to happen on Twitter. Often our best ambassadors are our students and alumni. We need to enable them to tell their own authentic stories through multiple media. Then, the rest of us need to connect the dots between their stories, the core elements of Lutheran higher education, and the questions that

our perspective students are asking. Finally, we also need to “message” to those who influence prospective students—to their coaches, folks in church circles, counselors, high school teachers, community college advisors, and—not least importantly—to eventual employers.

Some will say of all of this risks the “commodification of Lutheran higher education.” We happen to think that they are tactics just strategic enough—just savvy enough—to ensure that a new generation of students will be able to find their callings and a life of meaning and service by choosing to attend Lutheran colleges and universities.

Endnotes

1. Editor’s note: The authors collaborated on their research and made this joint presentation at the 2013 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference. The author’s name is given next to a section title that he presented exclusively.

2. Statistics in this section are taken from Sallie Mae’s national study of college students and parents (see “How America Pays” below); from the Cooperative Institutional Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (see Pryor below); as well as from data collected at Gustavus Adolphus College and peer institutions.

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PATRICIA J. LULL

More Value than Many Sparrows: A Sermon on Matthew 10:26-31

I left for college on my eighteenth birthday. It was a Sunday afternoon in mid-September. After church and a quick lunch with my family, I changed into the striped shirt and bell bottom jeans I had saved all summer to wear on my first day at college. While the table was being cleared and the dishes washed, I carried my college things out to the car: a stereo, a typewriter, a waste basket, a tennis racket, a trunk of clothing, a suitcase filled with linens and towels and the new Indian-print spread for my dorm bed, and a box of books including the Webster's dictionary I had received as an award at my high school graduation.

When I had loaded everything into the car, I sat in the backseat with the door swung open, waiting for my family to come out for the drive to the College of Wooster. I wasn't about to re-enter the house with my dream of going to college so near at hand. My widowed mother and my oldest sister, Jean, who had come home from her job in Cleveland to "get her baby sister off to college," may have remembered the day differently, but I marvel that so many of the details are still stunningly clear in my mind. Even at the time, that day—that beginning—meant so much to me that I knew I would measure my life by everything *before* and *after* that 82 mile drive.

In fairness, I should say that my sister Kathy was just a year ahead of me at that same college and I knew a week later she'd be a daily part of my life all over again. But still, leaving for college was a big deal. My family both cheered and wept that day. My church prayed for me and the many others

leaving "to go off to school." The hometown community rejoiced that another generation was launched on its way into higher education.

For all I could tell at the time, my college received me and 500 or so other entering students with joy and respect. They rolled out a royal welcome that day. Every faculty member and senior administrator showed up to greet us; older undergraduates returned early to serve as our RA's and team captains; even the housekeeping and custodial staff stood by lest we need anything on our move-in day. That evening the president welcomed us at a reception in his home, greeting us individually at the door.

But forty-some years later I can guess a whole lot more about what was going on behind-the-scenes at that college. It was the summer after the shootings just up the road at Kent State. The faculty and returning students would long remember the agitation that had marked the close of the last academic year. The admissions yield was higher than anticipated, which was great for the budget, but meant that lounges had to be turned into dorm rooms over the summer and additional classes added to the Fall offerings. Someone spent their August vacation making that happen.

I work occasionally as an enrollment consultant these days and know the thin margin by which most Lutheran colleges and universities—not to mention Lutheran seminaries—must navigate the treacherous waters of change and the demanding

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financial models for sustainability. In hindsight I can calculate the tuition discount that allowed me to be in college.

Back in the 1970s someone was surely watching the Return-on-Investments and noting the “butts in seats,” as enrollment is so inelegantly called these days, but little of that leaked out into public awareness. No one ever hinted to the two daughters of a widow living on less than \$5,000 a year that her children were anything less than smart kids, working their way through college with work-study earnings and well deserved scholarships. In those days students were anything *but* commodities; they were young participants in the college’s ambitious mission and life, welcomed to campus with joy and eager anticipation.

“In those days students were anything but commodities; they were young participants in the college’s ambitious mission and life, welcomed to campus with joy and eager anticipation.”

No lectionary text is exactly scripted for this conference theme. But hearing the words “vocation” and “commodification” in the title, this preacher’s imagination turned to these half dozen verses from Matthew 10, a chapter which is all about vocation. Most have heard these verses before but we can hear them anew as God’s message about what matters in a world of collegiate worry and woe. Jesus teaches:

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10: 26-31)

If you read the whole tenth chapter of Matthew, you’ll note the realism with which the tough challenges of discipleship are named. This is the unabridged version of what will happen to those who dare to follow the way of Christ. Though written to such followers near the end of the first century, it still holds true for those of us—and the institutions in which we serve—who truly aspire to the subversive and counter-cultural “way of the cross” in the twenty-first century. It’s a text that addresses both the *certainty of suffering* and the

possibility of endurance, which as far as I can see, are pretty good themes for Lutheran Higher Education these days.

Those sparrows in this gospel text were dinner for some poor family. They were, in fact, a commodity—an item to be bought and sold. But Matthew assures us that even those humble sparrows, offered at bargain price on the dollar menu, are regarded by the Creator God as creatures with value and worth.

“Don’t be afraid,” Jesus whispered to his followers. “No matter what happens, you are of more value than many sparrows.”

There’s a lot that could make us fearful today. There’s a lot of grim news about higher education in the air these days: Debates about student loan rates. Enrollment challenges. Competition between the institutions where we work and even greater competition with public universities and community colleges. It’s hard to say with certainty which of our Lutheran schools will even be around in 5 or 10 years. So it is right and wise that this conference be grounded in the unfailing promises of Holy Scripture.

And what exactly are those promises? I’ve looked from Genesis to Revelation and I can’t find the text that assures us that our Lutheran institutions will be exempt from the turmoil and financial challenges facing almost every other business and non-profit in this country.

The concept of “vocation” is not a guarantee that we will face fewer challenges. If anything, daring to speak of institutional mission as “vocation” likely guarantees that we will have to wrestle even harder to turn our values into real opportunities. Opportunities for slow-paced learning to thrive. Opportunities for ideas to be refined in the rough-and-tumble of genuine debate. Opportunities for students to earn a degree—especially students who cannot pay the full cost of attending our colleges and universities.

These may not sound like high-risk ventures, but such scholarship and learning take time and much careful, human interaction. In an age of huge anxiety about profit and loss, holding fast to these commitments may indeed involve a threat to body and soul.

And in that regard I love the candor of Matthew’s gospel. It promises not the easy path but the way that leads us *with Christ* into Christ-like service and sacrifice, not for our gain but for the benefit of others. It promises that God’s way of justice will indeed prevail in the end. It whispers in our ear that God’s mercy and investment in this whole creation is even more durable than our beloved alma maters. Most of all, it promises that this trust in Jesus Christ and the way of the cross is the easy yoke, the lightest burden of all.

Thanks be to God.

ANN HILL DUIN AND ERIC CHILDERS

Reinventing Lutheran Liberal Arts: A Preliminary Report on Project DAVID¹

We begin with comments from Dan Currell, a graduate and current trustee of Gustavus Adolphus College:

My college years were spent on a hill in a small town. I was in the company of 3,000 other people—students, faculty, staff—and we were set apart. The only thing on the agenda was to continue being Gustavus Adolphus College, whatever that meant. I didn't know who first set that agenda, and I don't recall a lot of active reflection on what it meant. What did it mean to be a residential, liberal arts college in the Swedish Lutheran tradition? We discussed that a little bit, but mostly we just did it.

Now I am a trustee. A lot has changed, but the basic character of the place hasn't. Whatever it meant to be Gustavus in 1990—well, it still means that in 2013. On the horizon, I can see a lot more reflection about what exactly it means to be Gustavus. Everyone can sense the powerful forces affecting colleges; some would say they threaten to destroy the four-year residential model altogether. Some expect this to happen fast.²

Like Currell, the authors' college years were spent at ELCA liberal arts colleges in small towns: Ann's at Waldorf College and Luther College in Iowa, Eric's at Lenoir-Rhyne University

in North Carolina. Each of us took part in the many distinctive opportunities offered by these residential, liberal arts institutions. We are proud, supportive alumni.

This past summer, Ann had the opportunity to attend The Vocation of a Lutheran College conference held at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where professors, administrators, and staff across ELCA colleges gathered to address the theme of "Vocation: A Challenge to the Commodification of Education." During one session a culminating slide placed the following themes as representative of distinctive institutional commitment to Vocation: global perspective, community, service, leadership, and values. And yet, discussion that followed that presentation indicates that these themes are not distinctive to this set of ELCA institutions.

And so, we repeat a question from Currell: "What are we for? What's the goal? Since there are now innumerable other (and cheaper) ways to be educated, why are we doing *this*?" Currell concludes: "The colleges with a compelling answer to that question—where all 3,000 people know the answer—are going to be fine."

In this essay, we write about a new research initiative called Project DAVID and preview some of its initial findings about

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the way ELCA colleges and universities are strategically reinventing themselves to meet current and emerging challenges.

Project DAVID and a Goliath of Challenges

Project DAVID is about showcasing strategic reinvention underway across higher education. Phase one, focusing mainly on a set liberal arts colleges and universities that are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), asks these questions:

- How are these colleges and universities reinventing themselves?
- How do faith and learning components impact reinvention?

This work builds on Eric Childers’ findings on the impact of leadership on organizational identity as described in *College Identity Sagas* (2012).³ We use a set of themes—Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, Digital opportunities (thus, DAVID)—and associated framing questions to identify how these institutions are positioning themselves for future success. We plan to share results in several ways: this introductory essay, a collection of contributed chapters as part of an eBook launched early 2014, presentations and workshops at upcoming conferences and association meetings, and an associated web (blog) site for continued conversation.

A liberal arts education empowers individuals and prepares them to lead amidst complexity, diversity, and change. Our country’s liberal arts colleges and universities provide students with broad knowledge of science, culture, and society; in-depth

knowledge of a specific area; a strong sense of social responsibility; and communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills. Amid the challenges and opportunities of our global era, our society and the world is in great need of graduates with this depth and breadth of knowledge.

The purpose of project DAVID is not about arguing that one set of institutions is better at empowering and preparing individuals than another; the purpose here is to showcase strategic reinvention underway as a means to foster conversation among institutions about the keys to their future success and the degree to which those keys are shared. This first phase of study focuses primarily on liberal arts colleges and universities that are part of the ELCA; therefore, a key question surrounds how faith and learning components impact identity, distinction, and ultimately, sustainability. These institutions face increasing demands for assessment, accountability, meeting accreditation requirements, relevancy and return on investment. These are transformative times with major factors demanding increased performance and targeted outcomes. Continued success quite simply means continued sustainability amid the “perfect storm” of external factors that will only increase.

Studies and articles abound regarding the intense challenges facing all of United States higher education, with most recent collections pointing to the need to realign programs and experiences to the needs and changing value propositions of learners. Table 1 includes forces, challenges, and factors outlined by three such authors: Jeffrey J. Selingo (2013), editor at large for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, identifies five disruptive forces that “will change higher education forever;” Donald Norris (2013), President and founder of Strategic Initiatives, and colleagues emphasize six major challenges

SELINGO’S FORCES	NORRIS ET AL.’S CHALLENGES	POPENICI’S FACTORS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sea of red ink 2. The disappearing state in public higher education 3. The well of full-paying students is running dry 4. The unbundled alternatives are improving 5. The growing value gap 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students and their families can no longer afford a degree 2. American higher education is facing a sea of red ink 3. American higher education has failed to assess student learning 4. Most institutions lack organizational agility and will 5. Higher education has been unable to leverage technology 6. Higher education has failed to learn from the disruptive innovations pioneered by the for-profit institutions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decreasing affordability of higher education 2. Growing unemployability and marginalization of recent graduates 3. Continuing changes in marketplace conditions 4. Emerging higher education alternatives 5. An increasing desire of learners for practical, innovation- and entrepreneurship-rich experiences

facing higher education; and Stefan Popenici, author of *What Undermines Higher Education* (2013), emphasizes that “there is an increasing (and justified) concern that all will change soon.⁴ New data and analysis increase the anxiety that the current monopoly of higher education will be lost and just a few universities [and colleges] will survive. No one knows which, how many or even if any university [or college] will have the chance to celebrate the middle of this century.”⁵

In 1990, David Breneman asked the provocative question: Are we losing our liberal arts colleges? His research indicated that, given “their offering a curriculum that does not cater to current student concerns with the job market,” they may be disproportionately affected by this changing educational environment, and that the very existence of this educational model may be at stake.⁶ More than 20 years later, Vicki Baker and colleagues revisited the viability of liberal arts colleges, stating that “Many powerful threats to the liberal arts college have been active in recent years. These include the cost of residential education; competition from new education providers, including online and for-profit educational programs; and a job market in transition to a knowledge and service-based economy.”

Noting the source of creativity that many liberal arts colleges represent, Baker et al. emphasize that “If the liberal arts college as an educational alternative dies out or morphs into another type of higher education institution, an influential ‘test kitchen’ for innovation in undergraduate education will disappear or, perhaps, become too peripheral to play a leadership role.” They urge academic leaders “to take steps to renew and reinvigorate these valuable institutions before liberal arts colleges disappear from the higher education landscape or shrink to the status of a minor educational enclave that serves only the academic and socio-economic elite.”⁷ Again, the purpose of phase one of Project DAVID is to showcase strategic reinvention and reinvigoration underway in ELCA institutions.

We must keep in mind, amid the disruptive literature, that liberal arts institutions have great resilience. As John Thelin stated in his 2006 essay on the resilience of the independent liberal arts college:

Faced with a fluid landscape of higher education systems, especially in the public sector, independent liberal arts colleges have been highly effective in maintaining and revitalizing their mission of baccalaureate education. Their resilience has required innovation in the curriculum and the structure of their campuses and has alerted attention to changes in the external environment of state and federal policies as well as in private philanthropy.⁸

We also must keep in mind that liberal arts institutions have ample opportunity to foster Distinction and attend to Analytics, Value, Innovation, and Digital opportunity. There is no doubt that a multiplicity of potential themes exists by which we could showcase strategic reinvention and collaboration underway across these ELCA institutions. But this set of themes follow in response to the factors, forces, and challenges facing our institutions, challenges that emphasize the need for analytics, innovation and agility; the need to leverage technology; and the importance of a clear value proposition and fostering clear distinction.

The use of “DAVID” is no casual reference. In 1 Samuel 17, David faced Goliath, a giant warrior who was greatly feared. Armed with attention to Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, and Digital Opportunity, institutions can also surely face the factors, forces, and challenges pressing down on them.

As part of this project, we have been visiting with college and university leadership across a number of our ELCA institutions.⁹ The remaining years of this decade will present each of our institutions with “Goliath facing” moments. In the remainder of this essay, we provide framing questions and additional thoughts around the DAVID themes as a means to foster conversation about the keys to future success and the degree to which those keys are shared. We invite our college and university leadership to embrace this opportunity to showcase strategic reinvention, and by so doing, work collectively to position our institutions for success.

Distinction

As part of strategic reinvention, how is each institution making a compelling case as to why and how its programs are distinctive?

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines a liberal education as one that intentionally fosters, across multiple fields of study, wide-ranging knowledge of science, cultures, and society; high-level intellectual

“As part of strategic reinvention, how is each institution making a compelling case as to why and how its programs are distinctive?”

and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges.¹⁰ A liberal

arts education has a core focus on creating an educated and engaged citizenry; indeed, its strongest proponents reiterate that the liberal arts represent a condition of freedom.

The reality is that this most distinctive, founded in America, higher education model is under attack. While liberal arts colleges rethink their messaging in the face of criticism,¹¹ some leadership appears stymied as to what its “distinction” will represent in the twenty-first century. Others, however, remain firm and visionary: Carol Geary Schneider, AAC&U president, states firmly that the AAC&U will “make the future standing of the liberal arts a central theme” in its next phase of work:

The liberal arts and sciences are basic to participatory democracy because only these studies build the “big picture” understanding of our social and physical environment that everyone needs in order to make judgments that are fundamental to our future... American society needs to own [this] tradition and to reinvest in its future vitality and generativity... Anything less will cede this nation’s educational leadership to others—and put this democracy’s future gravely at risk.¹²

And Swarthmore President Rebecca Chopp (2012) urges her presidential colleagues to shift the playing field. In an empowering speech to her faculty, she stated that “The case for the liberal arts, in my opinion, needs to be reframed to suggest not only how well we serve individual students but also how we act as a counterforce against a culture that is commodifying knowledge and projecting a view of community and anthropology that is reductionist and dangerous.”

As each of the institutions in phase one of Project DAVID is an ELCA college, we also ask: How do faith and learning components impact reinvention?

In seeking to identify factors related to institutional religious identity at colleges and universities of the ELCA, Eric Childers (2012) investigated three central questions:

- Are colleges and universities of the ELCA preserving or diminishing their Lutheran identities?
- Do the status drivers of secularization, financial viability, and faculty professionalization affect Lutheran institutional identity at these colleges and universities?
- If the colleges and universities described in the case studies are seeking to preserve their Lutheran identities, why and how are they planning this preservation?

Childers conducted case studies of three ELCA colleges that fall at various places on the continuum of religious identity:

Concordia College (robust identity); Lenoir-Rhyne University (mid point); and Gettysburg College (pervasive secularity). His work focused on institutional identity preservation and diminishment through the lens of two organizational theories, isomorphism and critical events theory. Findings from his literature review indicated the following:

- (1) institutional players have a significant effect on shaping organizational identity;
- (2) institutional identity is dynamic;
- (3) college governing boards and presidents significantly shape institutional mission through strategic planning;
- and (4) colleges and universities of the ELCA (at variable degrees) are institutions committed to freedom of inquiry, exploration of vocation, and faithful inquiry open to people of diverse faith (and non-theistic) traditions. (38-39)

Childers specifically explored the impact of secularization, financial viability, and faculty professionalization on organizational Lutheran identity, finding that “more than any other factor, the leadership of governing boards, presidents, and other senior administrators was essential in preserving or diminishing organizational Lutheran identity at all three schools” (201); and that “an institution’s self-understanding of its identity...is a vital ingredient in fully developing its intended educational experience for students, professional environment for faculty and staff, and societal relevance in developing citizens for service in the world.” (210)¹³

Self-understanding of identity, of distinction, is vital to strategic reinvention. Thus, Childers’ previous work is foundational to Project DAVID. Given his findings on the impact of leadership on organizational identity, as this project progresses, we will give special attention to how leadership—governing boards, presidents, and other senior administrators—is attending to the major factors, forces, and challenges facing liberal arts institutions.

Any discussion of Lutheran college identity must include the notion of vocation. Derived from the Latin word *vocat*, which means “to call,” vocation is understood to be the way Christians live out baptismal identities—whom God calls them to be—through relationships and occupations in service to God and neighbor. Vocation is about how God calls us to be helpful workers, responsible family members, steadfast friends, good citizens, and cheerful servants to neighbor.

In a crowded and competitive marketplace where value is so central to the decision-making conversation, how are Lutheran colleges and universities different from competitors? The ideal and potential of vocation is the key to this difference, distinction, and identity. For ELCA schools,

vocation and value are inseparable. Vocation matters at Lutheran colleges and universities, where each is free to create environments where students can ask critical questions about life's purpose, can wrestle with questions about meaningful work, and can discern their own call to service in the world. Guided by mentoring faculty, exploration of vocation should spark in students' minds the questions: "To what and for what am I called in this life, and how will my life reflect that calling?"

Project DAVID keeps vocation central to the conversation of identity, reinvention, and value. How can colleges accustomed to articulating their missions in the context of vocation imagine new ways to engage "calling and purpose" as part of their organizational identity? How can schools for which vocation is not central work to reclaim this Lutheran bedrock as part of their reinvention efforts?

Analytics

What role do analytics play in creating and sustaining each institution?

A key component in providing a compelling case for strategic reinvention comes from attention to analytics. Jacqueline Bichsel (2012) defines analytics as "the use of data, statistical analysis, and explanatory and predictive models to gain insights and act on complex issues" (6). Institutions committed to reinvention are those that identify baselines and benchmarks, determine trend lines, and commit to pursuing a deep understanding of what matters and what makes a difference. Using data to drive decision-making behavior, these institutions identify patterns and take "actionable intelligence" to enhance student success and institutional achievement.¹⁴

“What role do analytics play in creating and sustaining each institution?”

Analytics is about paying attention to learning and to fostering a culture of improvement. It's about using analytics to create an environment that best supports student and faculty success. Attention to analytics signals institutional commitment to collect, organize, and analyze data that is meaningful, useful, and obtainable. Attention to analytics signals commitment to student-centered learning and engagement.

For ELCA institutions, the bottom line is that any reinvention is predicated on having, retaining, and graduating students. Therefore, the number one commitment is to student success; this includes faculty and alumni engagement with enrollment management; and student engagement with academics, faculty, and peer groups. Academic and learning

analytics can be used to refocus resources on specific areas that impact having, retaining, and graduating students.

Moreover, attention to analytics signals attention to affordability. According to the College Board, the average cost of attending a four-year private nonprofit college increased 66 percent over the last decade, while family income declined an average of 7 percent.¹⁵ Even with the recent economic recovery, the Pew Research Center (2013) notes that while "the mean net worth of households in the upper 7% of the wealth distribution rose by an estimated 28%... the mean net worth of households in the lower 93% dropped by 4%."¹⁶

According to Jeffrey Docking, president of Adrian College, our liberal arts schools "are all getting to around \$40,000 a year, in some cases \$50,000, and students and their families are just saying 'we can't do it.'" Small classes, special programs, and amenities make these schools among the most expensive in higher education; however, most offer discounts to meet enrollment goals (Adrian College's cost is \$38,602, including room and board, but the average student pays \$19,000).¹⁷

These discounts increase each year: the most recent annual survey of private colleges and universities by the National Association of College and University Officers found that "the average tuition discount rate—institutional grant dollars as a share of gross tuition and fee revenue—for full-time freshmen enrolled at private colleges and universities grew for the sixth consecutive year...reaching a new high of 45 percent." According to this survey, "86.9 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen in 2012 received some form of institutional aid, with the average award amount equal to 53.1 percent of the sticker price."¹⁸

In addition, these discounts make it more difficult for students from low-income families to attend college. A 2013 report from the New America Foundation, in examining data from the 2010-11 academic year, found that at about two-thirds of the 479 private, nonprofit colleges and universities analyzed, students with annual family incomes of \$30,000 or less had tuition bills that averaged more than \$15,000 a year even after all forms of scholarship and grant aid were factored in.¹⁹

To address affordability, some liberal arts colleges are using a shared practice assessment tool to determine need, objectives, and potential partnerships with other institutions.²⁰ For example, the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE) assists institutions with a Shared Academics (TM) model made possible through strategic collaboration, driven by shared knowledge, and supported by emerging technologies. Other schools are cutting tuition and/or promising free classes to those students who need to stay beyond four years to complete their degrees.

Liberal arts colleges also are using analytics to guide their affordability efforts. Here Rita Kirshstein and Jane Wellman (2012) provide critical insight and direction. Since 2007, their Delta Cost Project has resulted in key findings:

- Prices are going up higher than spending;
- Nearly half of spending goes for overhead;
- Lower costs per student do not translate into lower costs per degree or outcome; and
- If higher education is to be more cost-effective and efficient, the unit of analysis needs to shift from cost per student to cost per degree.

They emphasize that “the most important point is that *budget and spending decisions need to be based on data, not on rumor or public opinion or perceived impact.*”²¹

Key to strategic reinvention is data that clearly articulates an institution’s value.

Value

How is each institution articulating its value?

Concordia University administrators, Eric LaMott and Kristin Vogel (2013), note that the old perception was that a college or university would only have value with an associated high price tag.²² They argue that liberal arts colleges must clearly articulate their value as learners and their families are becoming much more concerned and discerning about the value of what they receive. Learners and their families clearly scrutinize academic analytics, outcomes, experiences and costs, and they increasingly attend to national ratings.

Note these three value proposition statements:

- For St. Olaf College: Value = a student’s financial independence, professional accomplishment, and personal fulfillment
- From the Kiplinger group: Value = quality + affordability
- Don Norris and colleagues, as part of their work on transforming in an age of disruptive change, propose the use of this value proposition:

Value = Outcomes (learning, development, employment)
x Experiences

Cost²³

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is leading exemplary work to articulate value. As

part of their Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, the VALUE project “builds on a philosophy of learning assessment that privileges authentic assessment of student work and shared understanding of student learning outcomes on campuses over reliance on standardized tests administered to samples of students outside of their required courses. The result of this philosophy has been the collaborative development of 15 rubrics by teams of faculty and academic professionals on campuses from across the country.”²⁴

Each of our ELCA colleges and universities is attending to value amid the forces of change. In a recent visit with Luther College cabinet leadership, they shared with us “Luther’s Dependable Strengths,” part of a document in support of a recent Board of Regents consultation titled “Facing the Forces of Change with Hope”²⁵:

- Centered on student learning, lives, and callings to make the world a trustworthy place.
- Educationally excellent on a spectacular campus and in a growing variety of learning contexts.
- A community of learning and a community of faith, grounded in a generous Lutheran tradition.

Documenting strengths and measuring effectiveness is clearly part of articulating value. Doing so positions an institution to work innovatively to construct and implement strategic plans for its future.

Innovation

How is each institution interpreting the challenges/opportunities and working innovatively to construct and implement strategic plans for its future?

In an essay on the next generation of liberal arts college presidents, consultants Emily Miller and Richard Skinner (2012) emphasize that the challenges facing liberal arts colleges are as much ones of imagination and intellect as they are financial:

If liberal arts colleges are to survive intact, their presidents and their governing boards will need to think critically and creatively, honor the voices of stakeholders, communicate clearly, and act with resolve—in short, they will have to demonstrate the capabilities they cite as attributes of their graduates.²⁶

Here we define innovation as applying imagination and intellect, as thinking anew, and through attention to academic and administrative analytics, reinventing an institution. Norris and colleagues emphasize that the application of

analytics and predictive modeling provides institutions with the ability to understand and optimize learner performance. Attention to analytics enables institutions to think anew, and through doing so, to enhance their investment in measuring, understanding, and improving the performance of individuals, departments, and the institution itself.²⁷

“How is each institution interpreting the challenges/opportunities and working innovatively to construct and implement strategic plans for its future?”

We further expand innovation to include attention to and interpretation of disruptive forces and their impact on the institution. It is imperative that leadership understand these forces, interpret the reality of them for the institution, and share leadership as they work to transform the institution to remain relevant. Moreover, it is imperative that leadership reframe these disruptions as opportunities. Gilbert, Eyring, and Foster (2012), in a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, argue that to reinvent themselves in a world increasingly characterized by disruptive change, institutions and organizations in all sectors need to craft a two-track approach to transformation:

- Transformation Track A (Reshape/Reinvent the Core Model) works to reposition the core business of the institution, adapting the current (or legacy) model to the altered marketplace. For liberal arts institutions, this means adapting existing programs, experiences, and outcomes to be competitive with the new, emerging alternatives.
- Transformation Track B (Discover Future Business Model) works to create a separate disruptive model to develop innovations that later become the source of future growth. For liberal arts institutions, this means creating offerings or programs that meet new or unmet needs that were not possible in the past but that are now possible in this digital age.²⁸

Many of the ELCA institutions being studied in phase one of this project are constructing or have a strategic plan underway, and many of these plans signal a great deal of innovation. The upcoming eBook on Project DAVID will showcase the many outstanding efforts underway, and among these, the strategic and collaborative efforts in which institutions are leveraging digital opportunity.

Digital Opportunity

How is each institution responding to digital opportunity?

John Roush (2012), president of Centre College, notes with urgency the need for liberal arts colleges to “blend the best of what technology and technological partnerships have to offer [with] the highly residential, personal, and engaging educational experience we offer students.” We contend that 2013 is a strategic time for liberal arts institutions to articulate and engage digital opportunity. Whereas previous decades required institutions to invest heavily in enterprise administrative and academic systems, liberal arts institutions may best be positioned to take strategic advantage of three opportunities: cloud technologies, social media, and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD).

“How is each institution responding to digital opportunity?”

Institutions can leverage cloud technologies and social media to maintain and enhance the highly residential, personal, and engaging educational experience. They also can enhance their incredible alumni networks, further extending knowledge of their institution’s value. A recent Educause Center for Applied Research study on the BYOE (Bring Your Own Everything) environment found that IT leadership sees great opportunity in leveraging BYOE to diversify and expand the teaching and learning environment. As users bring their own devices, exciting prospects include increasing student engagement with technology; extending the classroom to anytime, anywhere; and making campuses desirable places to engage with technology and technology-enabled learning.²⁹

Conversations with institutions to date indicate a great deal of collaboration underway among IT leaders as they are part of multiple consortia in support of sharing expertise, and in some cases, sharing of services and new learning opportunities for their students.

Conclusion

After a visit with one of the Chief Information Officers (CIO) in this project, Ann received an email message in which this CIO included four lessons in leadership that he had appreciated from a recent sermon that he had heard on David and Goliath: (1) David got close enough to the problem to see what was needed; (2) he volunteered before he knew how he would solve the problem; (3) he met Goliath in his own way,

not in the ways of his adversary; and (4) David used the gifts and skills of his own life experience.

These lessons in leadership are appropriate to the Goliath-sized challenges requiring our strategic reinvention. We look forward to sharing results and to fostering conversation about the keys to future success and the degree to which these keys are shared among our institutions. Please join us in Project DAVID. Future success depends on it.

Endnotes

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Luther College | DECORAH, IOWA

Midland University | FREMONT, NEBRASKA

Muhlenberg College | ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Newberry College | NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Pacific Lutheran University | TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Roanoke College | SALEM, VIRGINIA

St. Olaf College | NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA

Susquehanna University | SELINGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA

Texas Lutheran University | SEGUIN, TEXAS

Thiel College | GREENVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Wagner College | STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

Wartburg College | WAVERLY, IOWA

Wittenberg University | SPRINGFIELD, OHIO



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