Why Diversity and Civic Engagement Don’t Talk to Each Other on College Campuses: The Need for Public Work

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I leave it to you to decide which current you feel most strongly today, whether you feel swept up by the pulse and eternal rhythm of nature, or can also feel the pull of career, academic, and religious narrative. Regardless, we find ourselves here together this morning in the midst of spring and the Easter season, being called into a future that is replete with promises of nerved growth, graduation and vocation, a future that is coming but a future that we cannot predict or control.

And the passage from Scripture read this morning, I’d like to suggest, speaks beautifully to our situation. A fragment of a poem taken from the Song of Songs, it offers another poetic voice to add to those I’ve mentioned. (Actually it offers two voices, two rather bold young lovers, a bride and a bridegroom in the P.C. version.

The young woman imagines her beloved, and in her anticipa-
tion compares him to spring itself bursting forth in the land, a gazelle bounding over the hills, the very picture of exquisite desire.

And in that bucolic setting, she tells us, she hears her beloved calling to her. He uses the occasion of the tempestuous promise of spring, to call:

Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away.
For see, the winter is past!,…
Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away.

To where is she being called? Why can’t he come to her where she is? And, if following our Jewish and Christian forbearers, we read ourselves into this fragment somehow, we must also ask: To where are we being called in the spring? And who is calling us?

Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away.
For see, the winter is past! ….
Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away.

THURGOOD MARSHALL’S ONE SIMPLE SENTENCE
captures a vexing problem for American higher education: how do we educate for a multicultural society in a way that recog-
nizes our need to address common problems? This task requires striking a balance between recognizing and affirming difference (learning together as learning from each other) and encouraging commonality and collaboration (living together).

These two tasks are presumably carried out through univer-
sity diversity and university civic engagement initiatives. Both of these efforts are socially and politically fashionable on college campuses. On the one hand, universities (and other social institutions) purport to be engaged in creating “diverse learning environments” that reflect the complexity and pluralism of the society in which we live. On the other, public universities are increasingly justifying public funding by emphasizing their civic contributions to society in which we live.

Despite the obvious interdependencies between these two efforts, they are often conceptually detached from one another in practice on college campuses. Civic engagement and its prog-
erness—service learning, community service, and university-commu-
ity partnerships—often proceed without serious re-

tion of how diversity and otherness related to addressing social

issues. In her view, “the language of diversity has been decoupled from the language of civic engagement” at colleges and universi-
ties (8). This decoupling of diversity and civic engagement as concepts means both efforts proceed without serious reflection on how they work together to promote common ends. Diversity work without a solid foundation in a civic purpose becomes little more than, what I call, menagere diversity, or an examination of difference that ends at the classroom bell or when the mandatory campus event ends. Conversely, civic engagement efforts that do

Without our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together. MILLIKEN v. BRADLEY 1974.

JOSÉ MARICHAL

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not seriously consider diversity run the risk of merely reaffirming pre-existing structures of injustice and exclusion (Stephan, Eby, Hepburn, Niemi and Chapman).

This essay thus engages the question of why diversity and civic engagement initiatives on college campuses often proceed on parallel tracks. I argue that this disconnect exists primarily because both diversity and civic engagement efforts are undergirded by thin or pluralistic notions of democracy that emphasize adversarialism and rights-claims rather than a strong notion of democracy that encourages deliberation, collaboration and civic obligation (Barber). To the extent that civic engagement encourages students to work collaboratively, it is largely in voluntaristic ways that do not challenge underlying pluralist assumptions about what it means to be a citizen of the United States and the world.

In this article, I illustrate how both diversity and civic engagement efforts reinforce a thin view of democracy. I then review the empirical research to highlight the shortcomings of a thin approach to civic engagement and diversity practices. I conclude by advocating for a public work (Boyte, Everyday Politics) perspective as a means to link diversity and civic engagement and discuss the implications for Lutheran higher education.

**Thin vs. Strong Democracy**

Both civic engagement and diversity have underlying socio-political assumptions that motivate their work. Guinier calls the process of constructing a freshman class at colleges and universities a public act that either challenges or reinforces current structures of power and oppression. Those engaged in diversity and civic engagement efforts are similarly engaging in political actions. While institutions differ in the actual practice of diversity and civic engagement, there are overarching trends that inform institutional efforts. I argue that, in general, both efforts are tied to a thin version of democracy.

**Thin democracy is a term coined by Benjamin Barber to describe what he viewed as an individualistic and interest-based notion of citizenship and social relations. Barber argues that the Lockean tradition of the state as a guarantor of fundamental liberties through a contractual relationship with the citizen encourages a "thin" perspective on the individual’s role vis-à-vis liberties through a contractual relationship with the citizen. Barber argues that democratic states need vibrant civil societies that encourage a "strong citizenship" based on identifying shared interests among the citizens.**

**The Decline in Political (not Civic) Engagement**

The decline in democratic participation (thin or strong) is particularly acute among college-age youth. To the consternation of democratic theorists, there has been a steady decline in youth political engagement in the last three decades (Zukin). Despite the upsurge in voting during the 2004 and 2006 election cycles, young people report significantly less interest in politics than either previous generations or their peers (Zukin). A 2001 study found that only 32.4% of 18-24 year olds reported a "following government and public affairs most of the time" (Keeter et al.). Perhaps more alarming are the decreased levels of social trust among young people. The study found that 76.3% of 18-24 year olds agreed with the statement "most people look out for themselves," compared to 45% of persons 65 and over (Keeter et al.). A majority (56%) agreed that "most people would take advantage of you" compared to 29% of persons over 65.

What is curious is that this decline in civic-mindedness is happening at the same time a "civic engagement" revolution is happening in U.S. high schools and colleges. In 2001, three out of four high school students and about two out of three (65%) of college students say that their school arranges or offers volunteering opportunities (Keeter et al.). Similarly, one out of five (19%) college seniors participated in service learning in 2004. This was up from one out of eight (12%) in 1999 (Kahl). This increase in civic engagement opportunities is driven by the documented effectiveness of service and experiential learning programs in enhancing student learning (Battistoni). Not surprisingly, given the effort put forth by secondary and post-secondary institutions, young people report levels of volunteerism comparable to older cohorts. In 2006, 15-25 year olds agreed with the statement "individual demand vs. collective responsibility," and "debate over dialogue." A protective and pluralistic view of democracy reinforces a "thin" (i.e. instrumental) notion of the individual’s obligations to his or her fellow citizens.

Barber argues that democratic states need vibrant civil societies that encourage a "strong citizenship" based on identifying shared interests among the citizens, not serious consideration of the common good. He emphasizes moving from a moralistic civic sphere where state and market make the majority of decisions, to a "politics of zoo-keeping," towards a politics of "amateur" where every man is compelled to encounter every other man without the intermediary of expertise" (152). The emphasis in strong democracy is developing participatory habits by creating structures for citizen deliberation and decision-making.

**HERE WE ARE!**

"Here we are! This beautiful morning in March, at a nexus of three currents of life pulling us into their rhythms. First, it is spring in Minnesota, and we can feel the earth starting to stir, starting to grow and green. Second, as faculty, staff and students we’re back from spring break heading into the final seven weeks of school. There is a lot of work to be done, and we may be uncertain about what the future holds, nevertheless, we know that the future will come, the end of the school year will be upon us before we know it, and we’ll be on our way even if we don’t know where we’ll be going. Third, for those of us who find strength and meaning in the church, we’re fresh from the joy and the drama of Holy Week and its passion—the crucifixion, the empty grave, and the resurrection. In this third rhythm, as with the rhythms of spring and the school year, we find ourselves asking: “What is happening now? Where is this current pulling us?”

In the midst of these three currents, one might be forgiven for feeling somewhat overwhelmed! Spring, at least for me, is quite enough. It is difficult for me to concentrate. My senses are awakening after the longest slumber. I can smell the earth that has been dormant for too long coming back to life and hear the birds that have been absent. The cycle of birth and life is beginning again, and it makes me giddy. Perhaps we might content ourselves with celebrating this rebirth of spring. Perhaps we ought to refuse attempts to synthesize its meaning with our own personal journeys, or the myths of a religious narrative. Maybe spring should be protected against a religious desire to baptize and control it’s unruly energy. As does Gerald Manley Hopkins when he wonders, “what is all this juice and all this joy? A stream of the earth’s sweet beginning, In Eden garden – Have, get, before it dries Before it dries, Christ, land, and sour with sinning Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy. (Spring)"

But suppose you hesitate at this tug of spring; you might not find it so innocent. With Edna St. Vincent Millay, you might acknowledge that "The smell of the earth is good It is apparent that there is no death And yet, as she does, you might require better answers, noting But what does that signify? Not only underground are the brains of men Eaten by maggots... It is not enough that yearly, down this hill, April comes like an ides, Habbeting and stewing flowers.

JAIME SCHILLINGER

"However, here is a turn that has me thinking about what the future holds. The future does not seem as bright as it was during the spring break or during the last two weeks of school.

The upsurge in the number of students participating in volunteer activities has been documented extensively (Keeter et al.). Similarly, one out of five (19%) college seniors participated in service learning in 2004. This was up from one out of eight (12%) in 1999 (Kahl). This increase in civic engagement opportunities is driven by the documented effectiveness of service and experiential learning programs in enhancing student learning (Battistoni). Not surprisingly, given the effort put forth by secondary and post-secondary institutions, young people report levels of volunteerism comparable to older cohorts. In 2006, 15-25 year olds agreed with the statement “what is all this juice and all this joy? A stream of the earth’s sweet beginning, In Eden garden – Have, get, before it dries Before it dries, Christ, land, and sour with sinning Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy. (Spring)"

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JAIME SCHILLINGER is Assistant Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. This talk was presented on March 29, 2007."
must say how delighted I was to learn Luther College has about seventy students in a group considering church vocations—I am referring also to future leaders of Lutheran educational and social ministry organizations, to Lutheran scientists who will contribute to the changing of rural and small town communities.

Your faculty members are important contributors to the development of ELCA social statements. It is a shared commitment to which I pledge my leadership and for which your continued leadership is vitally important. As competitive as higher education is today, I am convinced that a commitment to our deep and abiding relationship and our shared mission will strengthen each of the twenty-eight colleges and universities and the contribution we as the ELCA are making to the common good and the life of the world.

This church remains deeply committed to our shared mission in higher education. It is a shared commitment that calls for constant exploration, imagination, and mutual accountability. It is a shared commitment to which I pledge my leadership and for which your continued leadership is vitally important. As competitive as higher education is today, I am convinced that a commitment to our deep and abiding relationship and our shared mission will strengthen each of the twenty-eight colleges and universities and the contribution we as the ELCA are making to the common good and the life of the world.

Works Cited


The larger culture is reinforcing a sense of atomism that is difficult for campus service projects to combat.

Given the data, it would appear that civic engagement efforts on college campuses do not appear to be altering a thin view of citizenship. I argue that if civic engagement efforts hope to produce democratic citizens, they must explicitly challenge thin notions of democracy. As Thuss-Morse and Hibbing recently suggested, it may be challenging, if not impossible, to develop democratic habits through voluntarism, largely because voluntarism does not necessarily promote or teach democratic values of deliberation, compromise and conflict-resolution. One way that campus civic engagement efforts can provide citizens with these vital democratic skills is by being deliberate about combining civic engagement with diversity.

Diversity Work and Thin Democracy

The American Association of Colleges and Universities statement on diversity suggests that diversity is to be centrally linked to civic engagement. Its statement calls on universities to deploy “diversity as an educational asset for all students, and prepare future graduates for socially responsible engagement in a diverse democracy and interdependent world” (AACU “Statement on Diversity”). Inherent in the term "diverse democracy" is recognition that engagement with others is essential for democratic practice. These efforts seem to be complementary. Just as, a number of amicus briefs in the Grutter v. Bollinger Supreme Court decision on affirmative action at the University Michigan Law School argued that educating citizens for a diverse society served as a “compelling governmental interest” needed to support affirmative-action programs.

Indeed, diversity serves a great many pedagogical purposes. It serves to enhance cognitive complexity among those exposed to “diverse courses” (Antonio et al.), it leads to greater empathy and openness to other views (Aslin), and it provides students with the cultural competency needed to function in a diverse workforce (Carnevale).

The academy, however, is unsure how to “deploy diversity” toward the end of training democratic citizens. A recent call for papers to an American Association of Colleges and Universities conference on the intersections of diversity and civic engagement suggests as much:

The Academy has witnessed a significant expansion of innovative civic engagement programs in recent years, driven by student interest, community needs, social inequities, new understandings about teaching and learning, a growing commitment to social responsibility. At the same time, decades of work in diversity and global education driven by similar forces and committed to similar goals have often developed on separate tracks (AACU “Call for Papers”).

The presumption is that increased exposure to otherness translates into increased tolerance towards out-groups which will lead to more acceptance of pluralism and difference in a democracy. Indeed, as diversity initiatives have increased on college campuses, so too have tolerant attitudes. Keeter et al. found that 58% of young people thought that being a citizen entailed a sense of responsibility (as compared to 69% of people over forty years of age). The typical view of young people was that being a citizen meant being a good person and following the law (Lopez et al.).

However, the upsurge in voluntarism has not brought with it an increase in political engagement. Why is this? In the same 2006 survey, only 38% of young people ages 18-25 who had volunteered in the last twelve months reported volunteering for a “political group” (Lopez et al.). This is because community service might connect young people to others in their community, but is does nothing to alter their fundamental understanding of the political system and their role therein.

Levels of political engagement among young people could be low because there is a time lag between doing service learning and civic engagement projects and translating those civic skills into the political sphere. Perhaps if we check back in ten years, this generation will be as politically active as their grandparents’ generation. This may turn out to be the case. Young people’s levels of social trust and their attitudes towards citizenship suggest, however, that the larger culture is reinforcing a sense of atomism that is difficult for campus service projects to combat. Lopez et al. found that only 38% of young people thought that being a citizen entailed a sense of responsibility (as compared to 69% of people over forty years of age). The typical view of young people was that being a citizen meant being a good person and following the law (Lopez et al.).

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Recent work suggests that an “add diversity and stir” notion leads to negative effects on civic engagement. Research from the civic engagement benchmark survey reveals that people in diverse communities are less trusting of others, more person-ally isolated, had lower levels of political efficacy, and had fewer acquaintances across class lines (Saguro). On college campuses, as every diversity officer knows, there is an inherent tendency to form friendship bonds based on propinquity, or shared likeness. Maramos and Sacerdote found in their study of social networks at a small liberal arts college in the Northeast that race was a greater determinant of social interaction than common inter-ests, majors, or family background.

This evidence presents a challenge to linking diversity to civic engagement. Why do people report increased levels of toler-ance for other groups but are not any more disposed to want to interact with them? Again, we must return to the thin notion of democracy. A view of democracy that trusts diversity as a set of competing rights claims that should be respected rather than an obligation to engage each other to explore areas of commonality and pursue the common good does not change the underlying structure of society.

Undoubtedly, making people aware, particularly white males, that “race” and “gender” are phenomena that structure the social world is important work. But is it insufficient to prepare young people to address looming social problems. Making students aware of “isms” and hoping that by some how they can be more prepared to address looming social problems. The social world is important work. But is it insufficient to prepare young people to address looming social problems. Making students aware of “isms” and hoping that by some how they can be more prepared to address looming social problems.

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“Intersections” are one of the most common terms you will hear when discussing the importance of connecting diversity to civic engagement. At the national level, “Intersections” refer to the various ways in which different groups come together and interact. At the local level, “Intersections” refer to the various ways in which different communities come together and interact. At the individual level, “Intersections” refer to the various ways in which different individuals come together and interact. In all cases, the goal is to create opportunities for individuals to learn from one another and to develop a shared understanding of the world around them.

“Intersections” are important because they provide a framework for understanding the complex interactions that occur in our society. They also help us to identify opportunities for collaboration and to build bridges between different groups. In this way, “Intersections” can help us to create a more just and equitable society.

In conclusion, the importance of diversity cannot be overstated. It is essential for the success of our society. By connecting diversity to civic engagement, we can create a more just and equitable world. This is why it is so important to continue the work of connecting diversity to civic engagement.”
out negative course evaluations. Teachers sometimes need to be assured that they do not have to answer the questions for their students; rather, their role is just to help students think about them.” Connor continues that a friend recently wrote, “It is less a question of expertise than of feeling comfortable enough to articulate an Issue in a way that is cogent and civil, and encourage and doesn’t close off discussion.”

Isn’t he describing Lutheran higher education? We who were formed catechetically by asking the question, “What does this mean?” will be a church drawn to—rather than fearful of—big questions. We are committed to being a church that nurtures unqueenchable curiosity. Therefore, as an ELCA church-related college, our school shall ensure that all students, especially under- graduates, are confronted with the role of religion in civilization and its importance in asking (and for believers, in answering) the critical “big questions” of life. To be educated is to understand this and to grasp its significance. Josh Sitter wrote, “What I am appealing for is an understanding of grace that has the magnitude of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The grace of God is not simply a holy hypodermic whereby my sins are forgiven. It is the whole giftedness of life, the wonder of life which causes me to ask questions that transcend the moment.” (14)

“We are committed to being a church that nurtures unqueenchable curiosity.”

Two weeks ago my 95-year-old aunt and godmother died. Betty Burtness was a vibrant, wise woman of faith who taught us what it means to be a citizen in the United States. Moreover, it requires us to reflect on how that notion of citizenship affects those outside of the United States. It also means we move ourselves beyond a “thin” view of both diversity and civic engagement. Too often we repeat mantras of “engaging with others” that we in the academy do not heed. If we do “engage with others” it is an othership with which we are comfortable. We should not be immune from engaging in public work with those whom we might disagree or feel threatened. This is easier to say than to realize. Private institutions, particularly smaller liberal arts institutions, are heavily dependent upon private benefactors for their survival. As a result, emphasizing a strong democracy that might motivate citizens to participate in ways contrary to those favored by sought after benefactors is a source of tension for institutions. A participatory culture that engages students in collaborative decision-making might produce outcomes that abut the interests of corporate capital. All institutions, including ELCA affiliated ones, must ask themselves how they will address potential conflicts between donor interests and pedagogical practice. Furthermore, public work is hard work. As faculty at some teaching-oriented colleges are aware, innovation is not always rewarded if it results in poor student evaluations. Those who have entered the exciting yet challenging world of service learning pedagogy will tell you that it takes a great commitment of time on the part of faculty to make it work. At some places, it may not be worth the time and effort. Certainly at Research-1 universities where teaching is not a priority, there is little incentive to bring public work into the curriculum. Institutions like ours can serve a vital niche by creating the institutional infrastructure to support faculty in their efforts to link diversity and civic engagement through public work.

Works Cited
She called me back that evening and said, “I gave up on evil. I’m just going to pray grace. It’s what the people most need to hear.” Betty increasingly believed that it is the questions with which one lives and not necessarily the answers one gives that give evidence of faith.
In our commitments to our shared mission, I believe it is vital that ELCA colleges and universities value and provide for religious study and reflection as an important tool for the intellectual exploration of the “big questions” of life—in other words, to be communities of free inquiry that nurture unqueenchable curiosity. Our shared mission means the twenty-eight colleges and universities of this church will be communities that encourage religious expression, exploration, and conversations in our increasingly diverse society.
I know of none of the twenty-eight ELCA colleges and universities that greet incoming students with a sign that says, “Welcome. Drop your faith at the door and pick it up again in four years in case you still need it.” Yet, though not explicitly stated, it could become a not-too-implicit implicit message conveyed.
When visiting Bethany College last fall I preached in chapel led by an ELCA campus pastor. The room was full. That evening I was invited to the first fall meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Some of your campuses have a strong presence of Campus Crusade for Christ in addition to Lutheran Campus Ministries. I know at least from our youngest daughter in her first year at Augsburg, that it is important for her that there is diversity in which her faith is nourished through music, word and sacrament, and prayer. It is also important that there are religious classes in which faith is stretched and even challenged and that there are experiences—such as she had in January to travel to El Salvador—to see first-hand the resiliency and challenge people of faith experience in daily life and the church’s solidarity with those who live in poverty and struggle for justice.
The article by Connor references research with which I imagine you are all familiar. The UCLA Spirituality in Higher Education Project revealed, according to Helen Astin, “Students become less religious while in college with respect to attending church, but their goal to integrate spirituality into their lives increases in importance.” (Connor 11)
A University of Indiana study of 250,000 students at 462 four-year colleges found that what they termed “spiritually enhancing activities” such as worship, meditation, and prayer had no negative effect on “educationally purposeful activities” (i.e. deep learning reflected in the students ability to analyze, integrate, and synthesize information from various sources and apply it to new experiences). The National Longitudinal Survey of 2000 freshmen from 18 highly selective colleges found that students who participated in religious rituals at least once a week community-based action research, engaging students in organizing campus or community-wide town halls, or study circles.
The Role for Lutheran Colleges and Universities
Lutheran colleges and universities, with their emphasis on vocation as a call to the world rather than away from it, are better positioned to bridge the divide between diversity and civic engagement than both public institutions with their wariness of values-based education and more fundamentalist- oriented, religiously-affiliated institutions that emphasize a retreat from the secular rather than a dialogue with the secular (Christenson).
The challenge of getting our students to both “learn together” and “live together” can be both frustrating and invigorating. If we hope to move our students beyond recognizing injustice and intolerance towards acting on that knowledge through the political process, we must challenge our own assumptions of what it means to be a citizen in the United States. Moreover, it requires us to reflect on how that notion of citizenship affects those outside of the United States. If we hope to move our students beyond recognizing injustice and intolerance towards acting on that knowledge through the political process, we must challenge our own assumptions of what it means to be a citizen in the United States. Moreover, it requires us to reflect on how that notion of citizenship affects those outside of the United States.


<http://www.civic.org/research/products/youth_index_CivicLearningAndEngagement.pdf>


Lutheran identity with concrete proposals for strengthening that identity because it is core to Wittenberg’s mission.

The “Five Faith Commitments” of Augustana College, Rock Island are each made with specific descriptions of how the commitment is carried out in the life of the college. The appendix sets the commitments in historical context and includes President Bahl’s insightful reflections about the Lutheran expression of higher education at Augustana. Again, it is clear one is reading commitments core to the identity, microcosm, and vocation of this college and this church.

“...and rightfully becoming our focus.”

Pamela Jolicoeur’s inaugural address as the 19th president of Concordia College was titled, "Re-imagining Concordia’s Mission Moment." Building upon Concordia’s history and citing Gustavus Adolphus professor Darryl Jodock’s interlocking set of five characteristics that define the Lutheran approach to higher education, President Jolicoeur called Concordia into a process of re-imagining liberal arts education that cultivates compassionate education and connects students to the world. A favorite example is the collected papers and presentations of Bill Frame under the title “Faith and Reason.” The papers reflect Dr. Frame’s immense contributions to our rethinking, reclaiming, and re-imagining the mission of Lutheran higher education as it continues to be informed by Luther and Melanchthon, and especially by the Lutheran understanding of vocation and the two kingdoms.

These are just a few examples of the many that indicate our shared commitment in the context of a deep and abiding relationship that belongs to our shared mission, shared identity, and shared vocation as Lutherans.

What does this shared mission look like? I recently had the privilege of giving convocation addresses at Dana and Luther. I titled one of the addresses, “A College of the Church Reaching Out in Mission for the Sake of the World” and the other, “Unquenchable Curiosity and Evangelical Perserverence.” From these addresses I want to highlight at least four characteristics of our shared mission in higher education to which I hope we are committed.

Our shared mission means the twenty-eight colleges and universities of this church will be communities of free inquiry that nurture unquenchable curiosity in a cultural context that often seems preoccupied with satisfying our insatiable appetites for possessions, power, and consuming.

Recently, a young woman wrote to Dear Abby, “I’m 19 and dropped out of college in December 2005. After years of going through honors classes, I feel like I had nothing left. My brain was on cruise control. I think I want to go back to school in August, but I also feel I’m doing it to please everyone else. Honestly, I no longer know what I want to be in life. I have no idea what I want to major in. I’m just lost. I’ve never dated, done drugs, drunk or anything else besides go to school. And I was good at it. I have dreams of what I want out of life—a mansion, a nice car, money in the bank, but I don’t necessarily have to go to college to achieve that. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I feel like I don’t know who I am.”

Dear Abby said something like this, “Your first step should be to return to college. The next step should be a visit to the college career counseling department. It is important that you learn what it is you enjoy as well as have an aptitude for.”

The vocation of a Lutheran college is so vital to the mission of this church is to plant deep within students a lifelong unquenchable curiosity about God, about the meaning of life and being human, and the centrality of faith; an unquenchable curiosity about the vastness of the cosmos, the intricacies of DNA, and the beauty of the earth; the complexities of science, math, and economics; the richness of history; an unquenchable curiosity about life’s big questions. However, it is also vital that ELCA colleges and universities value and provide for religious study as an important tool for the intellectual exploration of the big questions of life such as: What makes life meaningful? What does it mean to be human? How do we live together on this planet?

I commend to you an article by W. Robert Connors, president of the Teagle Foundation titled, “The Right Time and Place for Big Questions.” He asks, “Can students’ interest in and engagement with religion and spiritual matters, and the questions associated with them, invigorate their liberal education? Based on my conversations with faculty members in a wide range of fields, meetings with students, and class visits, the answer clearly is ‘Yes.’ As a result, the Teagle Foundation invited colleges to apply for support on projects that deal with big questions in undergraduate education.”

Connors writes, “Despite the number and quality of those applications, however, we can see that there is still reluctance among faculty members to engage with the big questions—many professors clearly feel that they are not adequately trained to deal with them. Faculty members have also been expressing concerns that tenure and salary increases will be put in jeopardy if they break out of existing disciplinary paradigms—or that a few students who find that class discussions run counter to their beliefs or preferences could damage professors’ careers by filling