

# Project DAVID

## Vocation and Reinvention in Liberal Arts Colleges

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## Vocation and Reinvention in Liberal Arts Colleges

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Ann Hill Duin and Eric Childers



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This book is available in its entirety at <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/162339>

# Endorsement

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***Project DAVID: Vocation and Reinvention in Liberal Arts Colleges*** is an excellent resource for everyone involved with shaping the future of liberal education. Ann Hill Duin and Eric Childers have done a masterful job of bringing forth a framework to understand the opportunities and the challenges facing traditional small residential liberal arts colleges in the 21st Century.

Shared leadership and a culture of accountability, vocational discernment and strategic reinvention stand as critical metrics for institutional success and provide a means to celebrate that success beyond the habitual praise for the value of critical thinking. Liberal education provides for a methodology of living, beyond time spent in college, and the authors offer a mechanism to review progress in the development of a contemporary liberal education.

The contributors that Duin and Childers have assembled bring a breadth of perspective and experience that inspires as well as informs. The commentary provides a structure of analysis, evaluation, and planning that will be easily integrated into your own campus review.

The work of Duin and Childers reveals a palpable energy, an enthusiasm for the hard work of visionary leadership eager to be released to a wider audience. There is much to take in here, much to assess and integrate into your own institutional review.

*Michael Nanfito*  
*Executive Director*  
*National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE)*

Every college and university - and seminary - has its own distinct set of challenges and opportunities. ***Project DAVID*** identifies five that are at the heart of higher education and its future. For many small liberal arts institutions, this is a critical time. Their effectiveness, if not their future, depends on how they respond to the measures being studied by Project DAVID. This collection of essays, and the learning we can glean from each other, is a gift.

*Tom Jolivette*  
*Vice President for Seminary Relations*  
*Luther Seminary*

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# **Project DAVID: A Framework for Vocation and Reinvention in Liberal Arts Colleges**

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**Ann Hill Duin and Eric Childers**

## **Executive Summary**

Project DAVID is about showcasing strategic reinvention underway across higher education. Phase one, focusing primarily 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?

We use a set of themes--Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, Digital opportunities (thus, DAVID)--and associated framing questions to identify how institutions are positioning themselves for future success.

This work builds on Eric Childers' findings on the impact of leadership on organizational identity as described in *College Identity Sagas* (2012).[1] We give special attention to how leadership is attending to major challenges and



opportunities. In addition to examining institutional statements, strategic plans, accreditation reports, and uses of technology, we are visiting with presidents, provosts, IT leadership, governing boards, faculty, staff, and/or students, and spending time on campuses.[2]

Intended outcomes are many but certainly include a common conversation among these institutions about the keys to their future success and the degree to which those keys are shared. We plan to share results in several ways: this collection of chapters, workshops at conferences and association meetings, and online sites for continued conversation.

## **Introduction**

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 this project 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 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); therefore, a key question surrounds how faith and learning components impact identity, distinction, and ultimately, sustainability.

All higher education 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 in intensity. Studies and articles abound regarding the intense challenges facing higher education, with most recent collections pointing to the need to realign programs and experiences to the needs and changing value propositions of learners.

Jeffrey J. Selingo (2013), editor at large for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, identifies five disruptive forces that "will change higher education forever,"[3] and Donald Norris (2013), President and founder of Strategic Initiatives, and colleagues emphasize six major challenges facing higher education.[4] Even if things look good on the surface, scholars with broad international experience, such as Stefan Popenici, author of *What Undermines Higher Education* (2013), emphasize that "there is an increasing (and justified) concern that all will change soon. 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]

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

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 socioeconomic elite.”[7]

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 exist by which we could showcase strategic reinvention and collaboration underway across these institutions. But this set of themes follows 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 distinction and a clear value proposition.

Furthermore, this set of themes spells the word DAVID. The use of DAVID is no casual reference; in the Old Testament of the *Bible*, David faced Goliath, a giant warrior who was greatly feared.[9] We might dare say that, armed with attention to Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, and Digital opportunity, institutions can surely face these factors, forces, and challenges.

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:

- Lesson 1. David got close enough to the problem to see what was needed. He was willing to cross boundaries of safety...to get close enough to see what the problems are and what is needed to conquer them.
- Lesson 2. David volunteered before he knew how he would solve the problem. He didn't have it all figured out ahead of time.
- Lesson 3. David met Goliath in his own way, not in the ways of his adversary... He didn't try to fight in a way that was foreign or uncomfortable for him.
- Lesson 4. David used the gifts and skills of his own life experience.

The remaining years of this decade will present each of our institutions with “Goliath facing” moments. Thus, we embrace this opportunity to showcase strategic reinvention, and by so doing, do our part to encourage collaboration and position 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 AAC&U (2007) 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 and practical skills; an active commitment to personal and social responsibility; and the demonstrated ability to apply learning to complex problems and challenges.<sup>[10]</sup> A liberal arts institution is distinctively American. It represents an education that includes breadth, an education that teaches students not just education for a particular career but teaches skills that serve well regardless of the career: how to write, how to speak, how to think critically, how to analyze and interpret and collaborate. 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.

While a liberal arts education has as its goal to promote depth of thinking and a breadth of spirit, these traits are not subject to easy measurement. Some have stated that a liberal arts college's success may be best measured by the books and blogs the students read, the causes for which they labor, the positions of leadership they occupy, the serious issues they tackle, the children they raise; in short, by the lives the students lead. These are the stories shared on these colleges' web sites.

The reality, however, 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, some leadership appears stymied as to what its “distinction” will represent in the 21st 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:

Since the founding era—witness Jefferson's vision for the University of Virginia—the liberal arts and sciences have rightly been seen as absolutely essential to America's future... 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.<sup>[11]</sup>

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.” President Chopp goes on to stress the criticality of making a distinctive case for a liberal arts education: “My point is that...we have yet to make a compelling case as to why and how a liberal arts education remains relevant and, in fact, invaluable in addressing the challenges of our times and expanding the opportunities within them.”<sup>[12]</sup>

As the majority of institutions in phase one of Project DAVID are ELCA colleges, 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 College (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 that (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)

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, we give special attention to how leadership—governing boards, presidents, and other senior administrators—are attending to the major factors, forces, and challenges facing liberal arts institutions.

## **Analytics**

What role do analytics play in creating and sustaining a future-oriented liberal arts institution?

A key component in providing a compelling case for strategic reinvention comes from attention to analytics. 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.[\[13\]](#)

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 as well as 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.

Where should leadership focus their academic analytics effort to ensure institutional sustainability? Leadership (president, board, cabinet, faculty and student governance) should be committed to use data to drive decision making, to focus on predictive analytics and a future orientation. Diana Oblinger (2013), president of EDUCAUSE, provides a critical set of guiding principles for such efforts:

- Use data to change the conversation;
- Move from the past to the predictive;
- Empower choice, don’t restrict it; and
- Use data for gateways, not just gatekeeping.[\[14\]](#)

In short, 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.

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% over the last decade, while family income declined an average of 7%.<sup>[15]</sup> Even with the 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%.”<sup>[16]</sup>

Clay Shirky shares blunt conclusions from Robert Archibald and David Feldman's analysis of college and cost disease, *Why Does College Cost So Much?*: “Institution-specific explanations—spoiled students expecting a climbing wall; management self-aggrandizement at the expense of educational mission—hold up less well than the generic observation: colleges need a lot of highly skilled people, people whose wages, benefits, and support costs have risen faster than inflation for the last thirty years.”<sup>[17]</sup>

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).<sup>[18]</sup>

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.”<sup>[19]</sup>

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. The report site states: “Overall, too many four-year colleges, both public and private, are failing to help the government achieve its college access mission. They are instead using their financial resources to fiercely compete for the students they most desire: the ‘best and brightest’ students -- and the wealthiest.”<sup>[20]</sup> Jordan Weissmann for *The Atlantic* asks, “Could it be that their prices are worth it, that the educations they provide justify the eye-popping cost?”<sup>[21]</sup>

Presidential leadership admits that this high tuition, high discount model is not sustainable. Again as President Rebecca Chopp states, “Our financial model is unsustainable in terms of continuing our rate of tuition increases and the assumption of large endowment returns. Our failures--so far--either to curb our tuition increases or to explain them satisfactorily has damaged our credibility.”<sup>[22]</sup>

This continued assumption places institutions on an unsustainable path. According to Richard Holmgren, associate dean and CIO at Allegheny College, “Over the last 40 years of the last century, we built a model based on the assumption that net revenues per student would go up every year... We have a culture built on that assumption.” Furthermore, a Bain & Company analysis of the financial records of 1,700 US colleges and universities, an estimated one-third of them were on an unsustainable financial path, with operating costs increasing faster than endowment returns and other revenues.<sup>[23]</sup>

To address affordability, some liberal arts colleges are using a shared practice assessment tool to determine need, objectives, and potential partnerships with other institutions.<sup>[24]</sup> 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. Again, according to Holmgren, “Once colleges and their faculties can successfully lay down a set of criteria for what makes



a great liberal arts education, they can start figuring out what parts of the institutional infrastructure are load-bearing and which ones are not and begin remodeling from there.”[25]

Other schools are cutting tuition and/or promising free classes to those students who need to stay beyond four years to complete their degrees. For example, Concordia University is cutting tuition by 33 percent; tuition for freshmen enrolling Fall 2013 was \$19,700. Current students saw their tuition dropped to the same level while the cost of room and board was frozen at the current rate.[26] The NAICU site lists a number of colleges, including Belmont Abbey College, that also reduced tuition this year. And about one in five students at Alma College takes “free” courses to complete the degree.[27]

Liberal arts colleges also are using analytics to interpret reality and guide their efforts. Here Kirshstein and Wellman (2012) provide critical insight and direction. Since 2007, their Delta Cost Project has provided data and metrics focused on spending in both public and non-profit higher education institutions, measuring commonly held assumptions about college finances.[28] Key findings include the following:

- 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 stress 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.”

And indeed, President Janet Riggs of Gettysburg College emphasizes the need for a clear cost/value analysis. She asks, "Can the poor and middle class afford an education at a private liberal arts college? And is it a wise investment?" Her data-driven analyses indicate that "not only is a liberal arts education not as expensive as news stories lead us to believe, but there may be no better investment in America today." [29]

She goes on to ask, "But what about value? Is this investment worth it? Is it worth it enough to take on debt? That's the question we should all be asking, whether it's a private liberal arts college, a business school, or a major research university."

## Value

How is each institution articulating its value?

Eric LaMott, Concordia University’s vice president of administration notes that the old perception was that a college or university would only have value with an associated high price tag. LaMott emphasizes “That is changing,” and Concordia’s web site promotes the “Concordia Value.” 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. They scrutinize academic analytics, outcomes, experiences and costs, and they increasingly attend to national rankings.

Note these two value proposition statements:

- For St. Olaf College, Value = a student’s financial independence, professional accomplishment, and personal fulfillment[30]
- From the Kiplinger group, Value = quality + affordability[31]

Don Norris and colleagues, as part of their work on transforming in an age of disruptive change, propose the use of this value proposition:[32]

Value = Outcomes (learning, development, employment) X Experiences / Cost

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is leading exemplary work to better 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.”[33]

Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, president of Marlboro College, emphasizes the need to further refine and redefine what value or “return” means: “We claim that we produce the inquiring, analytical, vocal, and engaged citizens required for a vital democratic system, but do we present the civic value of our missions forcefully enough to enter into and even change the public discourse?... We must redefine ‘return on investment’ to include civic behaviors that support our diverse and participatory democracy.”[34]

## **Innovation**

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

Innovation is not about simply making more classes available on the Internet; it’s about looking broadly at what’s working and what’s not, and trying something new where the old ways are not cutting it. -- Senators Chris Murphy (Connecticut) and Brian Schatz (Hawaii) in the U.S. Senate.[35]

In an essay on the next generation of liberal arts college presidents, consultants Miller and 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.”[36]

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.[37]

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.[38]

Many of the institutions being studied as part of this project are constructing or have a strategic plan underway, and many of these plans signal a great deal of innovation. For example, St. Olaf College’s theme for 2012-2013 was Innovation in the Liberal Arts: Creative Problem Solving from an Interdisciplinary Perspective.[39]

The calls for innovation continue. Once again, Clayton Christensen and Michael Horn articulate the innovation imperative: to change everything. As one example, they highlight the Minerva Project, a startup in San Francisco that aims to provide an affordable liberal arts education: “Minerva anticipates that most of its students will be from outside the United States. To serve them, it will enlist operators to create mini-campuses around the globe where clusters of its students will live and socialize together in residence halls, as well as take online courses and work together on projects.”[40]



And most recently, Presidents Rebecca Chopp (Swarthmore College) and Daniel Weiss (Haverford College) along with educational consultant Susan Frost have co-edited a collection titled *Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal Arts College* (2013), work that grew out of a symposium on the future of liberal arts in America and the role of leadership in education around the world. The chapters therein clearly indicate that when times get tough, "liberal arts colleges get creative, resourceful, and wise." (1) They issue this challenge: "For our institutions to thrive and our system to prosper, we must continue--and even accelerate--our efforts to innovate and communicate effectively as we work together to ensure that we have an educational system worthy of the dynamic opportunities ahead." (10) [\[41\]](#)

## Digital Opportunity

How is each institution responding to digital opportunity?

What happens to learning when we move from the stable infrastructure of the twentieth century to the fluid infrastructure of the twenty-first century where technology is constantly creating and responding to change? -- Thomas & Brown (2011). *A New Culture of Learning*.[\[42\]](#)

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." And most recently, Norris (2013) and colleagues suggest that a traditional liberal arts program might "'double down' on its belief in the value of a challenging liberal arts education, but infuse the experience with digital scholarship."

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).

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 ECAR study on the BYOE (Bring Your Own Everything) environment found that IT leadership sees great opportunity in leveraging BYOE to diversity 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.[\[43\]](#)

Digital opportunity is the final DAVID theme because technology should serve in support of the other themes. As part of Project DAVID, Ann visited with a number of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) at these institutions, asking how each person is deploying IT in support of institutional distinction, analytics, value, and innovation. Conversations indicate that a number of these institutions are taking strategic advantage of digital opportunity, working to infuse and enhance the highly residential, personal, and engaging educational experience with networked and connected learning. Conversations also indicate a great deal of collaboration underway among these IT leaders as they are part of multiple consortia in support of sharing expertise, and in some cases, providing new learning opportunities and services for their students.

## Conclusion

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. --Dan Currell, "What is College For?" (2013) [44]

Like Dan Currell, each of our college years was spent at ELCA liberal arts colleges in small towns: Ann's at Waldorf College and Luther College in Iowa, and 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 (2013), 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. Discussion that followed indicated that these themes are not necessarily distinctive to this set of liberal arts institutions.

Dan Currell asks: "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? The colleges with a compelling answer to that question – where all 3,000 people know the answer – are going to be fine."

What are we for? What's the goal?

Strategic reinvention is hard work. The contributors to this collection address these questions and the DAVID themes because they know that the future of our colleges and universities depends on it.

An earlier version of this chapter was recently published in *Intersections*.

Duin, A.H., & Childers, E. (2013). Strategic reinvention of Lutheran liberal arts: A preliminary report on project DAVID. *Intersections*, 38, 36-43.

## Notes

[1] Childers, E. (2012). *College identity sagas: Investigating organizational identity preservation and diminishment at Lutheran colleges and universities*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

[2] To date, presidents, provosts, CIOs, chaplains, faculty, staff, and/or students from the following liberal arts colleges and universities have agreed to share their perspectives and work underway: Augsburg College, Bethany College, California Lutheran University, Capital University, Concordia College, Concordia University--St. Paul, Gettysburg College, Gustavus Adolphus College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Luther College, Macalester College, Muhlenberg College, Newberry College, Roanoke College, Saint Olaf College, Susquehanna University, Thiel College, Wagner College, Wartburg College, and Wittenberg University. Additional visits will be held throughout the 2013-2014 academic year. We thank the leadership of these institutions for welcoming us to work with them, and we look forward to broadening this conversation as phases two and three of Project DAVID will focus on additional sets of liberal arts colleges.

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[4] Norris, D., Brodnick, R., Lefrere, P., Gilmour, J., Bear, L., Duin, A.H., & Norris, S. (2013). [Transforming in an age of disruptive change](#). Strategic Initiatives, Inc.

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[7] Baker, V. L., Baldwin, R. G., & Makker, S. (2012). [Where are they now?](#) *Liberal education*, 98 (3).

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Council of Independent Colleges. p.4.

[9] 1 Samuel 17

[10] [http://www.aacu.org/leap/what\\_is\\_liberal\\_education.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/leap/what_is_liberal_education.cfm)

[11] Schneider, C. G. [President's Message: The Dangerous Assault on Disciplines Basic to Democracy](#). *Liberal Education*, 98 (3).

[12] <http://www.swarthmore.edu/presidents-office/against-the-grain-liberal-arts-in-the-21st-century.xml>

[13] Campbell, J., DeBlois, P.B., & Oblinger, D. (2007). [Academic analytics: A new tool for a new era](#). *Educause Review*, 40-57.

[14] <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/analytics-changing-conversation>

[15] <http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/03/07/essay-next-generation-liberal-arts-college-presidents>

[16] <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/04/23/a-rise-in-wealth-for-the-wealthydeclines-for-the-lower-93/>

[17] <http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2012/11/napster-udacity-and-the-academy/>

[18] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/30/liberal-arts-colleges-for\\_2\\_n\\_2384987.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/30/liberal-arts-colleges-for_2_n_2384987.html)

[19] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/05/07/nacubo-survey-reports-sixth-consecutive-year-discount-rate-increases#ixzz2Sd6ZNcvt>

[20] Byrd, S. (2013). [Undermining Pell: How colleges compete for wealthy students and leave the low-income behind](#). New America Foundation.

[21] <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/05/how-colleges-are-selling-out-the-poor-to-court-the-rich/275725/>

[22] <http://www.swarthmore.edu/presidents-office/against-the-grain---liberal-arts-in-the-21st-century.xml>

[23] <http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2013/04/13/are-small-private-colleges-trouble/ndlYSWVGFAUjYVVWkqnjfk/story.html>

[24] [http://www.nitle.org/shared\\_practice/](http://www.nitle.org/shared_practice/) and <http://www.nitle.org/live/events/156-the-nitle-symposium>

[25]

[http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/04/08/college\\_technology\\_experts\\_discuss\\_broken\\_business\\_model\\_in\\_1](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/04/08/college_technology_experts_discuss_broken_business_model_in_1)

[26] <http://www.minnpost.com/driving-change/2013/04/behind-concordias-bold-tuition-cut-maybe-we-can-actually-do-something>

[27] <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324539404578343132132375670.html>

[28] [http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/technology-and-broken-higher-education-cost-model-insights-delta-cost-project#.UTVckIvJrew\\_email](http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/technology-and-broken-higher-education-cost-model-insights-delta-cost-project#.UTVckIvJrew_email)

[29] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/janet-riggs/liberal-arts-degree-value\\_b\\_2750442.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/janet-riggs/liberal-arts-degree-value_b_2750442.html)

[30] <http://wp.stolaf.edu/president/public-remarks/cic-remarks-1-6-12/>

[31] <http://www.kiplinger.com/tool/college/T014-S001-kiplinger-s-best-values-in-private-colleges/index.php>

[32] [http://www.scup.org/asset/65064/PHEV41N2\\_Article\\_Transforming-Part1.pdf](http://www.scup.org/asset/65064/PHEV41N2_Article_Transforming-Part1.pdf)

- [33] <http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm>
- [34] <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/02/21/essay-urges-liberal-arts-colleges-create-measure-civic-engagement#ixzz2MbyBdws>
- [35] <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/making-college-affordable-97399.html?hp=r5>
- [36] <http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/03/07/essay-next-generation-liberal-arts-college-presidents>
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- [38] Gilbert, C., Eyring, M., & Foster, R.N. (2012). Two routes to resilience. *Harvard Business Review*. December.
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- [40] [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/education/edlife/online-education-as-an-agent-of-transformation.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&\\_ga=2.111111111.111111111.111111111.111111111](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/education/edlife/online-education-as-an-agent-of-transformation.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&_ga=2.111111111.111111111.111111111.111111111)
- [41] Chopp, R., Frost, S., & Weiss, D. (Eds.). (2013). [Remaking college: Innovation and the liberal arts](#). The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [42] <http://www.newcultureoflearning.com/>
- [43] A recent ECAR bulletin uses the acronym BYOE, Bring Your Own Everything. See the report, [BYOD and Consumerization of IT in Higher Education](#).
- [44] <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/06/28/tempestuous-times-colleges-must-decide-what-they-re-essay#ixzz2gPdURHks>

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## Vocation



# Vocation, Value, and Identity: Defined and Declared in the Central Things

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**Eric Childers**

Questions are often more important than answers, for the questions shape and guide us as much as the answers. Questions can reveal to us what we want to be, but more centrally, who and what we actually are. An important and perpetual question college leaders must ask—presidents, administrators, and governing boards alike—is about institutional identity and mission. Who are we as colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? In my book, *College Identity Sagas* (2012), I investigated college and university Lutheran identity through the lens of organizational theory. In this brief essay, I turn attention to identity of these ELCA schools through an ecclesial lens.

## **Vocational Identities**

A student at the University of Virginia, I was struggling to develop a clear, manageable, and worthwhile research question to focus my dissertation. I recall explaining to my advisor, a U.Va. undergraduate alumna, my desire to investigate identity at Lutheran colleges and universities. I described the traditional Lutheran college focus on the liberal arts core, the residential (or at least communal) experience, and the focus on teaching, mentoring, and the student-teacher experience.

My professor's response was clear: "Well, we do that here at U.Va., too, and we do it well. You'll have to do better than that in framing your question." And she was correct: those hallmarks I had described to her that I had assumed were exclusive to, or at least somewhat proprietary to, Lutheran higher education could also be accomplished at large public research universities. As a result, my study turned first to defining clearly the identity of Lutheran colleges.

While the first letter of the Project DAVID acronym is distinction, I want to consider more closely the concept and question of identity. Distinction is often a specific recognition of the organization which is bestowed by a party external to the organization. This is not to say that the colleges and universities discussed in this project lack distinction; in fact, each can claim myriad distinctions. Another closely related word, sometimes confused, is distinctiveness. If distinction is how external audiences see the organization as special or remarkable, distinctiveness is how the organization (and its leaders) sees or describes itself as different or better than its peers or competitors. Because each is highly subjective, both distinction and distinctiveness are often difficult to quantify. Both ideals are important and should be thoughtfully considered by institutional leaders; indeed colleges of the church can certainly claim a distinction.

Here I turn to identity, particularly from an ecclesial perspective. Through intentional institutional questioning, colleges and universities can and should perpetually evaluate and examine identity, the very DNA of their organization. While distinction and distinctiveness are words that describe how organizations strategically and competitively position themselves—what they and others claim them to be—identity marks an organization's truest self. Identity is an organization's central, fundamental, and enduring character anchored to mission (Ashforth and Mael, 1996).

The questions I eventually asked in my study were about the preservation and diminishment of religious identity at Lutheran colleges and universities. Through the lenses of institutional theory (specifically isomorphism) and organizational theory, I examined whether three ELCA colleges were systematically preserving their "Lutheranness." Among other findings, the study revealed that Lutheran identity at ELCA colleges is expressed differently per school, and that mission statements, leaders, internal participants, and organizational strategy ensure that identity preservation is a priority. Though expressions of Lutheran college identity vary, a good benchmark for describing Lutheran identity is summed up by Paul Dove (2009), who argues that the vocation of a Lutheran college is to inspire purpose, to prepare students for a life of service to neighbor, to emphasize freedom, to explore the religious and secular world, to affirm the importance of the arts, to advocate the centrality of community, and to support a nuanced pedagogy which includes human reason, dialectic, and paradox. Though not exhaustive, this is a good

place to start when considering the vocation of a Lutheran college.

During the brief but rewarding years serving my alma mater, I recall fondly the hard work of wrestling with the identity of Lenoir-Rhyne, not yet rebranded a university. Ryan LaHurd, Lenoir-Rhyne president at the time, was a bold champion for speaking publicly about Lenoir-Rhyne's mission and vocation as a college of the church. He was very good at explaining what that means, often to donors unfamiliar with Lutherans and their theology. One of his musings in our planning sessions has stayed with me years later. He said, almost as a throwaway line, "It's too bad the Army took the slogan, 'Be all that you can be.' That's exactly what we're about." I have thought that that abandoned recruitment slogan does indeed mark who we say we are and what we say we do in liberal arts education and in colleges of the church, especially in the Lutheran tradition.

Those who care about the Lutheran higher education tradition should never be far from the question of vocation and what colleges and universities of the church are called to be. The identity of a Christian is defined and declared in the waters of baptism when God claims, names, renews, and marks the child of God with the cross of Christ. In baptism, the old sinful creature is put down, and the new creature is born. Vocation is born in baptismal waters. The Christian's vocation is how the baptized answers God's call to live out her baptismal identity in daily life. With a cheerful spirit of thanksgiving, we live out whom God calls us to be by serving neighbor in lovingkindness. And this service and citizenship is expressed in many ways.

Likewise, churches must also perpetually ask and prayerfully consider the vocation to which they are called. What will be the mission of each assembly, those gathered in the name of the Risen Christ? What will be the work of the people in that congregation? How will that parish live out its vocation as the body of Christ in a broken world? Churches are not baptized by water the way humans are cleansed and claimed, but the Holy Spirit is present—at work—in the bricks of the nave, in the wood of the ambo, in the ink of the worship books. It still works.

If individuals are called by God to live out vocational identities, and if churches are called by God to live out missional identities, then colleges and universities of the church also share the potential, possibility, and responsibility for making available an environment for God to change the learner, to develop the whole person, to help the student be all that she or he can be.

### **Word and Prayer, Table and Bath**

The liturgist and professor Gordon Lathrop (2005) tells the story of an old bell at a North American Danish Lutheran Church in Luck, Wisconsin. Upon that bell is inscribed these words: "To the bath and the table, to the prayer and the word, I call every seeking soul." These central things, as Lathrop calls them, are the instructions and DNA that order our worship together. And in these central things God comes to us to forgive, renew, nourish, send, and ultimately change us. When we do these central things together in worship, we are transformed. That is, we are changed by the connection of prayer, by the proclamation of the Word, by the renewal of the waters at the font, and by the nourishment at the table.

If these things happen at our parishes in worship, is it not possible that the Holy Spirit works in other institutions of the church? Is the Holy Spirit also at work in the institutions of higher learning in our country, in the colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other religious bodies? I believe that the identity of these colleges and universities are rooted in this possibility for individual and communal transformation. Like churches, the identity of these colleges and universities dwells in the way these institutions, through the work of the Holy Spirit, change their students from old creatures into new creatures.

At ELCA colleges and universities, no question is off the table. And that is a great place to start. Colleges of the church can ask questions about bacteria and Bach, statistics and Steinbeck. But curricula can also include talk of Holy Communion, forgiveness of sin, and everlasting life. Professors can teach these Christian truths and then move one step further, asking, "What does the Christian faith mean to vocation, to a life of service in the world?" Yes, God-talk might happen in a religion classroom, but it is not absurd that a mathematics professor could entertain questions of faith in a vocation of numbers and algorithms.

Public universities are also apt to ask questions of faith, but is it the mission of these institutions to change the person? By this I do not mean that the college mission is ever to proselytize students. Instead, it is the purpose of the church college to make the topic of faith a matter of mind and heart. We lift up topics of faith that we see as Christian Truth, and we treat them fully. An image has emerged at Lenoir-Rhyne University that describes the possibility for Lutheran higher education: two pillars of the current fundraising effort are a chapel and a science



building. University leaders have valued and privileged both faith and reason, not only in word but in deed. In the center of campus, a magnificent chapel is rising up; a new wing to the science building will follow. After all, in the old Army slogan, “Be all that you can be,” it is the “all” that counts in our educational tradition. Educating, developing the whole person is paramount.

The Lutheran Church is a confessional church of Word and Sacrament. The fifth article of the Augsburg Confession addresses faith and how we obtain it through the preaching and proclamation of the Word. We read, “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe” (Kolb and Wengert, 2000).

We believe the power of the Word is remarkable. Through the work of the Spirit, the gospel acts upon us and changes us. Central to Luther’s Small Catechism is the question, “What does this mean?” Just as we can consider science, history, humanities, and economics, our colleges can and should ask questions pertaining to our spirits and souls, the most important things that are seemingly the most difficult to talk about. Even these questions are on the table, front and center. What do these things mean to us as educated people, as transformed students, persons whose vocational identities are vital to life and citizenship?

An important function of a faith community is to pray for and be prayed for by others in community. We lift up prayer as a vital way we are held and connected in community. To pray for the needs of the hurting and afflicted assumes a community: the teachers, students, staff, coaches, mentors, trustees, parents, and alumni. To live fully as a college community, especially as a community of faith, our colleges can point to prayer as a central thing of its identity.

Likewise, we are fed in community. Though innovation and reinvention call for new ways of offering the educational experience in the twenty-first century, Lutheran liberal arts colleges remain rooted in the residential community. This means students live together, are mentored by one another and by faculty committed to teaching, and eat together in dining halls, dorm rooms, and public spaces. The residential community figuratively and literally gathers around the table. Like at the table of Holy Communion, our colleges are fed in community.

Lathrop’s fourth central thing is the bath, the place we are cleansed and made anew. In college, we are also renamed. We are remade, transformed, marked, and changed forever. In part, we are changed by the questions we ask together as a community of learners, and we are transformed by the answers we discover together. In Holy Baptism, we are changed, marked, and renamed forever. We may expect and should receive the same result from our Lutheran college experience.

## **An Audacious Identity**

Are Lutheran colleges bound by the definition of a single identity? Organizational identity is dynamic, fluid, and unstable (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, 2000). Instead of destabilizing an organization, this fluidity and flexibility can be an adaptive force for identity shaping. The promising news is that Lutheran colleges can adapt to isomorphic change (strategically mimicking other organizations) through emulation of non-Lutheran and non-religious colleges, while concurrently preserving and proclaiming religious identity. For instance, college leaders may seek to emulate systematically a non-religious elite liberal arts college while still expressing its own Lutheran tradition.

Will every college or university of the church so boldly proclaim its identity using such explicit religious language? No, not every school will articulate its mission and purpose using images of baptism, communion, prayer, and gospel. With a keen eye on strategic reinvention, however, leaders of schools can claim vocation as an institutional distinctive in a way that honors its mission and the value of the Lutheran tradition. Lutheran colleges must be nimble.

While visiting campuses for the preparation of my book, I had the chance to meet and talk with a variety of personalities. One has stayed with me for multiple reasons, but mainly because of his profound words about Lutheran education. Dr. Olin Storick, Concordia College Professor Emeritus, said this of the mission of his college: “I have always felt our mission statement was wildly audacious. Here we are: a wide spot in the prairie, and we claim we want to influence the affairs of the world. But (statement author) Carl Bailey never used words he did not intend. And so maybe our influence will be small and limited in scope and geography, but we claim it nonetheless. Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Childers, 2012). Where there is no strategic reinvention,

the college perishes. Let us also be audacious in looking forward.

Lutheran colleges are indeed audacious. We profess to change the lives of students in the process of developing the whole person. Those who care about Lutheran higher education should be quick to profess its potential to show life's meaning to students. Regardless of the college or university and the extent to which each publicly proclaims its religiosity, the Lutheran higher education model allows for relevant discussion about vocation and meaning. It is the duty of an organization's leadership team and governing board to know fully and to articulate clearly the mission of the institution.

Some colleges will unabashedly use religious language to describe their mission and purpose; others will not. That some schools will be uncomfortable using vocation and baptismal vocabulary is beside the point: the Lutheran model, as it were, still provides the foundation to discuss life's meaning and mission with or without using churchy language. A significant part of the educational experience is the acknowledgement and celebration that students are called to be students, encouraged to explore questions of faith, reason, purpose, and values. Students are helped along the way by faculty and staff who are also called to teach and serve. No questions are out of bounds, especially questions of purpose, servanthood, and calling.

The power of questions to focus who we want to be or who we are called to be is profound. Why do we seek to become Christian? We seek to be changed. Why do we go to church? We seek to be changed. Why do we go to college? We seek to be changed. In all these events and human exchanges, we seek, albeit in different ways, to be transformed, renewed, fashioned into new creatures, and made whole.

What is the identity of a Lutheran college? And what does this mean? Lutheran college identity affirms faithful conversation about the gospel, an educational experience built upon a liberal arts foundation, a focus on student-teacher mentoring relationships, a confession that we do not hold all the answers, an insistence that no inquiry is disallowed, and a robust conversation about grace, vocation, our life's work, and who benefits from that work. People who care about this tradition of higher education, especially those in positions of power and influence at these institutions, would be wise to give perpetual, systematic thought to religious identity. The reason why we should care about religious college identity, at last, is not because this identity limits the mission or possibility for developing the whole person. Rather the school's religious identity--its Lutheranness--opens up all the questions and possibilities for student transformation.

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# What is College For? Getting to “Why” in an Era of Technological Disruption

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**Dan Currell**

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 2014.

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.

Perhaps higher education has adapted slowly to the Internet, especially compared to the private sector. But the practical benefit of being last in line is that you can learn from everyone ahead of you. (There’s a reason you didn’t want to go first when it came to giving oral presentations in 4th grade.) The parts of our economy most affected by the Internet have learned several clear lessons, and I think these lessons can help to set a vision of the future for colleges.

I believe the main lesson is this: the Internet didn’t kill off whole sectors of the economy, but it did force management teams to take the threat of rapid extinction very seriously. If the “old economy” management conversation was about how to gain more customers, the “new economy” conversation is about why customers would want what you have to offer at all. It’s not a conversation about degrees of success or failure; it’s a conversation about the prospect of total doom and what can be done to prevent it.

I hope colleges never discuss why “customers” would want their “services” – not in that vocabulary. These are communities, not big box stores. But the college version of that conversation ends up in the same place as the corporate version to some degree. What are we for? Why would someone join this community? Why would they be willing to bear the costs it imposes upon them? In short, why are we doing this?

Colleges with compelling answers to these questions are going to be fine.

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In the mid-1990’s the business world began to recognize a series of forces that were thought to threaten nearly every industry. By 1999, the forces had names: digitization (products and services become electronic); disintermediation (intermediaries disappear); and unbundling (products are disaggregated into discounted components). Doom was declared for incumbent companies, and the Pets.com sock puppet roamed freely at Super Bowl halftime.

Latching onto the emerging zeitgeist, GE’s CEO Jack Welch declared that his goal was to destroy his business before someone else did. He was latching onto Schumpeter’s concept of “creative destruction” as a driver of economic advancement; Welch called the initiative “destroy-your-business.com.”

In the years that followed, much effort went into studying how innovation works - and how it often leads large companies to fail. In 2001, a study of the market for mechanical excavators and disk drives showed that markets are typically disrupted by cheap, inferior technologies aimed at customers who can’t afford the “full package”. When the cheap products get better, it’s curtains for the incumbents – they have been disrupted. Clayton Christensen, the author of the work, became the corporate world’s most famous professor. He also made a compelling case that

incumbent companies were nearly powerless to resist the undertow of this kind of disruption – thus, his breakthrough book was titled *The Innovator’s Dilemma*.

The forces that began threatening businesses 20 years ago took a long time to get to higher education, but now they have arrived. In the last year, hundreds of massive open online courses (MOOCs) have rushed onto the scene, digitizing the teaching of world-class scholars and making their classes available to anyone for free. This followed Christensen’s model of a cheap (or in this case, free) and admittedly inferior substitute undermining a very expensive one. The prospect of disruption has unleashed a flood of anxiety and not a few prophecies of doom for expensive universities. The problem for universities looks much the same as it did for “bricks and mortar” businesses in 1999 – digitization would lead to disintermediation, which would lead to unbundling. That sequence could destroy the incumbents.

Of course, colleges and businesses are different, and most people who take higher education seriously want to keep it that way. But educational services are increasingly bought and sold on an open market. If we don’t want colleges to become mere creatures of the market, the first step is to better understand the market.

Viewed this way, the incumbent company experience since 1999 should be largely encouraging. It turned out that it’s harder for a bunch of web programmers to learn retail than it is for an established retailer to hire web programmers. The sock puppet lost. Petco, which never had a significant online presence, now has over 1,000 locations, and PetSmart owns the defunct Pets.com domain name. (Pets.com lost a staggering \$300 million for its investors, though the sock puppet got a second life pitching auto loans.)

That said, the last decade has forced every company to focus relentlessly on its *raison d’être*, on knowing exactly what it is good for and adjusting its operations accordingly. That soul-searching is probably the most lasting effect of the digital revolution: managers are constantly forced back to the question, “What are we good for now?”

This will be the main effect for colleges, too, and it doesn’t come a moment too soon. Many of us agree that college is important, but we have no broad agreement on why. Now that an education can cost more than a house, it seems like a particularly important question. Why is college important? What exactly makes it worth so much time and money?

Online education may force many universities to admit that they are not really in the transformation business. Is a 200-student lecture hall with an adjunct or graduate assistant at the front the path to transformation? In many cases, it’s barely education. Colleges are better positioned than most universities in this regard – but online education will still bring real pressure to demonstrate the distinct value of what a college can deliver.

Questions like this have now taken on a sharp edge because there will be a heavy price to pay for getting the answers wrong. The path to an answer starts with digitization and moves through disintermediation to unbundling.

## **Digitization**

Digitization turns a physical product into a data set. Most entertainment, financial, and information products have been digitized, which has dramatically reduced the cost to copy, store and transmit them. Most importantly, digitization can allow a product to rapidly evolve into something different – and better. This rapid evolution is the real threat to incumbents. And tantalizingly, a digitized product obliterates physical and proximal limitations: employees can live and work in the Bahamas even if their services are consumed in Seattle.

The prime incumbent horror story for digitization is *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The obvious effect of digitization was to make encyclopedias lighter, easier to search and far cheaper to distribute. These were all improvements to Britannica’s product. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, Britannica circa 1999 seemed to be in an enviable position.

But of course we now know that the main effect of digitizing encyclopedias was to transform the thing itself. Wikipedia hasn’t quite killed Britannica – but it may just be a matter of time. Wikipedia was inferior and free a decade ago. Now it is rapidly increasing in quality, scope and depth, and it is still free. It fits the disruption model perfectly.

The frightening thing about the Britannica story is how hard it is to think of a happier ending. Could the executives at Britannica possibly have imagined that their greatest risk was that tens of thousands of amateurs would spontaneously create a free substitute for their product?

The lesson to be learned from our first experiences of digitization is that digitization alone changes very little – but when it allows a product to rapidly evolve into something else, the effects can be violent and unpredictable. Digitization did not change the pet products business: dogs eat the same food they did in 1998. Digitization, however, changed what an encyclopedia is, and that made all the difference.

That said, very few businesses were hurt as badly as Britannica. For example, money has been digitized – so what happened to banks? In 1999, there was no reason to think that banks should survive in their bricks-and-mortar form for more than about five years; depositors and borrowers could transact everything far more efficiently online and pocket the savings. In 1999, Britannica seemed to be in a better position than Wells Fargo.

How wrong that was. Retail banking products have been digitized but they are otherwise largely unchanged. Because we haven't yet figured out how to make virtual money do anything different than its predecessor, retail banking today would be entirely recognizable to George Bailey of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Money has been digitized, but it hasn't been transformed.

And what about the virtual company – employees doing their work from notebook computers on the beach? Digital products make remote work possible, but the financial sector – whose products now have no mass and no physical location – is still heavily co-located. Bankers may vacation in the Bahamas, but they still work shoulder to shoulder in New York and London. Perhaps the only sector more heavily co-located than banking, ironically, is technology: there are high places here and there, but the only true altar is in Silicon Valley, where code is written by software engineers sitting in adjacent cubicles.

In hindsight, it is no great surprise that universities have been affected so little by digitization. Some elements of a university (lectures, books, lab activities) can be digitized, but as of yet their core product hasn't changed. If MOOCs are the first step towards transforming what a class is – then yes, we are at a crossroads in higher education. If however they are simply a way of getting broader distribution for an existing form of teaching, they won't destroy colleges. In higher education as in other sectors, the litmus test is whether the product itself will change.

This brings us back to some key questions: what is the product really, and why does anyone want it? If cheap, simple substitutes are supplanting some components of a college education, what important parts, if any, are left? And who is responsible for assembling the product and ensuring its quality?

## **Disintermediation**

Remember travel agents? In their simplest form, they were pure intermediaries. The internet has nearly killed them by connecting consumers directly to airlines, hotels and cruise operators. That's disintermediation, and it has been happening in every sector since 1999. It is one of the forces that makes corporate strategists most nervous.

It was easy to foresee the death of the travel agent in 1999. But it was equally easy to foresee the death of real estate agents, publishing houses (readers buy direct from authors), music labels (same rationale) and a host of other intermediaries who are nevertheless alive and well in 2013.

What happened? Why did so many intermediaries survive?

For the most part, industries still have intermediaries – just different ones. Consider the music business. Tower Records died pretty quickly – one intermediary down, score one for the consumer. The chain from production to consumption was getting shorter, and pretty soon consumers would buy their music direct from artists.

Right? Well – no.

As it turns out, music labels (the intermediary everyone loves to hate) are still alive, and iTunes stepped in right where Tower Records used to be. There are just as many links in the music industry's distribution chain now as

before. The price of an album hasn't dropped much, even though the cost of distribution is almost gone. As before, most artists are barely paid while the music industry generates billions in revenue. The most lucrative profits go to the intermediary with the best tollbooth. Right now, that's Apple, and the tollbooth is iTunes.

But surely this re-shuffling has had some effect on the product itself or the way we consume it? Again, so little has changed. In "The Entertainer", Billy Joel wrote "If you're gonna make a hit, you gotta make it fit, so they cut it down to 3:05" – a reference to the power of radio stations who didn't like to play long tracks. In the era of satellite radio, iTunes and Pandora, radio stations no longer rule the roost. So - has the product been transformed? According to thebillboardexperiment.com, the average length of a pop song has increased by all of fifteen seconds since the 1980s, and neither the sound nor the economics of the industry are all that different.

As with digitization, the question for disintermediation isn't whether it will happen but whether it will change the product. Travel agents weren't driven out of the basic flights-and-hotels business because they increased the price of a ticket. The problem was that Orbitz and Travelocity could do the job faster and better.

So it turns out that disintermediation is a misleading term, because better intermediaries tend to replace worse ones – but there is still an intermediary. This doesn't make the transitions any less painful. Most travel agents had likely never wondered exactly what value they created, or why their customers chose to use them, until it was too late.

Who are the intermediaries in higher education? Reed-Elsevier, Pearson and other content providers are obvious examples, and for now their positions seem secure. But the college itself is an intermediary, too. Professors provide services that colleges and universities bundle together and sell. To be a little provocative, consider the music business again: the content creators are rarely paid much, even though there is a lot of money sloshing around the sector. The excess money goes to the intermediary. For colleges and universities, that extra money pays for counseling, career services, athletic facilities, housing, and so on. Will students and their parents continue to want these things if there is a cheaper alternative that offers them a la carte?

The economic form of the question "What is college for?" might be this: does the college create enough value to justify its position as an intermediary between professors and students?

The question of whether colleges will be disintermediated likely turns on whether their service offerings can be unbundled. Unbundling was the third big force strategists were thinking about in 1999, and it has arguably been the most powerful one in the decade since.

## **Unbundling**

Many products are made up of separate parts that consumers must buy together even though they won't likely use them all – they are bundled. A cable TV package, a Disney World pass, or a subscription to the Chicago Tribune – they are all bundles. Bundled products are always more profitable than their a la carte siblings because they force a larger purchase and improve the economics of creating and selling the product. They also always involve some amount of cross-subsidy from one purchaser to another: those who only use a few parts in the bundle subsidize those who use everything, since everyone pays the same price.

In 1999, we saw that the internet might force the unbundling of products and services. The most valuable parts of a bundle could be sold individually, which would be cheaper and more tailored for consumers who used only some pieces of the bundle. Because those were the consumers who cross-subsidized the rest, this seemingly innocent development could undermine well-established business models.

Indeed, unbundling was lethal in many sectors. Many newspapers sat on an economic foundation of classified ads, though few people knew it. Consumers made a small co-payment to get their comics and sports, and the real revenues came from commercial and citizen advertisers. Commercial advertisers had other options – radio, magazines, billboards. But private citizens had only one way to sell the lawn mower or get rid of an unexpected litter of puppies. Classified ads were very important, and they were a piece of the bundle that not everyone used.

What newspapers didn't know in 1999 was that classifieds aren't very effective. Craigslist and eBay made this clear – they were superior and free, and they were completely outside of the newspaper bundle. Those two websites alone took the legs out from under the newspaper industry by stripping a key element from its bundle.

Unbundling may be the greatest threat to colleges, and a far greater threat to universities. At first, the college bundle just brought together several different professors to offer an integrated degree. More recently, we have added athletics, student services, career services, disability support, counseling, housing, and a host of other elements into the bundle. Everyone pays for the whole thing, no matter how much of it they use.

If something is cheap, it's easiest to buy the whole bundle even if you pay for many elements that you never use. At higher price points that becomes less sensible. If the sticker price for a private college education is now about \$200,000, that will buy a lot of private tutoring, lab time, and other a la carte educational services over the course of four years. All that's left is for the student to separately validate her achievements and the resulting competencies.

If this sounds far-fetched, consider that this is a major movement in high school education. We know it as homeschooling, and it is no accident that the trend has exploded since the advent of the Internet. As we now know, "homeschooling" is often a misnomer. It is really the a la carte construction of a secondary education by families sharing resources and working in cooperative networks. It's unbundled education.

We haven't seen unbundled education at the college level yet. This is surely in part because of the social status conferred by a traditional college degree. But it is also because colleges have kept education and evaluation tightly bundled together. The professor teaches and evaluates progress; the college offers courses and confers a degree. As it now stands, the only way to get a degree is to actually attend a college of some sort.

It won't necessarily stay this way. There is no reason why education and evaluation will necessarily stay bundled together, and one can already see movement in the direction of the two splitting apart. Right now it comes up as a question of compatibility: what transfer credits will a degree-granting institution accept? A transfer student may have taken his courses on campus, or he may have taken them online. If it was the latter, at least in some cases, it's possible that he did little more than self-study followed by an exam or paper. This comes very close to separating education from evaluation. The next natural step is to accept credits from standalone online courses, at which point the degree becomes partly unbundled.

It might seem easy for universities to clamp down on this, but right now most colleges are in no position to be choosy when accepting transfer students, particularly if they can pay much or all of the sticker price.

Of course, a more concerning possibility is that diplomas won't matter that much in ten years. Some large and reputable employers – particularly in the tech sector – are now quite willing to hire people with demonstrable skills whether or not they have a college degree. To take two prominent examples, neither Microsoft nor Facebook are in much of a position to insist that their employees have all finished college since neither of their CEOs did. What they need are demonstrable technical skills, many of which are now separately assessed through third-party testing anyhow. For example, see [www.brainbench.com](http://www.brainbench.com). In those cases, a college diploma is already a "nice to have".

Granted, our culture is still very attached to the idea of a college diploma. But the idea that it might not be necessary, even (or perhaps especially) at the elite end of the labor market, is catching on. Apparently there's something about a \$200,000 price tag that will make someone reconsider how much she really wants the product. And there's also the investment of time and energy.

Consider the Thiel Fellowship: fellows are given \$100,000 to skip college and pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions right away. The presumption behind the Thiel Fellowship is that college offers little that the brightest students couldn't pick up along the way as they build the next big thing. This reduces college to nothing more than the content-learning element; it ignores the maturing process, critical thinking, collective learning, ethical reflection and a host of other things more important than the principles of organic chemistry.

A less radical possibility than ditching college altogether is the unbundling of evaluation from education. This would allow students to spend their college budgets as they see fit – online courses, live tutorials, study abroad and internship experiences, seminar classes or whatever – and test separately for the purpose of showing progress.

This kind of unbundling may seem a long way off, but at least one economic factor points in its direction. Bundles will tend to come apart when the cross-subsidy between different buyers of the same package becomes too great. In American higher education, we may soon reach that point. At most private colleges and universities, the gap between "full pay" students, median-tuition students, and heavily aid-dependent students is enormous.



Why would this cause the bundle to rupture? It's one thing to pay \$5,000 for an airline ticket from New York to Los Angeles, as business travelers sometimes do. That kind of premium pricing cross-subsidizes those on the same flight who have paid \$300, and it's what makes airlines viable (at least in the years when they are). But at some point on the pricing curve - \$15,000, say - the New York-based executive hires a NetJet to fly her direct to Burbank. The pricing isn't very different and the service is more tailored.

## **What Next?**

What became of GE's destroy-your-business.com? Jack Welch said in a 2004 interview that in hindsight it was unnecessary. GE's existing businesses didn't need a separate initiative to prod them along – they focused relentlessly on creating real value for customers, innovating rapidly along the way. This was a common experience across the economy. It had seemed for a moment in 1999 that the internet placed incumbents in mortal peril, but there was just too much connective tissue holding their businesses together - creative work, advertising, accounting, quality control, audit, personnel management – for the internet alone to unbundle them. Indeed, incumbent companies that focused relentlessly on their *raison d'être* came out of the digital revolution stronger than they went in.

## **Some Questions to Consider**

Many conversations are ongoing at colleges and universities around the country right now. Taking some of the key issues as laid out above – here are a few questions I believe every institution should be asking as it assesses vulnerabilities and opportunities arising from the changes currently underway.

Don't think about these questions against the backdrop of how technology is now. Think about them against the far superior technologies that will exist five or ten years. For instance - we can presume that online and mobile video and audio quality will continue to improve, enabling low-cost real-time or asynchronous interactions between parties that have some of the feel of current telepresence technologies. (That is, everyone will be available everywhere in HD video on tablets.) We might want to assume that web 2.0 (peer-to-peer web – e.g., Facebook, Wikipedia) will give way to some sort of web 3.0 that enriches peer exchanges with video, rich media and other functionality. We should probably presume that the textbooks will be transformed, permitting wiki-style annotations, embedded video, asynchronous class discussions, and other features as yet unthought-of.

## **Overall – What is our college for?**

- What do our graduates all have in common? What causes that?
- What typifies our intellectual culture?
- What typifies our social culture?
- What typifies our culture of teaching?
- Is there anything happening here that truly happens nowhere else? Is there a secondary list of things that happen here to a greater degree or quality than elsewhere?
- What do our top-quartile graduates tend to be doing within five years?
- What do our bottom-quartile graduates tend to be doing within five years?
- What is our mission? Do we achieve it more now than we did ten years ago, or less?

## **Digitization & Technological Change**

- Which of our typical classroom experiences are least susceptible to virtualization or replication through broadcast or telepresence? Which are most susceptible?
- What aspects of our lab experiences could never be effectively virtualized or replicated through telepresence? Which could be?
- What pieces of contextual learning (internships, service, practicum, etc.) could never be effectively virtualized or replicated through telepresence? Which could be?
- What does our library provide now that could never be provided by Google in the next decade? What could be (or is) provided by Google or similar?

- Which library resources are used most differently now than ten years ago? How will students use the library differently in ten years?
- How could we improve our teaching through the use of new technologies?
- How could we improve our community through the use of technologies?
- How could we improve our economics/efficiency through the use of technologies?

### **Disintermediation & Unbundling**

- What proportion of our students are here for one or two specific educational outcomes, rather than “buying into” the whole bundle? Do we have more or fewer of those than ten years ago?
- What proportion of our faculty could be just as happy somewhere else? What proportion are uniquely committed to this college?
- Imagining this college experience as a bundle of five or six main elements – what are they? Which of those elements are most unique to this college? Which are most valuable to the typical student?
- How critical are those elements to one another from our (faculty, administration, board) perspective? From the perspective of a prospective student? From the perspective of the student who is just there to “get a degree”?
- How would our “bundle” be even more distinctive if we kept it the same, but the rest of higher education became far more digitized?
- How could we use new technologies to enhance what we already do?
- Could new technologies lead us to want to change the composition of our bundle?
- Do any of our students take assessments or get certified separately from their course of study and degree? Could that assessment become disconnected from our degree?
- Do we have any cohorts of students who don’t care about their diploma all that much – personally or from a career perspective? In ten years, is it imaginable that we could have such a cohort of students?

### **Fiscal & Practical Impacts**

- What are the typical causes of interruption or failure here – i.e., what are the most common reasons for a student not to complete a degree? Could those factors increase in the coming decade?
- What is the typical profile of a prospective student whom we believe truly should come to our college, but doesn’t? Could that profile grow in the next ten years?
- Which two or three programs are most “revenue-positive” for the college? Will other institutions skim students in those programs off the top?
- Which two or three programs are most “revenue-negative” for the college? Could we survive if we lost the cross-subsidy supplied by students in the most revenue-positive programs?

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# Higher Education Built on a Lutheran Foundation

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**Darrell Jodock**

*A speech given to the ELCA College & University Presidents, February 11, 2013.*

The question I would like to discuss is what Lutheran college/universities have to offer our contemporary society. My suspicion is that, given the multiple options available for post-secondary education, we need to differentiate ourselves more clearly. I do not think this necessarily means branding everything Lutheran (this word may or may not convey anything to our constituents), but I do think it means claiming our ongoing legacy and striving to articulate clearly what that legacy offers in our day.

As a kind of footnote to that last sentence, I should add that the viability of this project depends on retrieving aspects of the Lutheran tradition that are not always front and center in current Lutheranism. That is, the task I have in mind (of claiming and articulating) may in fact put the ELCA colleges and universities in a leadership position rather than simply repeating what someone else has said sometime in the past. I think this could be helpful. It could midwife into existence a revitalized vision of the role of the church in the world.

To provide an example, I have learned from my involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue that the Lutheran tradition provides some helpful resources for welcoming and practicing inter-religious dialogue, but inter-religious dialogue is not something to which Lutherans in the past have given much attention—whether during the Reformation or post-Reformation or even during the period when Lutheran immigrants were adjusting to life in the U.S. In fact the retrieval includes acknowledging and rejecting some of the harsh things Luther said late in his life.

As strange as this may sound, some fresh thinking is needed in order to claim the benefits available in the tradition.

To offer one other example, Luther had a lively and dynamic sense of creation. The world itself is a gift of God. And the world is infused with the divine. Humans are invited not only to celebrate God's generosity but to participate in God's creativity. In American culture, this lively sense of creation often slips from view, because Christianity as a whole focuses so much on individual salvation (the most extreme form of which comes in the peculiarly American and peculiarly modern idea of individual believers being raptured out of tribulation while the world is destroyed). To be useful in a college setting, its lively sense of creation needs to be retrieved. Ecology, science, art, sexuality, civil rights, inter-religious relations, the role of government, all these and more are informed by our view of creation. If we do not retrieve this appreciation for creation and explore its importance, the tradition will be relegated to the chapel alone rather than informing the whole of the educational enterprise.

In response to the opening question (what Lutheran colleges/universities have to offer our contemporary society), I am going to proceed in three steps. Step one will examine some resources the Lutheran tradition offers. Step two will describe in several ways the purpose of higher education when it is built on this foundation. And step three will offer some suggestions about how this multi-faceted purpose can be exemplified in a college or university today.

## **Step One**

There are at least five things about the Lutheran tradition that enable it to work well for this purpose:

1. It sees no opposition between faith and reason or between faith and learning. It is not insignificant that it was begun when a university professor called for an academic debate, challenging a common religious practice and some widely held societal assumptions of his day. Because this tradition sees no opposition between faith and reason, it stands apart from those strains in American life in general and American religious life in particular that are deeply suspicious of learning. And, perhaps less expectedly, it stands apart from those voices who think religion provides

answers to questions. If we explore this issue, it soon becomes apparent that religion and learning are not in conflict because, for Luther, religion was primarily about relationships. As one biographer, Richard Marius, points out, when Luther struggled with questions to which he could not find an answer, he took comfort in the fact that the Psalmists and Jesus himself also had unanswered questions. He learned that the security of a divinely-sustained God-human relationship made living with unanswered questions possible. Unanswered questions were simply part of the human condition, not a symptom of insufficient faith.

Moreover, there is no conflict between faith and learning because, for the Lutheran tradition, there is no human authority to which scholars and teachers must defer. Questions are best settled in the community via deliberation and debate.

Allow me to continue to explore this point a little further. Please bear with me as I back up a step or two before returning to the main point. Luther's religious problems were caused in part by what he had been taught—namely, that he needed to take the first steps toward God, and then God would do the rest. Humans needed to do their best (*facere quod in se est* = literally, “to do what in one is”). Luther's careful self-examination showed him that he always failed to meet the expectations his teachers claimed were possible. His breakthrough was a realization that the biblical message is of a God who takes the initiative, repairs the broken relationship, and comes to where we are. What builds or repairs a relationship is unconditional, steadfast love. Faith comes later. It is the acknowledgment of what God has been doing and will continue to do. This puts Lutherans at odds with the “decision theology” that is so omnipresent in American Christianity (“you need to have faith, and then you will be saved”). But even more important for the point we are making, it puts relationships ahead of beliefs. (I mean here by “belief” a statement to which someone subscribes.) Our two-year-old grandson is, for the moment, “grandpa's boy.” If he's on the swing set and I hold out my arms, he jumps. He probably does not yet understand the concept “trust,” but he knows what a relationship of trust is all about. It is precisely because this tradition puts its emphasis on love-formed and love-based relationships that there is no conflict between religion and learning. The beliefs that describe this relationship can always be re-examined. The kind and quality of relationships is what matters. Were religion understood, as it often is in the U.S., to be a matter primarily of beliefs, the potential for conflict would be much higher. To repeat, because the emphasis is on love-formed and love-based relationships, there is no conflict between learning and religion.

This tradition underlines and proclaims that we are to acknowledge our giftedness. We did not choose to be born, we did not choose our parents, we benefited from schools and teachers that we did not create, we enjoy trees we did not plant and roads we did not build, and so on and so on. The appropriate response is a deep, pervasive, life-shaping gratitude. Even those things for which we like to take credit are often the result of someone else. A person may tell me I deserve credit because, “you worked hard and did well in college, graduating summa cum laude and receiving a Danforth Graduate Fellowship,” but I would not even have gone to college had it not been valued so highly in my non-college-educated family. I would not have rallied to overcome that D- in my first German exam had someone not already taught me to work hard and (quite intentionally) instilled in me some level of confidence that challenges could be overcome. I would not have moved on from the C- in my first history exam had my advisor not talked me into seeing the professor and had the professor not patiently explained to me what was expected in an essay exam (something I had never encountered before). Those too were gifts. In fact, I cannot think of anything I am that is not the product of a gift. Celebrating giftedness is the context in which Lutheran higher education occurs. Celebrating giftedness is not at odds with learning. They operate on different, though not disconnected, levels. If we step back and look at religion on its most general level, it involves a sense of wonder, a sense of giftedness, and a sense of connectedness. (That is, everything is connected, and I am connected to everything, so that what I do or do not do affects humans in China and affects shell fish in the Pacific.) Wonder, gratitude, and connectedness are not at odds with learning.

Point #1 is that, for a variety of reasons, Lutherans understand religion in such a way that there is no conflict between it and learning.

2. The Lutheran tradition affirms freedom of inquiry. Nothing is exempted from study and critique, and this includes religion and Luther's much beloved Bible and patriotism and pedagogy and anything else. But in an era when “critical thinking” has become a slogan, it is important to add that construction is equally important. Education is not just about taking things apart. It needs to help people put things together in an open-ended, penultimate, and yet usable way.

3. The Lutheran tradition favors an image of God that is out of step with common assumptions about God. The

more common image is of a God who stands above what happens and controls it—whether in a micromanaging way by causing or allowing specific occurrences, or in a more “stand back-ish” way of establishing natural and moral laws and watching them operate. In either version of this view, the emphasis is on order, and academic study is about identifying this order. But the image of God that comes through Luther is of a down-to-earth God with sleeves rolled up, struggling for shalom in the midst of prevailing societal winds that are blowing the opposite direction. On this view, the world exhibits both disorder or conflict and regularity. This God is at work in at least two ways, both struggling for shalom in every aspect and in every corner of society and transforming human beings so that they can become agents of shalom. God transforms them into channels of steadfast love, reconciliation, justice, and shalom.

With God at work in the world, vocation ceases to be an imperative; it becomes instead an invitation to join in what God is already doing. And religion ceases to be a separate compartment of life; it becomes an aspect of everything. John Updike, the American novelist who died a couple of years ago, often acknowledged his Lutheran outlook. It was, he thought, the reason some of the more moralistic critics did not understand him. Among the things he said was that from his perspective every accurate description is a psalm—that is, one does not have to talk about God in order to talk about God, because the divine is present everywhere, in the imperfections of humans as well as in their finer moments. For him and the tradition, everything can be transparent to the presence of God. Luther’s down-to-earth image of God invites conversation about God’s presence—or, should we say, the presence of mystery and its role—in politics, in scientific discovery, in good literature, in art, in music, etc. This down-to-earth, non-controlling image of God also affects how humans deal with tragedy and suffering—areas of life where Luther found God more clearly present than in power and success.

So, the third resource is a dynamic, active, down-to-earth image of God.

4. The Lutheran tradition operates with a two-dimensional approach to human beings and their manifold interactions. This two-fold approach is built on another part of its particular idea of God—namely that God never acts unilaterally. Instead God always acts through creatures or through humans being. So, it is perfectly appropriate to say that I received many gifts from my parents—gifts that have influenced who I am. And it is also appropriate to say that I received from God through my parents many gifts that have influenced who I am. My own opinion and the opinion of the Lutheran tradition is that the latter perception is a more profound one, but the other people with whom I work in a college or university do not have to agree with this in order for us to work well together on overlapping educational goals.

Allow me to explore this two-dimensional approach a little further by using the example of vocation. Vocation, as you likely know, is the Lutheran vocabulary for the calling that every human being has to serve the neighbor and the community. With a sense of vocation, one’s work, one’s community involvements, one’s family ties, one’s leisure, indeed everything worth doing can be a way to benefit others and benefit the community. The uniquely Lutheran spin on vocation is that it is not developed from within so much as it comes to us from the outside. It is built on a deep sense of gratitude for all that a person has received (so we are drawn into vocation by the gifts and unconditional love of others). And this gratitude is combined with a lively awareness of the needs of those around us (so their needs draw us into vocation). Such needs may be dire ones—as in a house destroyed by a hurricane or a lack of food or a loss of loved ones—or they may be less “in-your-face”—as in the need for art or music or good literature or financial advice or a well-constructed road. The two dimensions that I mentioned earlier come into play in that a person may be so moved by the needs around as to feel called by the neighbors to do something to help, or a person may sense God’s call accompanying the call of the neighbors. Either way, the person may be moved to help and may do exactly the same thing. The neighbor and the community will benefit (and this is what matters, because a Lutheran ethic is one of results, not just intentions). Either way, the far-too-typical American sense of entitlement will have been transcended by a sense of vocation. As will the far-too-typical American individualism that views each person as an isolated unit, capable of a full life on their own; it too will have been transcended by vocation.

So, if I can re-formulate my definition of vocation—it is a sense of one’s self as nested in and gifted by a larger community and the accompanying sense that life’s meaning and purpose come from serving that larger community, all leading to the ethical priority of serving the community and the neighbors in it. This vocation will be deeper and more resilient if grounded on God’s relationality, but it will be vocation even without that. And now, back to the point of this discussion—the call of the neighbor and the call of God illustrate the two-dimensional nature of Lutheran thinking. They are not separate but connected.

5. The two-dimensional feature of Lutheran thought allows it to support colleges and universities when they follow a “third path.” My observation has been that, when many faculty and staff are introduced to one of our colleges or universities for the first time, they find it perplexing. They expect it to follow one of two default models and are perplexed when it does not. And the same is often true of parents and students and potential donors who expect us to be something we are not.

One of the default models is “sectarian.” A sectarian college is deeply rooted in a particular religious tradition. Its faculty, staff, and students tend to come from that tradition. They are expected to affirm, sometimes also sign, a statement representing the convictions of that religious group. There is a very noticeable line between the college community and the surrounding society. The sectarian college often seeks to serve its religious community more than the surrounding world (though, of course, it sometimes does both). The sectarian college can be a nurturing community, because the religious outlook is reinforced in so many ways. But it is not easy to cross the line separating it from the surrounding society—in part because religious diversity is either absent or not acknowledged. The sectarian college is a religious enclave. It is deeply rooted but relatively homogenous and not inclusive.

The second default model is “non-sectarian.” If such a college ever was tied to a religious tradition, those ties have been severed. The non-sectarian college is a microcosm of the surrounding society, and this makes movement between the two quite easy. With regard to religious diversity, the non-sectarian college follows the lead of American society. More often than not, the accommodation with which it operates expects that religious practice be checked at the campus entrance. Faith and religious practice are not topics that get much attention in the corporate life of the college. As a result, a non-sectarian college is inclusive but not deeply rooted. It tends to draw its values from the culture in which it is located.

I know I am painting with a broad brush, but I am not trying to be critical. Each of these models has its virtues.

The Lutheran tradition, with its tension-filled relation to culture, supports a third path. A college or university that follows the third path draws upon its religious tradition in order to serve the larger society. It endeavors to be both rooted and inclusive. I mean “inclusive” in two senses.

The first is welcoming into its midst persons of other religious traditions in such a way as to foster inter-religious dialogue of the sort that benefits both the non-Christians and the Christians and in such a way as to equip them to serve society as a whole.

The second meaning of “inclusive” is having an all-encompassing vision. A college built on this tradition seeks primarily to serve the world, not just its religious community (though, of course, sometimes it does both).

The value of the religious tradition is that it puts deeper questions on the agenda. It keeps the purpose of education alive. It keeps mystery alive—the sense of mystery that undergirds all profound academic endeavors. It gives to the college or university a basis upon which to assess the culture of which it too is a part—supporting some parts and critiquing others. Rather than a religious enclave or a microcosm, a college/university following the third path is a well dug deep to serve the whole community.

The difficulty of the third path is that it is hard to explain, especially in a culture formed and shaped by religious traditions that are out of step with the Lutheran outlook. The third path seeks to hold together things that others claim should be separated—such as faith and learning, freedom and community, a determination to learn more and a readiness to live with unanswered questions, religious conviction along with civil discourse and inter-religious dialogue. It is precisely this kind of unexpected linking that enables Lutheran colleges and universities to make an important contribution to our society.

## **Step Two**

Let me now try to articulate a few features of a college or university that claims the Lutheran tradition. (These features are all interlocking—in fact, they are different ways of speaking about one central, albeit multi-faceted, reality.)

1. A contemporary claiming of the Lutheran tradition affirms that the focus of education is not primarily on the subject matter (as crucial as that is) but on the learner. Knowledge itself is readily available in our wired society; in



fact it is available in overwhelming quantity. Education today is about helping learners sort out that knowledge, helping them formulate good questions, helping them convey clearly what they learn, and helping them apply what they discover for the benefit of others. Employers say that they want college graduates who can communicate well and can think responsibly and creatively. The purpose of this kind of higher education is to graduate creative people with a strong sense of vocation, not primarily to train them with the information and skills needed to do a particular job (as important as that may also be). Given all the questions and challenges currently faced by higher education, today, more than ever, we need to explain and demonstrate what we are doing. I know I am singing an old song here when I say that the specific skills can be learned separately. My younger son majored in physics and now works as an engineer designing control systems for commercial jet engines. Most of the specific information and skills that he uses he learned on the job, including how to use the sophisticated computer program with which he works. What he gained from college was the understanding needed to master the information and learn this system. When he returns home, he plays the piano, a skill he cultivated in college. My older son majored in international relations and works as a computer programmer in a company that keeps track of mortgage payments. Because it does this rather than broker or design mortgages, it has done very well during the recession. The specific skills he needs for this job he gained from courses he took after college while working for his first employer. When he returns home, he is reading his way through a selected list of great books, based on a curiosity he also cultivated in college. Both are using what they learned in college to know how to learn what they need, how to work with others, and how to think creatively about their projects. These are abilities that go beyond just doing their jobs. For both, their education has value both in and outside of their jobs.

2. To use slightly different vocabulary, a contemporary claiming of the Lutheran tradition encourages a campus-wide discussion of vocation. How can what we are learning serve the community? How can each individual best serve the community? And it encourages the kind of transformative leadership (or “servant leadership” or “communal leadership”) that grows out of vocation—that is, the kind that inspires and persuades and organizes others to join in projects of benefit to the community.

3. And to use slightly different vocabulary again, a contemporary claiming of the Lutheran tradition affirms that the purpose of education is the cultivation of wisdom. For Luther God’s unconditional love set people free—free from enslavement to self and free for service to the neighbor. But, unlike many other theologians, Luther did not think that he could provide in any detailed way a prescriptive pattern for this service. The person who has been set free needs to listen to the needs of others and then use his or her wisdom to determine how best to address those needs. Wisdom, then, is (a) a deep understanding of what makes humans tick and what they need for a full, meaningful, purposeful life and (b) a deep understanding of how communities work and what contributes to their health. For Luther, the primary overarching purpose of education was to enhance wisdom so that citizens could lead their communities and their households. I can gather knowledge on my own, but wisdom requires the give-and-take of multiple perspectives and of thoughtful teachers. There is no way I can understand others without interacting with them. (Of course, some humans are wise even without formal education, and some are, as my father used to say, “educated fools,” but Luther’s conviction was that the right kind of education could and would enhance wisdom.)

4. And, to try one other formulation: besides educating learners, educating for vocation and educating for wisdom, a contemporary claiming of the Lutheran tradition affirms that the purpose of education is to enhance our ability to serve the neighbor and the community. Wrong ideas have harmful consequences. It was, for example, a bad idea that prompted Stalin to starve out more than 1 million Ukrainian peasants who refused to collectivize their farms. It was a bad idea, even though the idea was thought for some time to be “scientific,” that produced contemporary racism. On the other hand, right ideas can have beneficial consequences. So learning matters a lot if the goal is to help others in ways that make a positive difference. In this tradition, education and educational excellence are both aimed at equipping for more effective service.

5. A contemporary claiming of the Lutheran tradition fosters a sense of agency—that is, a confidence that a person can make a difference even if the problem is too large or intractable to be solved in some final or definitive way. When Samuel and Pearle Oliner sought to understand how those who in the 1940s who risked their lives to rescue victims of Nazism differed from those who remained bystanders, they noted that the two groups had often been exposed to the same prejudices. The presence or absence of prejudice was not the cause of their different responses. What they learned was that the rescuers had a sense of agency while the bystanders felt trapped, victimized, and powerless. Much in our contemporary society prompts people to feel overwhelmed and paralyzed. Our colleges and universities will make a contribution if they help students overcome that paralysis. Luther himself kept sending people out into society: if society needs a mayor, become a mayor. If it needs schools, build schools. And he himself was involved in virtually every issue of his day, creating and designing community chests to end begging,

advocating schools for both young men and young women, urging the peasants and the princes to negotiate rather than taking up arms, settling disputes between princes and their subjects (something he was doing right up to the day he died), opposing a crusade—the list goes on and on. Education that serves our society empowers by fostering a sense of agency. Mentoring is crucial for this. Practice is crucial for this. As is a community of support.

6. With this in mind, education is not primarily an intrinsic good (though it is that), nor is education primarily an avenue to financial and professional success (though it also may be that), it is a communal endeavor undertaken for the sake of the larger society. Such an education begins in community to prepare humans who are inherently communal to serve the larger community.

### Step Three

Having tried to build a foundation, let's see if I can identify some features of this sort of higher education: (This list is not in any way exhaustive. Other features can be added, and some on this list may deserve to be replaced by even better proposals. Moreover, the suggestions are not listed in any particular order.)

1. Higher education built on this foundation will provide opportunities for faculty and staff to learn what the concept of vocation is all about and opportunities to think about how they introduce, mentor, and model a sense of vocation in the students with whom they interact. I have discovered that this concept is readily shared. At the most recent workshop for faculty that I helped organize, we had a Muslim, a Pure Land Buddhist, and a Jew each speak about how vocation was supported in their respective religious traditions, so that everyone could see that it was a concept suitable for an inter-religious setting at the same it is a central feature of the Lutheran tradition. As I said earlier, vocation is two-dimensional—both a human calling and a divine calling, and this enables it to be readily shared.

In addition to faculty and staff, opportunities should be provided for alumni to understand and reflect on vocation. A group of us from several Lutheran colleges/universities are currently trying to organize a joint program for alumni, whereby the alumni from all the cooperating Lutheran colleges and universities who live in a particular area are invited to attend a workshop or retreat where they reflect on the big questions of meaning, purpose, and calling. The workshop itself is planned jointly by local alumni and college personnel who have experience working with vocation. Two day-long events have been held in Rochester, MN. Another event, oriented to those in the “third chapter of life” (retirement), is scheduled for later this month in Arizona. Two other similar events are in the planning stages. Everyone was surprised when the first local committee decided to schedule its event on a weekday. Their reasoning was that, for families, weekends are so jammed that it is easier to take a day off work when child-care is already arranged than to carve out time away on a weekend. This in itself says something about how important a gift time apart can be. Thinking about priorities and how well these priorities are being lived out in one's life does not end with college graduation.

2. Higher education built on this foundation will prioritize excellent teaching. This may seem obvious, but, given the socializing that currently occurs in many graduate programs where careerism and publishing get all the emphasis, it still needs to be said. Enticing faculty and staff to subscribe to this mission takes some focused attention. Hiring, evaluation, tenuring, and promotion procedures need to reflect the priorities of the college or university. However it may be accomplished, there should be some mechanism whereby each faculty member is challenged to think carefully about how his/her teaching educates for service, vocation, wisdom, a sense of agency, and transformative leadership.

3. Higher education built on this foundation will seek to minimize the “silos” that develop when each discipline functions in isolation. Inter-disciplinary programs are fine, but they may or may not achieve what I am talking about. There should be deep, serious, extended conversations among faculty in various disciplines so that they begin to see the assumptions of their own discipline and feel an urgency to communicate those assumptions clearly to students. For example, what do psychology and philosophy each assume about the nature of human beings? What do chemistry and religion each assume about what counts as knowledge? I expect there are differences and they are worth exploring. I am forever grateful that my college instructor began our freshman chemistry course with an extended discussion of the history and philosophy of science. It changed the way I understood what came next. If the focus is on the learners and on the benefits to society each learner can contribute, then disciplinary silos are not helpful. And we cannot expect students to make connections that faculty members have not themselves explored.

4. Higher education built on this foundation will think carefully about its claims to know. Luther was very clear that humans could not climb up to heaven and peek in the back door—that is, they could not understand things from God’s point of view. The implication, of course, is that humans cannot understand anything completely, and their claims should be appropriately circumspect. This militates against ideologies of any sort—religious, political, scientific, social—while at the same time valuing learning as a resource for serving. And it also undergirds the importance of dialogue and civil discourse. If a person thinks they have things figured out, there is no reason to dialogue. But if a person realizes their perception is incomplete, they begin even a difficult conversation with a very different kind of readiness to listen and to treat the other with respect. (Lest I be misunderstood, I am not implying that anyone’s claim to know is as good as anyone else’s. I am not endorsing the kind of relativism that I sometimes hear in the classroom—“what is true for me is true for me and what is true for you is true for you,” and this ends the conversation. To be aware of the limits of my claims is not the same as this sort of relativism.) In any case, the capacity to understand, value, and participate in civil discourse and communal decision-making is an important contribution to a society that is increasingly divided, isolated, and polarized. Sociologists tell us that groups often have so little contact with each other that they cannot understand why anyone would disagree. The only thing they can conclude is that the ideas held by the other group are somehow dangerous or subversive. This reaction marks the boundary between healthy difference and polarization.

So, education influenced by this tradition will make cautious, non-ideological claims.

5. Higher education built on this foundation will help people live with tensions. Though it is not evident in the voices currently opposed to gun control, humans are a complex mixture of good and evil. They are not as easily separated into two camps as our society sometimes assumes. Luther was fond of paradoxes. God is both hidden and revealed. Humans are simultaneously justified and sinful. Humans are both free lords of all subject to none and dutiful servants of all subject to all. This fondness for paradox did not reflect intellectual laziness, as it may, but rather a recognition that relationships are more basic. The paradoxes invite us to see past the contrasting propositions to something deeper. In my opinion, current American society is characterized by a pervasive anxiety that prompts many to exaggerate every fear. Yes, the fears are real, but the anxiety blows those fears out of proportion. Those who study family systems tell us that anxiety leads to dichotomous thinking and an inability to imagine new alternatives. Our society will benefit from citizens who understand paradoxes and are ready to live with tensions as they look beyond the current alternatives. In almost every case, this means taking one’s eyes off ideology and turning them instead to real people with real problems and trying to figure out how they can be helped. (Eric Cantor, in a speech last week, seemed to open the door to this kind of discussion, when he suggested that the debate about immigration reform first consider a path to citizenship for children who were brought to this country at a very young age. He acknowledged that there are competing claims, but this tension did not prevent him from making proposals. Tension is not the same as polarizing ideologies; it does not paralyze.)

6. An institution of higher education built on this foundation will be very concerned about its relationship to its surrounding community. That is, it will ask itself what the vocation of the institution is and not just attend to the vocation of its individual members. What can the college or university do to benefit the environment or the poor or the jobless? What can it do to enhance the education of children in the surrounding community? What can it do to provide continuing education opportunities for laity and clergy? What can it do to partner with groups such as Habitat for Humanity or Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service or Lutheran World Relief or Lutheran Social Services? What are the possibilities of service-learning programs? Such a college or university will be very concerned about its relationship to the surrounding community.

7. Higher education built on this foundation wrestles with the very difficult questions of access. Under the present conditions, who does or does not have access to higher education in the area where the college or university is located? One commitment of the Lutheran tradition is justice. One of Luther’s favorite passages was from the first chapter of Luke where Mary praises God for scattering the proud, bringing “down the powerful from their thrones” and lifting “up the lowly,” filling “the hungry with good things,” and sending “the rich away empty.” For Luther, God is at work behind the scenes leveling the playing field. Participating in this activity is part of the vocation of each human and part of the vocation of an institution of higher education that is built on this foundation.

8. Higher education built on this foundation will recognize the importance of support systems. That is, Americans tend to learn to value their worth on the basis of their “busy-ness” and their success or failures. This standard is a pretty grim taskmaster. And many of our students feel this pressure intensely. Support systems are needed to help them sort out and cope with this pressure—to create a safe environment within which to consider options, and to have the sense of leisure required to delve deeply into a problem or delve deeply into a work of literature. A friend

of mine, in the context of a course on Judaism, assigns students one Sabbath day during the semester—no studying no shopping, no texting, etc.—only conversations with family or friends, going for a walk, attending a religious service, etc. For many of the students, it turns out to be an enormously difficult assignment, and the instructor is deluged with questions seeking some way to wiggle out (“May I go shopping if I do not buy anything?”). Their difficulty is symptomatic of our society.

Education that inspires a different set of standards for self-assessment would be a contribution.

Let me add that, just as individuals need support systems, so do institutions if they are to carry out their vocation. They need to sort out and cope with as many competing standards and with as many pressures as do individuals. Exploring how this group of ELCA college presidents can lend support is, I take it, what you will be discussing later today.

9. As strange as it sounds, higher education built on this foundation will concern itself with etiquette. I would prefer a word more appropriate than “etiquette”—because I am not talking about fancy stuff, just basic rules of human relationships—but I do not have one. As we know, students often come to college without having learned how to treat others with respect. This does not go over very well in job interviews. It does not enhance their chances of being heard by a school board or city council. In other words, it undermines their capacity to contribute positively to the community. This last week, I looked over the syllabus of someone teaching psychology and neuroscience, and along with sections on the purpose of the course, assignments, and grading, it had a section on “class etiquette.” The section included very basic things such as turning off cell phones and raising one’s hand before speaking. I found its presence to be striking.

10. Higher education built on this foundation will be incarnational. That is, it will view humans as whole beings, as physical, emotional, spiritual and mental, recognizing that these are not separate parts but aspects joined together in a whole. And it will acknowledge and explore the interdependence of humans with the whole of creation. It will be incarnational.

11. Higher education built on this foundation will understand worship and chapel services as reminders of the pervasive presence of mystery, of the pervasive presence this tradition names as God. A sense of mystery inspires good science, it inspires good literature, music, and art, it inspires gratitude, it inspires a sense of limits, it inspires vocation, and it contributes to wisdom. Thus, an awareness of mystery is part of a college or university serving the purposes we have identified.

12. Higher education built on this foundation will include in its vocation serving the church, because it has unique gifts to offer that will enable church members to serve the larger community more effectively. That is, its retrieval of themes needed today can help the church also retrieve those themes. No other institution has the same resources to explore the intersection of faith and the various areas of life. People in the church need help—sometime desperately need help—with negotiating those intersections.

Well, I have suggested that when higher education reclaims and rethinks the contributions of its Lutheran heritage, it has much to offer our society:

- In the face of careerism, it offers a lively sense of vocation.
- In the face of individualism, it holds up the centrality and transformative power of relationships.
- In the midst of anxiety, it offers a message of hope, based on the ongoing activity of a down-to-earth God.
- To those overwhelmed into paralysis, it offers a sense of agency.
- In the midst of success-oriented standards of self-worth, it offers freedom, including a freedom from such standards and a freedom for others.
- In the midst of polarizing ideologies, it supports dialogue and civil discourse.
- In the midst of religions that focus on beliefs, it holds up paradoxes that invite us to look deeper.
- In the midst of religions focused on comfort or escape, it calls us to “be with” those who suffer and to reduce their suffering in whatever way possible.
- In the midst of individualized religion, it sets its eyes on shalom—on justice, peace, and wholeness, or, as our Jewish colleagues quite appropriately say, on tikkun olam, on “mending the world.”

When shaped by this tradition, education does, I believe, have something important to offer!

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# Welfare of the City and Why Lutherans Care About Education

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**L. DeAne Lagerquist**

*This address was delivered at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference in 2013 at Augsburg College.*

Now that we have been welcomed and I have been introduced, it seems right to notice who is in the room. I will not ask you to introduce yourselves to your neighbors because I suspect that you already know each other. Instead, let me speculate about the sorts of people we are. We have two characteristics in common; we are associated with Lutheran higher education by our employment 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 at a similar.

I imagine that some of you have worked at Lutheran schools for a rather long time, but may still have questions about this tradition. Maybe you 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 of you are committed to the mission of your college or university, you admire its heritage, and are able to give a subtle account of the tradition, but you 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 you have gotten yourself into. You 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? And 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 (and in this room) 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, and 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 these annual conferences—The Vocation of a Lutheran College—is another, related question 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.

The second common characteristic: we all work at Lutheran colleges and universities in the early 21st century in the United States. In our shared context there is notable public confusion, not to say conflict, about the purposes 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 19th 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 these.

Let me be blunt. The conference organizers have given us a theme that turns our situation on its head. They invite us to consider "Vocation as a Challenge to the Commodification of Education," but 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 your mind as we visit 16th century Germany, the formative decades of Lutheran higher education in the USA, and then return to our own time. In addition, given who is in the room and back on our campuses, a related question: how 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, and 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?" Other speakers will say more about this phenomenon. Nonetheless, we all get our paychecks from colleges so we know that money changes hands in the 'delivery' of learning, and not only to pay us. Already Target stores have begun 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. Also 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 here to think about the value of education and about how that intertwines with its economy.

Given these realities, how useful is Luther? Of course life in early 16th 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, p. 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, p. 19-20) Noll and Harran and many others 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.

He and we ask big questions like 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 conference 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, political, and religious circumstances of the early 21st century. Carl Dennis' 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 500th anniversaries of Reformation events: first, Luther's 1517 posting of the 95 theses and then of all that followed. These are well enough known that I do not need to recount them for you.

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 replace the market exchange.

In his book, *The Gift: Imagination and Erotic Life of Property*, Lewis Hyde introduces gift economy and draws 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, p. 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 erotic, generative power is released, even increased when it is given away. This dynamic is expressed by a colleague in this 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, contrasted the late medieval image of Christ as judge. (Bayer, p. 452) Immediately this shift reverberated in the spiritual arena where, having received grace, the human being stood before God, clothed in Jesus' righteousness and offering 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, p. 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 and 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.

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. (LW, p. 219) One purpose of education is cultivation of personal faith; a second prepares learners for service to the neighbor (=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, if you will—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 on-going, 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. (LW, Vol. 45, p. 712-1)

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 sub-set 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.

In the 16th 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 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, he founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502 Elector Frederick III (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, p. 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.

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 approved adding the Greek professorship which brought Philipp Melanchthon to the University of Wittenberg in 1518 and his successor agreed to the reforms Melanchthon 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 Melanchthon 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 (last of the three identified by Noll) 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.

My equivocating in that last sentence, if not rejected and at least initially, points to the scholarly dispute about the degree to which Luther and Melanchthon either agreed or disagreed 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 had more to do with daily bread (a place holder 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 philosophy value relative to the civil law that governs society. Once again we are reminded of the horizontal, vocational dimension of education. (Bayer, *Pro Ecclesia*, p. 149-52)

As the Reformation movement consolidated in the late 16th 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, p. 68) By 1701 the number of German universities grew to an over abundant 30. 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 Melancthon’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, p. 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 17th 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, pp. 93-4 ) In addition to his university post, Francke launched a full range of charitable institutions: an orphanage, a Latin school, a pharmacy, and a 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.

Now we travel across an ocean to the United States of America 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 19th 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 19th century Scandinavia and the USA 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 USA 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 and the Second Great Awakening rather than by the Lutheran Confessions. Thus Lutheran parents had two options: 1) sending their children to the common schools for secular education and supplementing it with spiritual education or 2) organizing 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, parochial schools.

Like the primary schools and supplementary classes Lutherans sponsored, their colleges 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 19th 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, p. 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.

Since the mid-20th 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 under graduate 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 and the man in Dennis' poem. 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. 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 through 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 to you.)

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 that encourages 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 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, before inviting you to speak as well as to listen, there is one other set of changes to notice. In the 16th century universities became secular institutions that retained their ecclesial missions and served the civic good. In the 19th 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-20th century notions of the secular and the sacred, but it is consistent with my understanding how Lutherans view God's way of being act 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 people in this room without whom the mission would be impossible.

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# A Lutheran Dialectical Model for Higher Education

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Ernest Simmons

Luther was a relational thinker. For him one relates to God through faith and to the neighbor through love. This is the inner and the outer person referred to in “The Freedom of a Christian.” (Luther LW 31: 327-77) **The Lutheran sensibility is that life is a paradox, a dialectical tension, in the midst of which one must act and live. Life need not be simple and clear in order to be livable and intelligible.** Drawing upon Luther’s model of simultaneity for the Christian life (e.g., simul justus et peccator), such a dialectic, a movement between contrasting positions, can offer both affirmation and critique as it supports dialog involving multiple points of view, contributing to mutual understanding and constructive change. Such a theology can inform a dynamic interaction between Christian freedom and academic freedom and assist in constructively critiquing the emerging global society in which we find ourselves immersed. We must argue neither for a faith so detached from the surrounding culture as to lack intellectual credibility nor for a faith so accommodated to a particular culture as to sanctify its idolatry and hubris. **My thesis is that the Lutheran Tradition informs an open and dialectical educational model that encourages the dynamic interaction of faith and learning supporting a vocational understanding of leadership.** I will turn first to a brief discussion of legacy and then to leadership, considering particularly the Lutheran dialectical model of higher education and its usefulness for preparing leaders for our time.

## I. Legacy

Valuing the liberal arts, the fundamental purpose of Christian education for Luther was the preserving of the evangelical message and the equipping of the priesthood of all believers for service in the church and the world. For Luther and his colleague, Philip Melancthon, one of the direct results of the theological doctrine of justification by grace through faith was public education. In his treatise of 1524, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” Luther states this in a very practical manner,

Now the welfare of a city does not consist solely in accumulating vast treasures, building mighty walls and magnificent buildings, 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 consist 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. (Luther, LW 45:355)

For Lutheran higher education that purpose has not changed but the context has. The task now is to bring into creative interaction relationships of faith and learning in an increasingly global and multicultural society. In her recent book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum argues forcefully for the value of liberal arts education to prepare future leaders to think critically and creatively for our time of global transition. She says there is a “silent crisis” at hand in education because so much of the arts and humanities is being dropped in American Higher Education in favor of emphasizing quantitative and technical skills. (Nussbaum, Chap. 1) At a time when critical thinking is needed the most, a time of rapid global change and adaptation, we are deemphasizing it in many of our educational institutions. For Nussbaum, nothing less than the survival of a democratic society is at stake. (Nussbaum, Chap. 7) Lutheran Higher Education has retained the arts and humanities, actually relished in them such as in our music programs, while not neglecting the applied sciences and practical skills. Nussbaum’s “manifesto” as she calls it would support exactly what we are about at most of our colleges and universities in the United States but the pressures are upon us as well. The challenge is to preserve this legacy of liberal arts education at our institutions so that they can continue to provide critical thinkers for our time. If liberal arts education is to remain true to its roots it must not lose its originating purpose of cultivating informed, civil leaders but find creative ways to express it today. Joseph Sittler put it so well, “The purpose of liberal arts education is to complicate a person open.” (Sittler)

## II. Leadership

Dialectic stands at the heart of the Lutheran tradition precisely because Luther refused to separate the life of faith from life in the world. Luther insisted on the Christian life being lived right in the midst of the world so that the resources of faith must be brought to bear on daily work and life, not in some separated, ostensibly more holy or religious sphere such as a monastery. This simultaneity gives rise to two realms in Luther's thought. The realm of today, the natural world, governed by the civil use of the law in society and guided by reason, and the realm to come, the kingdom of God, governed by grace and guided by faith. The Christian lives in the interface, the overlap, by being in the world but mindful of a world to come. The Christian lives in both worlds simultaneously. Richard Hughes summarizes:

The authentic Lutheran vision, therefore, never calls for Lutherans to superimpose the kingdom of God on the world as the Reformed tradition seeks to do. Nor does it call for Lutherans to separate from the world as the heirs of the Anabaptists often seek to do. Instead, the Christian must reside in two worlds at one and the same time: the world of nature and of grace. The Christian in Luther's view, therefore, is free to take seriously both the world and the Kingdom of God. (Hughes Mission 6)

This dynamic "withness" sustains dialogue and does not fear a slippery slope into secularity. Rather, it is all of life, including that which is labeled secular, for it too is part of God's creation, which must be brought into dynamic relationship with faith, and the potentially transforming grace of God.

This very dynamic sustains openness and academic freedom in higher education while at the same time insisting on bringing this world of knowledge into dynamic relationship with the Christian faith, with Christian freedom. The result can often be messy, paradoxical, ambiguous but that is where faith gives one the strength to continue on. Faith frees the mind for open inquiry and creative reflection for we are not saved by our own understanding but by the grace of God. Hughes observes, "The task of the Christian scholar, therefore, is not to impose on the world—or on the material that he or she studies—a distinctly "Christian worldview." Rather, the Christian scholar's task is to study the world as it is and then to bring that world into dialogue with the Christian vision of redemption and grace." (Hughes Models 6) To conduct open reflection in dialog with transcendence is clearly one of the most important contributions Lutheran colleges and universities can make to the church's mission of enlightened understanding of the faith, empowering educational service to society. In a culture where public discourse, especially about matters of religion, is not encouraged or even welcome, colleges of the church may offer one of the most effective venues for such deliberations. Our students, our society and our religious institutions need such reflection for we live in a time of significant spiritual searching.

From the beginning of the Enlightenment through the middle of the Twentieth Century it had become common to speak of a separation between fact and value, science and religion, nature and history. Nature, as object, had no intrinsic development but was rather to be understood through scientific analysis in a value free inquiry where both human and religious purposes were considered to be irrelevant. History, on the other hand, was the realm of human purpose and religious value in which civilizations rose and fell, charting their course in dominating an impersonal world. I have come to understand this as a false duality. History would not exist without nature and nature itself has a history. I agree with Parker Palmer that epistemologies have moral trajectories; ways of knowing are not morally neutral but morally directive. (Schwehn 25) Ways of knowing necessarily include ways of valuing so a complete separation of fact and value is not possible. All facts are value laden for it is precisely the values imbedded in interpretive systems that permit the conversion of raw data into meaningful fact. That is the function of theories, models and paradigms whether it be in the sciences or the humanities. This condition of the presumed separation of fact and value combined with flux, impermanence and mass media merchandizing has led to a collapse of traditional, cultural frameworks of meaning. Today this condition is not only local and national; it is increasingly global.

Historically, individuals found personal meaning through the received religious and cultural explanations of their time but no longer. Renate Schacht speaking from a German Christian perspective refers to the formation of what she calls a "collage identity" among many persons, especially the young, today. She observes,

Modern man [sic.] has no fixed roots. Mobility, flexibility, plurality of standpoints, and freedom of opinion development are key characteristics of modern life. These truly positive characteristics, however, bring a dark side of insecurity and disorientation with them, which can retreat behind fundamentally secured walls or vegetate into a "nothing matters" position. The task of education then is to make other paths visible and accessible. (Schacht 68)

It seems to me that it is exactly the role of a Lutheran college to offer such identity forming alternatives. (See Simmons Chap. 1) Identity is a process not a possession and environment forms identity. Lutheran, as well as other Christian, colleges and universities may assist this meaning-seeking, identity-forming process by cultivating an environment in which faith and learning can be kept in dynamic relationship, cultivating the possibility of vocation.

The Lutheran Tradition's emphasis upon vocation is one way to give theological grounding for responsible leadership. It centers upon one basic question that has two fundamental dimensions. I would like you to think with me about this question. The question is, "**Why are you here?**" The first dimension is the practical, why are you *here*? Namely why are you working at the place you are currently employed? What are you doing now and why are you doing it there? This is the realm of practical engagement with life on a daily basis. This first dimension of the question is of the here and now variety. The second dimension cuts more deeply, however, why *are* you here? That is, why do you exist? This is the existential dimension of the question, the dimension that focuses on the nature and challenges of human life. Why are you here and not someone else? Why did you come into life or existence at all? Where did you come from and to where are you going? The practical is composed of the necessary factors of place, history, resources (both physical and human) and structure. The existential is composed of the philosophical and theological dimensions of human existence. In a rather simplified manner, one could say that the practical dimension addresses instrumental questions of value (means), while the existential dimension addresses questions of intrinsic value (ends) for human life. The point is: **Vocation occurs at the intersection of these two dimensions of the why question.** Vocation, in the Lutheran understanding, addresses the practical from the context of the existential. It seeks to connect purposes and practices, ends and means and not allow them to fall apart into separate realms. Why are we here? Luther's answer was vocation. It is through our work in the world that we incarnate faith and by so doing help sustain the creation. Vocation rejects the separation of the material from the spiritual, of nature from grace, insisting that they be kept together.

The Lutheran understanding of vocation empowering for public service can serve the common good. Certainly Luther's proposal of the "common chest" is a clear Sixteenth Century example of such a pursuit. (Lindberg 141) He was concerned to provide for the poor and needy as monasteries and convents, the historic source for such care, were being closed. Not only public education but also social service organizations were a direct result of the Lutheran Reformation. Our educational systems, accordingly, were organized to offer instruction for leadership in such programs and institutions. It is education for the common good. But the common good for any given situation must be discerned through dialog and mutual participation by all parties involved. Vocationally inspired leadership will seek such dialogue.

## Conclusion

The human question of why always hangs suspended between the finite and the infinite. Juxtaposed between time and eternity, humanity seeks meaning before its own beginnings and after its demise. Part of the grandeur of being created in the image of God, of humus (soil) becoming spirit-breathed and self-conscious, is the ability to ask why. Human beings are meaning-seeking creatures. We are a form of incarnation where the spiritual is made manifest in the material precisely in the transcending of self-interest. Nicholas Berdyaev once observed, "To eat bread is a material act, to break and share it is a spiritual one." (Gilkey 229 and Cobb Chap. 10) Spirituality is opening up to the needs of the other, to transcendence of the self and to possibilities of meaning beyond materialistic consumption alone. The study of the liberal arts assists one in opening up to the transcendent dimensions of life and in so doing equips faith for meaningful expression in service to the other. That is why there has always been a close connection between liberal arts education and the Christian faith.

The Lutheran model of such an education is particularly helpful here because of its dialectical openness to alternative viewpoints and their dynamic interaction. It critiques contemporary society by bringing it into dialectical engagement with Christ and the Gospel. Such a model avoids what Tom Christensen has termed the "fallacy of exclusive disjunction." (Christenson, 12) There are middle positions between exclusion and accommodation in higher education and the Lutheran dialectical model is one. The theology of the cross encourages humility both in terms of one's own thought and also in the claims of others. Such a theological perspective can and should confront any claim to absoluteness or finality (Tillich's "Protestant Principle") especially in its secular expressions.

The great challenge facing mainline religious institutions and faith traditions is to communicate their religious reflection in a way that is accessible to persons living in a technologically socialized, mass media driven, popular culture dominated society. I think the social media that have emerged in the last few years demonstrate how younger

people have come to live in the virtual world as authentically as in the so-called “real” world. They move seamlessly and effortlessly between what used to be called “virtual” and “real” reality, a distinction becoming increasingly one without a difference. Work-a-day reality is not going to disappear but the interface between these realms has become diaphanous for the Digital Native. Social organization has undergone a sea change. It has been developing for a long time but we have now reached a tipping point in how social (or political) movements (such as the “Arab spring”) are formed and motivated. We have witnessed Facebook and Twitter revolutions. We are in the beginnings of what can only be called the birth pangs of an emerging new world of global social structures. It is a technologically mediated social revolution but then again, wasn’t the Reformation? Education for leadership today must involve critical and creative thinking as well as dynamic social interaction.

**To summarize:** The model of education at a Lutheran institution is ultimately education for self-transcendence, education that draws the student out of her/himself to acknowledge the needs of their neighbor. It is interactive education that always holds in tension academic and Christian freedom, reason and faith without forcing a premature closure of thought in either direction. It is education for vocational leadership expressed in public life. It is preparing for leadership. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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# Lutheran Colleges: Past and Prologue

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*My association with Lutheran higher education dates back to 1952 when I enrolled at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Since then, with the exception of just six years, I have been involved in Lutheran higher education as a student, teacher, dean, president and consultant. In response to invitations from others and my interest in the history of Lutheran colleges, I will share my perceptions on several of the key trends that have characterized the past fifty years in the history of Midwestern Lutheran colleges. In both method and content, this should be regarded as autobiographical rather than academic, for it is more about reminiscence than research.*

As the template for the historical assessments that follow, I draw from the classical sources of persuasion as identified by Aristotle and others. According to the classics, people are persuaded or convinced by three distinctive sources or proofs: *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. *Ethos* is the power of one's personality, character and reputation. We say we are convinced because the person making the argument is deemed to be honest, trustworthy, knowledgeable or loyal. I think that organizations and institutions have *ethos* as well and it is derived from their mission, their values, their traditions and their character. The *ethos* of a college is transmitted through the people who constitute the institution, primarily the faculty and staff.

*Logos* is the second source of persuasion and it has to do with arguments and evidence, that is to say, with logic. When we say that a speech was substantive and persuasive, it means that we were convinced by the arguments and supporting evidence the speaker was able to offer. I believe institutions have a *logos* in that they make a case for what they stand for or what they have to offer their constituents. If they present well formed arguments and supporting evidence, good programs and sound learning, they are both respected and understood.

Finally, *pathos* is a form of persuasion that appeals to our wants, desires or emotions. Such persuasion may appeal to either our basic instincts or our higher inclinations. Institutions also offer *pathos* to their constituents as they appeal to ideals, values, aspirations, fears, hopes and even dreams. To the extent that people are inspired by, or in congruence with, these elements they will be content, moved or even inspired.

In my view, at mid-twentieth century, Midwestern Lutheran colleges made their case to their constituents of faculty, staff, alumni, church members, friends and students primarily on the basis of *pathos* and *ethos*. These colleges were generally places of unity and common focus, shaped by religious and ethnic identity and a strong sense of shared values and commitments. With the passing of the generations and the presence of a more diverse faculty and a more secular and pluralistic culture, both the *pathos* and *ethos* declined in their efficacy. Many new faculty "knew not Joseph" and so the traditions, values and general character of these places did not have a strong impact on them. Toward the end of the century, spurred on by serious self examination and growing numbers of inquiring faculty and the support of the church, *logos* became the focus and the basis for institutional renewal. I believe that this emerging *logos* is having a significant impact upon these institutions.

As a way of explicating these matters, let me share my perceptions about the church and Midwestern Lutheran colleges during this period of change. The church was a major part of the context within which these colleges carried out their mission during the past half century. There have been substantial changes in the church's experience and those changes have had an impact in the life of the schools. For example, the church has changed from a mono-ethnic institution growing from within to a multiethnic church depending on outreach for growth. At a different pace perhaps, the schools have experienced a similar trend toward greater diversity in the ethnic, religious and economic (if not racial) backgrounds of students, faculty and staff. In similar fashion, the church has made the transition from being insular to being energetically ecumenical. Mirroring this, the colleges have attracted students

from a broad ecumenical spectrum. The church has changed from a body fairly clear about positions on moral and ethical issues to a church that is full of divisions over such matters. While the colleges may not have experienced such divisions in the ways that the church has, they are clearly places with a diversity of opinion and a liberal bias in such matters. At mid century the church was a major collecting and distribution point for benevolence dollars and the colleges enjoyed high priority in that distribution. By century's end, benevolence dollars were scarce and the colleges, thought to be able to fend more or less on their own financially, were much lower on the priority list. Somewhat shadowing this development, a church that at mid-century paid close attention to its schools and held them accountable in a number of ways, now has both less time for, and less claim upon, such accountability.

A second template identifies four key issues around which I will discuss developments in the five decades of the second half of the twentieth century. Those key issues are survival, respectability, faithfulness and relationship to the church. In the 1950s the leaders of the Midwestern colleges were Stavig at Augustana, Christianson at Augsburg, Carlson at Gustavus, Ylvisaker at Luther, Becker at Wartburg, Granskou at St. Olaf and Knutson at Concordia. All except Carlson had ministerial preparation and parish experience. All were active leaders in their respective church bodies and these men gave leadership at a time when institutional authority was more centered in the office of the president than at any time since then.

Of the key issues, survival was the one that occupied most of the attention of these colleges. These were the post-depression, post WWII days when campus infrastructures were rundown, facilities were totally inadequate for the expanding growth caused by returning veterans, and there were not enough qualified faculty to cover all of the classes. Lutheran colleges were not unique in these regards; their state was the common state of most of higher education. A piece of good news was that although the faculty was stretched thin, there were among them some giants who defined the quality and character of these institutions. The second issue was respectability. Most of higher education had been given a pass on rising academic standards during the survival years of the 1930s and 1940s. But in the post war the accrediting bodies began to flex their muscles. There was pressure to add Ph.D.'s to the faculty, to improve library holdings, and to provide adequate equipment and facilities, particularly in the sciences.

With respect to the third key issue, faithfulness, the story is rather straightforward: each college was a monoculture of the sponsoring church body; almost all of the faculty and staff were Lutheran as well as most of the students. In most cases attendance was required at daily chapel and the religion requirement consisted of several classes taken over four years. Campus rules and norms reflected the culture and expectations of the church. The mission identity of these colleges was not a matter discussed very often; it could simply be taken for granted. The *ethos* and *logos* of these places was not very self-conscious but it was constitutive and one can only wonder how these institutions could have prevailed through times of testing without this reality. As a contribution to the *logos* of these institutions, the Lutheran College Faculty group undertook a decade long study that resulted in the publication of *Christian Faith and the Liberal Arts*, which examined the theological underpinnings of a Lutheran college and their implications for the curriculum. With respect to the church relationship, there was a strong tie. The financial support of the church body was a significant variable in the financial well being of each school. The church kept a close and loving eye on these colleges. The presidents were, without exception, also church leaders. The governance relationship between the church and the colleges was very strong; in most cases, church leaders had places on the governing boards and every board member was a member of the sponsoring church. Governing boards paid more attention to the details of managing the colleges, a practice grown out of the necessities of the 1930s and 1940s.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were marked by leadership changes at many of the colleges; from Stavig to Balcer at Augustana, from Christianson to Anderson at Augsburg, from Ylvisaker to Farwell at Luther, from Carlson to Barth at Gustavus, from Becker to Bachman at Wartburg, from Granskou to Rand at St. Olaf and from Knutson to Dovre at Concordia toward the end of that period. It should be noted that, in several cases, the new leaders brought stronger academic credentials and often less theological education. This was the case at Augustana, Luther, Wartburg, Gustavus and Concordia. With respect to the defining issues, while material survival was not in question, there was significant financial pressure related to expanding and improving campus facilities and providing necessary financial assistance to students. Federal policies and resources turned out to be of immense importance in meeting these needs with the advent of loans and grants for students, loans for building student housing, and loans and grants for improving academic facilities. On several campuses there were construction projects underway every year for twenty years in succession. Since loans had to be repaid and grants did not cover all of the construction costs, each of the colleges put additional resources into fundraising with good results. Alumni, church members and community friends were committed to these schools and their generosity followed.



During these decades the schools grew in academic respectability. Faculty numbers increased and the percentages of faculty with Ph.D.'s increased as well, all of which was very important to accreditation agencies. New programs were initiated on every campus, and library and laboratory facilities were upgraded. Faithfulness to mission and tradition became more challenging during this period of time for a number of reasons. Increasingly and with pressure for academic respectability and shortages of personnel, faculty appointments were likely to place more emphasis on academic qualifications than other factors. Most of the new academics came from research centers in which they had been shaped by modernism that placed priority on scientific methods of establishing truth claims. This trend, in turn, placed pressure on the humanities and the religious values that were intrinsic to the distinctiveness of the schools. Curriculum changes tended to diminish the size of the religion requirement. Chapel attendance was by now voluntary but still substantial. The advent of the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement led to myriad changes in the society and its institutions. Some of those changes (e.g. more diverse faculty and student bodies) had a positive impact on the colleges while others (destructive life styles) did not. Two of the consequences were the increasing secularization of the schools and the demise of *in loco parentis*.

As it had in the 1950s, The Association of Lutheran College Faculties was minding the *logos* of Lutheran colleges, addressing both the rapidly changing culture of the late 1960s and 1970s and the challenges for Lutheran colleges. The Association's work led to the publication of *The Quest for a Viable Saga* by Richard Baepler and others in 1977. The American Lutheran Church initiated the "Theological Development Program for Faculty" in the 1970s, a program that helped shape a number of persons who would emerge as faculty and administrative leaders in the 1980s and 1990s. However, in most instances, the attention given to institutional mission (*logos*) by most colleges in the 1960s and 1970s was of a lower priority than the attention given to institutional quality. The discussions of mission rarely gave systematic attention to the ways in which the mission might impact the academic life. However, in most cases faculty leaders were persons who had come in the 1940s and 1950s and were infused with the *pathos* and *ethos* of which I wrote earlier.

There were several emerging trends in these decades with respect to the colleges' relationship to the church. To begin with, while church support was still a stable and growing part of the church budgets reflecting the continuing priority of the colleges, church benevolence declined substantially as a percentage of the rapidly growing budgets of the colleges. Another marked trend in this period was the growing generosity of individual church members with respect to the financial needs of the colleges. In the case of the American Lutheran Church, a major church-wide campaign was very successful. During the 1970s some Lutheran colleges revised their governing documents to include non-Lutheran members. This reflected the growing ecumenism of both the church and the colleges as well as the desire to "spread a bigger net" in search of influence, financial support and enrollment. In the Lutheran Church in America, colleges developed covenants with synods in their regions as a way of setting forth the mutual commitments that would guide the relationships. It is accurate to say that, with respect to Midwestern Lutheran colleges, college presidents were still thought of as prominent in the leadership of the church.

The decade of the 1980s saw a myriad of leadership changes in these colleges: At Augsburg College Oscar Anderson was succeeded by Charles Anderson; Augustana moved from Charles Balcer to Bill Nelson and then to Lloyd Svendsbye; St. Olaf from Sidney Rand to Harland Foss and Mel George; Luther from Elwin Farwell to H. George Anderson; Wartburg from William Jellema to Robert Vogel and Gustavus from Ed Lindell to John Kendall. In all but one case, the new presidents came from academic backgrounds. While finance is always an issue for private colleges, financial survival was not a defining issue in the 1980s. Federal and state financial aid programs were very helpful in maintaining vigorous enrollment. Many of the schools launched and completed sophisticated and successful fund raising programs. In terms of academic quality, the Lutheran colleges were respected by the public. It was during this decade that various national rankings of colleges first appeared and Midwestern Lutheran colleges earned high ratings. These ratings reflected the academic quality that had been built in the faculty and the attention that was being given to strong academic programs.

Perhaps the most challenging issue in the 1980s was faithfulness to the tradition and mission. By the 1980s the academy was shaped by the enlightenment focus on knowledge as opposed to learning, and the pedagogy of the scientific method held sway. These developments have been chronicled by George Marsden (*The Soul of the American University*), Douglas Sloan (*Faith and Knowledge*), and Mark Schwehn (*Exiles from Eden*) with respect to the academy in general and by James Burtchael (*The Dying of the Light*) and Robert Benne (*Quality with Soul*) with respect to religious colleges. The consequences of these trends were to diminish confidence in religious knowledge and the role of faith in the life of the school. Augmented by the reality that secular values were shaping the culture, these trends were real sources of stress for most religious colleges, including Lutheran colleges in the Midwest.

In addition to the growing secularity of the schools, there was more religious diversity on the campuses in the faculty, staff and student body. While most of the faculty in the 1950s and even into the 1960s had come through the Lutheran pipeline, the majority of appointees in the 1970s and 1980s did not. That meant that the *ethos*, which had been carried in the DNA of the faculty in the fifties, sixties and seventies, could not be counted upon to carry the tradition in the eighties and matters of mission could no longer be taken for granted. While in the past academic criteria and institutional/missional fit were held in balance in the faculty selection process, by the 1980s academic criteria held sway. A related shift in the profile of incoming faculty in the seventies and eighties is that they had been shaped in ways that meant their primary allegiance was to their discipline and department rather than to the institution they served. I don't think this was a self-conscious commitment on the part of most people, but it was nonetheless a growing reality. The consequence was a diminished religious *ethos* and *pathos*. During these decades one noted subtle changes in the rhetoric of many colleges with a growing emphasis on academic distinctiveness and a softening in the emphasis on religious identity and mission. This was in some measure due to the fact that Lutheran schools were attracting an increasing number of students from other religious traditions whom they did not want to offend.

The connection between the colleges and the church also changed in the 1980s. The college presidents were less likely to be church leaders. The church was stressed for resources, and hence the financial support for colleges diminished. While Lutheran colleges were included in the mission circle of the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), they were less central to that mission. The implication of these developments in the church meant that the colleges would assume a larger role in defining the ways and extent to which they would embrace their relationship to the church and mission identity. While it was clearly not the case that any of the Midwestern colleges were hostile to their Lutheran identity or trying to distance themselves from their mission, the close of the 1980s became a kind of watershed for these colleges; the relationship to the church had changed, the self understanding of these schools as institutions of the church had eroded and the faculties were not always "at home" in the academic communities of the Lutheran church. In short, the *ethos* that had been carried by an earlier generation had largely disappeared with their retirement, the *pathos* was less clear and compelling and the *logos* of the Lutheran academic tradition was not a significant factor.

Enter the 1990s: There were myriad changes in leadership: Frame was leading Augsburg, Wagner and Halvorson led Augustana, Baker and then Torgerson came to Luther, Edwards served at St. Olaf and Steuer at Gustavus. All of these leaders had academic backgrounds and represented a new generation. Most of them were intrigued by the questions of relationship, identity and mission and they came to these conversations with a refreshing curiosity. They were leading healthy schools, while some were more robust from a financial view than others, all were viable; while some had more success in attracting students than others, all had stable numbers. Academically, these schools each continued to make one or more list of best colleges. There were centers of excellence on each campus reflecting the quality and ingenuity of the faculty. A challenge dating from the 1980s was around the "vocationalism" that was sweeping the country. From grade school on students were being pressed to pick a career and pursue a professionally oriented education. This was a special concern to colleges with a strong liberal arts tradition.

Viewed through the lens of faithfulness to the Lutheran tradition, the 1990s were years of renaissance. The roots of this renaissance were both external and internal. There was a heightened awareness of a values crisis in the society. At the same time, there was an emerging spirituality among the young. In the academy, the postmodern movement provided a critique of modernism, rationalism and the scientific method. Along with a new generation of leaders came a new generation of faculty members who had, in part, been shaped by this critique, young people who were curious about religious matters and college identity and open to deep conversation about value, meaning and faith. Providing counsel and leadership were some key faculty and administrative leaders who were schooled in the *logos* of Lutheran higher education.

Out of this crucible of change religious colleges found both incentive and support for a new self examination of mission and identity. Many Midwestern Lutheran colleges initiated formal discussions about the meaning and implications of their mission and identity as Lutheran schools. The ELCA supported these efforts with annual conferences on the vocation of Lutheran colleges. These conferences were (and are) well attended and led to the publication of *Intersections*, a journal that features essays about faith and learning. The Lilly endowment, sensing the new opening for such matters, launched a mammoth program enabling many colleges to initiate comprehensive programs centered on the Christian idea of vocation. Most of the Midwestern Lutheran colleges participated in the program. The ELCA initiated the Lutheran Academy of Scholars where faculty members could devote themselves to a serious intellectual engagement between faith and learning. Endowed professorships were created on a number of

campuses in support of academic endeavor informed by faith commitments. A number of curriculum projects emerged and for many the touchstone was institutional mission. The Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) launched a major research effort designed to identify the unique impact of Lutheran colleges upon their graduates.

To return to the template of *ethos, pathos and logos*, what happened in the 1990s was the beginning of the reconstruction of a *logos* in behalf of the mission of Lutheran colleges. Mirroring the leadership of their predecessors in the 1950s and 1970s, faculty members examined the Lutheran confessional, academic and intellectual traditions and found a trove of helpful propositions upon which to build an understanding of both personal and institutional callings. This *logos* is compelling enough to generate conviction, yes even passion, for the cause. Thus we have the re-energizing of the *pathos* of these institutions and, over time, an emerging community *ethos* as well. This is not to suggest that questions about mission and identity are now settled. Indeed, that would defy the Lutheran tradition that is almost constantly in motion about such matters. As the society changes around these schools, the task or reinterpretation must go on.

To complete this historical template, I ask about relationship of the colleges to the church starting in 2000. Financial support continued to decline in 2000 as church-wide resources grew scarce and the fiscal well being of most of the colleges made their need less compelling. The ELCA went through a re-organization in which higher education was joined with theological education. While church wide direct financial support continued to decline, the ELCA continued to sponsor staff development and faculty interchanges in a variety of forums. What is remarkable among the Midwestern Lutheran colleges is the leadership that the presidents have provided in initiating and supporting partnerships with other institutions and agencies of the church. Out of a vision of unity in mission and interconnectedness in ministry, a number of partnerships are emerging.

In summary, survival was the issue defining the 1950s, respectability was the compelling issue of the 1960s and 1970s and faithfulness to Lutheran identity and mission emerged in the late 1980s and continues into the current decade. Over the span of the five decades, the relationship with the church evolved from dependence to independence to partnership. The profile of the presidents transitioned from churchly to academic; the cultural inclinations moved from sectarian to secular; the intellectual paradigm shifted from pre-modern, to modern, to postmodern and the demographic profile moved from homogeneity to a growing diversity. Entering the new century, Midwestern Lutheran colleges enjoyed regional and national reputations for excellence and possessed a robust attitude about their viability. Leaders of excellence mediate complex and stressful institutional agendas in a time of material uncertainty and cultural change. The case for Lutheran colleges, once resting on strong *ethos* and *pathos*, is being reconstructed around a lively and rich *logos*.

What then of the future of these colleges as expressions of the Lutheran tradition in higher education? Perhaps the most obvious answer is that, given the significant autonomy that characterizes Lutheran colleges, they will evolve in unique ways. Given the evolution that has occurred in the past decades, the colleges themselves will be primary in defining their relationship to the church. Setting these matters aside, let me identify a set of key variables in shaping the identity and mission of Lutheran colleges.

The first variable is the student marketplace. It is very difficult to characterize the rising generations of college students; they are at once liberal and conservative, religious and secular, spiritual but not necessarily religious and materialistic but committed to social action. Clearly, this profile suggests many vantage points for engaging with students around religious matters. We can be reasonably confident that they will come from the full range of religious persuasions including non-Christian traditions, and so colleges will continue to make adjustments, curricular and pedagogical, to that reality. While Lutherans will perhaps remain the largest cohort group in the Midwestern schools, they will not always be in the majority. While these products of postmodernism are interested in the spiritual side of things, they are poorly informed with respect to confessional, theological, and biblical matters. This presents a special challenge and opportunity to those who teach religion. In addition, today's students are not great worship attendees so campus ministry leaders will face a continuing challenge in the engagement of students in corporate religious practices. These students are close to their parents, sometimes called the "hovering" generation. Cell phones and instant messaging mean that students are always networking and parents tend to be a significant part of their life experience. Colleges will continue to find their way in adapting to this reality which presents both opportunity and obstacle.

Another set of variables informing the status of these colleges in relationship to their mission and identity evolves around the faculty. Faculty recruitment will be especially crucial for faculty, more than anyone else, must represent

and affect the mission of the college. Each college has the right to ask and expect that faculty members from any faith tradition will uphold the mission of the college. While the exegesis of that mission is always a work in progress, colleges should recruit people who are willing to engage that dialogue in a constructive and sympathetic way. Discussion of these expectations should be part of the recruitment and screening process.

For many reasons, the formation of the faculty *ethos* will be of high importance. The faculties are and will be composed of a significant number of persons from non-Christian and non-Lutheran traditions. The presence of this kind of diversity presents both opportunity and challenge; the opportunity (and need) for dialogue (a Lutheran staple) and the challenge of educating those from other traditions. In reflecting on this diversity, Darrell Jodock put it this way, “In order for these colleges to retain the advantages of a tradition that challenges them to be more deeply and more profoundly what they already aspire to be, the tradition needs to be articulated more clearly and affirmed more intentionally.” Since persons entering the professoriate in recent years have been oriented around disciplinary identity rather than institutional identity, there will be a continuing challenge for Lutheran colleges to integrate these persons into the community and engage them in the activities that give life to it. As noted earlier, the postmodern consciousness of faculty educated in the later part of the last century and the early years of this century may be an asset to these schools. The typical postmodernist recognizes the legitimate place of religion in intellectual discourse, is open to the spiritual dimension of their own being and respects the important role of context, or community, in framing one’s perception and life practice.

Faculty are not the only element in the human variable of course. One thinks about the important roles of presidents, other college leaders, regents and staff. Leaders of experience and informed commitment to the Lutheran project in education are scarce so continuing attention to leader identification and development will be essential. The colleges will want to be self conscious in filling leadership positions with people who share the vision and mission of Lutheran colleges. The influence of persons who are either ill-informed or indifferent to such matters has been, and will be, detrimental to Lutheran schools. Of almost equal importance to the selection of such individuals is the provision of continuing education experiences around mission and identity. Again, if board and staff development around these issues is only left to chance, the results are likely to drift and such matters be of growing indifference.

Another variable, perhaps the most important, centers on how we navigate the identity/diversity paradox. We acknowledge the value of both identity and diversity but have tended in recent years to give the greater weight to diversity. This is perhaps not surprising for institutions that were monocultural in the recent past (and defensive about it) and are well informed about, and widely influenced by, the diversity movement in higher education. It is also to be expected of Lutheran colleges that are, by tradition, culturally engaged institutions. The challenge will be achieving a relationship between these two powerful variables that will be consonant with the mission and identity of a Lutheran college. I think that multiculturalism becomes an asset when the cultures that inform it are well represented. That is, one of the special gifts that Lutheran colleges have to contribute to the multiculturalism that is our world is a substantive, high quality, and unapologetic representation of the Lutheran and Christian traditions. In other words, this identity becomes an asset, something to build on and never be apologetic about. Of course I am not arguing for some new parochialism but for a hearty multiculturalism that draws special strength from what the Lutheran tradition brings to it. One of those strengths is a commitment to engage in conversation with other faith traditions and to literally “test all things,” including our own tradition. This view of the identity/diversity paradox underscores earlier comments about the importance of recruiting faculty for mission and providing excellent opportunities for growth in understanding and sustaining the Lutheran tradition.

Focusing on the distinctiveness of the college program, another variable is the key dimension of a school’s *logos*. In recent years and out of the impulse of the Lutheran teachings on vocation, colleges have been paying increasing attention to Lutheran narratives in the construction of curricula. While “faith and learning” is not a Lutheran invention, it has always been central to the Lutheran intellectual tradition and Lutherans have brought special resources to it. In the biblical, theological and confessional narratives of the Lutheran tradition we find resources that apply to both the form and content of education. One thinks of Lutheran teachings on vocation, the two kingdoms, *simul justis et peccator*, original sin and the priesthood of all believers. Or, with reference to the biblical tradition, one recognizes distinctive traditions of historical, literary and rhetorical criticism. Concerning pedagogical matters one thinks of the place of dialectic, the paradox, moral deliberation and discernment in community.

The *pathos* of campus life is another significant variable in the unfolding of Lutheran identity and mission. Proclamation, prayer and praise are staples of the Lutheran tradition and are formative of community. One calls to mind the worship centers on many campuses and the high quality programs in sacred music and art that involve large numbers of students. Given the challenge posed by individualism in religious matters and the secularism of

harried life styles, worship will be a challenge for this group of colleges. We will need creative and winsome leaders who can both gather students in and reach out to students where they gather. Given the impulse to serve others that is strongly present on our campuses, campus ministry will find ways to identify with and inform such endeavors. Under the aegis of Lilly funded programs and church wide initiatives, the vocation idea has taken root on many campuses and, increasingly, in the lives of many students. This trend is fortuitous for the mission and identity of these colleges.

I need to say that on most campuses the gathering of the community is increasingly problematic. Whether a lecture or a concert, a faculty meeting or morning coffee, a worship service or an athletic event, participation is a challenge. The busyness of the culture and the ubiquities of electronic communication combined with the individualism of the social order explain some of this. So in the coming decades we must continue to invent new modes of gathering the community and new strategies to build the unity and social coherence that is essential to the living out of our missions.

What of the variables related to the relationship of the colleges and the church? The new Unit for Education and Vocation is intended to create synergies among the educational ministries of this church. Hopefully, the resources of theological education will enrich the colleges as they engage in the dialectic of faith and learning. On the other hand, the real world disciplines of the liberal arts colleges will be of benefit to the seminaries in their dialogue with a world of many faiths and cultures. There are some early and promising signs of collaboration, may their number multiply. The social statement on education prepared and adopted in 2007 calls upon bishops and pastors, church wide and synods, to be more intentional in advocacy and support of the colleges. In turn, the colleges are called upon to affirm their unique identities as Lutheran colleges, to feature the Lutheran teaching on vocation, to maintain programs of liaison with various expressions of the church and to collaborate in shared ministry projects. The embodiment of these commitments will go far in defining the relationship of college and church.

I have often described the current decade as a time of renaissance in mission for religious colleges in America. One sees signs of this revitalization at many turns. Many Lutheran colleges have been in the vanguard of this renaissance. Hopefully, this good beginning will provide the foundation for the continuing renewal of Lutheran colleges in coming decades. I believe in, and am committed to, such a future.

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# Loving Reform

Reflections on John 2: 1-11

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## Paul C. Pribbenow

*I had the rare privilege in the summer of 2012 to be away from the Augsburg campus for a sabbatical – literally, to enjoy Sabbath time away from the roles and routines of daily life for renewal and refreshment. During my time away, I engaged in research on the relevance and sustainability of Lutheran higher education. I explored the literature written during the past fifty years about Lutheran higher education in America and set out to test a hypothesis that the charisms (or gifts) of our Lutheran theological tradition have helped to make us institutions with particular identities and character that are more needed than ever in our world. Those Lutheran charisms are:*

- *The theological concept of vocation;*
- *A commitment to critical and humble inquiry;*
- *Engagement with the “other”;*
- *Service to neighbor; and,*
- *Semper reformanda.*

*During the 2012-13 academic year, I preached homilies in the Augsburg Chapel on each of the five gifts of the Lutheran tradition and suggested that they ground the relevance and sustainability of Lutheran higher education in the 21st century. The following homily offers a perspective on the ways in which the gift of semper reformanda shapes our work as Lutheran institutions in the 21st century.*

The concept of *semper reformanda* is the underlying contention of our Lutheran heritage that we are called always to be open to new and different ways of being in the world, watching for God’s activity in our midst and bringing our hearts and minds and hands to bear as co-creators of God’s plan for God’s people.

Our exploration of *semper reformanda* seems especially fitting on this day when our Board of Regents have gathered for their winter meetings and when they have invited into an historic conversation almost 60 of us – faculty, staff and students – a conversation about the future of Augsburg College.

There is genuine enthusiasm and anxiety about these conversations, in part because at the heart of planning for the future we must face the difficult, complex and challenging questions that portend change – change that is inevitable, some would argue; but change that will not be easy, we all agree.

In the midst of this swirling discussion of change – within our academic community and in the wider society – we here at Augsburg have the gift of the theological concept of *semper reformanda* which offers a framework that may be more relevant than ever to helping us negotiate a path forward together, faithful to who we are and at the same time fresh and relevant to the needs of the world – a world that God loves so much.

A few thoughts about what *semper reformanda* means to us and to our work as a college.

First, what is the character of the reformation tradition of which we are a part? My title for this homily, “Loving Reform,” might be read in at least two ways. The first way is likely the worst fear of many of us. And that is that you have a crazy president and perhaps a few others who simply love change and will pursue it with abandon no matter the cost, no matter the damage to our underlying values, no matter what... In other words, loving reform means exactly that – we must love change for change’s sake.

I stand here today to reject firmly this attitude about reform and change. Instead, I call for us to embrace the stance of Martin Luther himself, who believed that reform must be loving, that change – inevitable as it may be – is never an end in itself. Reform happens in the context of communities of memory and faith and values, whose underlying

commitments set firm boundaries on who we are, what we do and where we are headed. Augsburg College is such a community, firmly rooted in its values as a liberal arts college, preparing students for lives of purpose and meaning, guided by its Lutheran Christian heritage, shaped by its distinctive setting in the city. These core values are the “loving” we bring to any exploration of reform.

Martin Luther wrote in perhaps his most well-known treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520, M. Tranvik, trans.) these famous lines:

A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything...  
A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all

Here is the creative tension at the heart of Luther’s vision of reform: because we have been saved already, our freedom assured through Christ’s death and resurrection, we are freed not to do whatever we desire, but to be of service, to follow our calls to be God’s co-creators in the world. And there we are situated, freed and at the same time bound, saved and called to love the neighbor and the world, to be God’s people and do God’s work. Luther’s vision of reform was pastoral. We are called to be loving reformers.

So the next question is what exactly this call to be loving reformers sounds and looks like? There appear to be many options before us. How will we know what God intends for us? Here we are drawn back to the gospel to listen carefully and discern what God has in mind for God’s faithful people. And the passage from John’s gospel, assigned for the 2nd Sunday in Epiphany, may offer us some guidance.

The story is simple and familiar – sometimes referred to as Jesus’ first miracle, performed at a wedding banquet. Jesus is at the wedding with his disciples and his mother. We learn that the wedding hosts have run out of wine. Jesus’ mother says to him, “They have no wine,” to which Jesus responds rather impatiently, “Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has yet to come.” Surely this is meant by the evangelist as a glimpse of the future – Jesus can’t be bothered with these mundane problems, there are bigger challenges ahead. But his mother jumps right back in, telling the servants to “Do whatever he tells you.”

And perhaps to make the point that Jesus is a good son, he proceeds without further protest to have the servants take six stone water jars, fill them with water, and then take a draw to the chief steward, who compliments the bridegroom on the unusual practice of saving the best wine for the conclusion of the banquet.

We can draw many lessons from this simple story, but allow me to suggest three points that offer us guidance as loving reformers. First the role of Mary, who doesn’t allow Jesus off the hook when he claims to have more important things on his mind. She reminds us that we too are called – as she was – to pay attention to the moment, the sphere of human experience right in front of us with all of its ordinary, mundane, perhaps even trivial, and yet also significant and meaningful, aspects. And she teaches us this lesson most simply by saying to the servants and to us, “Do whatever he tells you.”

The second lesson we might draw from the gospel story is how the instructions Jesus offers the servants do not call for some supernatural hocus-pocus; they point them back to their work. “Fill the stone jars with water, take a draw to the chief stewards,” he tells them. The servants may have witnessed a miracle – the miracle of abundance in the midst of scarcity – but the fact is that they participated in the miracle by doing what they were called to do. We, too, are called to participate in the miracle of God’s abundance right here in the midst of our daily lives.

And finally, there is the startling outcome of this story. Fine wine is served at the conclusion of the banquet. This is counter-cultural – no one saves the best wine for last, the steward says to the bridegroom. But there you have it, perhaps the most hopeful and inspiring lesson of the entire gospel: Since you follow Jesus, since you do what he calls and tells you to do, you can believe that the best, the very best, is yet to come. This is God’s way. This is why we embrace loving reform. Because the best is yet to come.

And so, what shall we do? Do we sit back and wait for God to speak out of a pillar of fire or a cloud, telling us what to do, calling us to this blissful future state? That, of course, is one way the concept of vocation or calling has been (I would say) misunderstood. Our callings do not denote some sort of passive form of agency. Instead, they call us out of ourselves, into community, into the world, constantly vigilant and active in pursuit of our God-given role in creating this better future. We are called to bring the best of our hearts and minds and hands to bear in being co-creators of God’s loving intentions for all of creation. “Do whatever he tells you,” Mary says to the servants. Use



your gifts to help perform a miracle.

Our friend and colleague, Christensen professor Marty Stortz, recently reminded me of a 2010 *New York Times* opinion piece by columnist David Brooks entitled “The Summoned Self.” In the column, Brooks outlines two ways of thinking about our lives. Coincidentally the first way he suggests is based on a commencement speech by Clayton Christensen, a Harvard Business School professor, whose book, *The Innovative University*, is the beginning point for our planning conversations this afternoon. Brooks labels Christensen’s way of thinking about life as “The Well-Planned Life.” In the well-planned life, you spend time when young finding a clear purpose for your life and then you dedicate and discipline yourself to live with that purpose clearly in mind – granted, with a few tweaks and refinements along the way, but ultimately leading to a well-rounded fruition.

Brooks then describes a second way of thinking about life, which he calls “The Summoned Life.” In the summoned life, you do not live as an unfolding project to be completed, but rather as an unknowable landscape to be explored. In this mode of living, you focus on the important commitments that precede choices you make – commitments to faith, family, nation or some other cause – and you tend to be skeptical about applying so-called business concepts, with their focus on utility, to other realms of life.

The well-planned life emphasizes individual agency and is widely admired in our American context as we lift up the entrepreneur, the pioneer, the lone free agent who blazes new trails and creates new worlds. The summoned life focuses on context and circumstances, observes the world carefully and asks questions about how we can be most useful in this time and place.

We might recognize the summoned life as a fairly close description of what we describe as “the called life,” and I would contend that at our best as a college, we keep this vocational focus firmly in mind as a way of understanding our roles in the world. It is counter-cultural and deeply rooted in our faith tradition. I couldn’t be more proud of our commitments to the summoned life.

At the same time – as Brooks concludes in his column – if we choose only one of these two options for looking at life, we may miss important guidance for what he names as a third option, “the well-considered life.” Looking only at context and circumstance without a longer horizon of naming our life’s purpose can lead to passivity. On the other hand, focusing only on achieving long-term goals by planning out well in advance the steps we will follow, may well lead to rigidity and disappointment.

I would argue that our Lutheran heritage actually leads us to embrace the well-considered life. We believe that we are called to serve our neighbor. We are freed for service in the context of our daily lives in the world. At the same time, we also believe that God has a plan for all of creation and that the best is yet to come. There is a clear purpose for our lives in the world.

Loving reform – *semper reformanda* – is the challenge to live at the intersections of God’s call and God’s plan, to bring all of our God-given gifts – gifts of intellect and imagination and passion and faith – to bear as co-creators of a future that unfolds in our midst, a miracle even of abundance in the midst of scarcity, of love and compassion in the midst of violence and mistrust, of grace and forgiveness in the midst of legalism and finger-pointing.

Loving reform calls us to believe and act as if the best is yet to come. And so it is, thanks be to God. Amen.

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# Vocation and the Liberal Arts

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**David R. Anderson**

*This essay is adapted from a presentation at the fifth biennial joint meeting of the American Conference of Academic Deans and the Phi Beta Kappa Society on the topic, “Is There a Case for the Liberal Arts?”*

We are in a tumultuous time in higher education, marked by public outcry at the cost of a college education—75% of Americans in a recent poll said that college is too expensive for most Americans to afford ([Pew, 2011](#)); deep concern at the level of indebtedness of college graduates and the impact of their debt load on their ability to transition to independent adulthood—the most recent national average three-year cohort default rate among federal student loan borrowers is 14.7% ([U.S. Dept. of Education, 9.30.13](#)); high rates of unemployment or underemployment of college graduates—the overall unemployment rate for recent college graduates (ages 22 to 26) is 7.9 percent ([Georgetown’s Center on Education and the Workforce](#)); widespread skepticism that colleges and universities appreciate the depth of these concerns or have any sense of urgency about addressing them; a President of the United States who talks about getting “more bang for your buck” out of a college education; and revolutionary challenges enabled by technology to the way we have imagined teaching and learning—and credentialing—happening at our colleges and universities. This is the context in which we find ourselves.

The fact that we are in tumultuous times doesn’t mean we should retreat from our advocacy of the liberal arts. Precisely because it is “liberal”—i.e. “directed to general intellectual enlargement . . . ; not narrowly restricted to the requirements of technical or professional training” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* would have it—a liberal arts education offers the best preparation for both professional and personal rewards in a rapidly changing world. It equips the student, in addition to a knowledge base, with such transferable skills and competencies as critical thinking, the ability to evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources, a tolerance for ambiguity, communication skills, and many more. These are the skills that give you the ability to adapt, to confront the unknown with confidence, to figure things out, to flourish in a time of change. They may be the most important outcome of the education we offer.

My argument in this essay is that we need to do a much better job of speaking directly about the other outcomes of the education we offer—namely, employment and earnings. We can’t simply assert the value of the liberal arts. Frankly, the days are over—and they should be—when we can collect tens, even hundreds of thousands, of dollars in tuition from students and their families and then turn around and say, “Here’s your liberal arts degree, you’ll figure out what comes next; meanwhile, you’ll be hearing from the annual fund.” Instead, the time has come for our message to be something like this: “Among the outcomes you can expect from your liberal arts education are financial independence, professional accomplishment, and personal fulfillment, and your college will work with you from the day you matriculate and on into your post-graduate years to help you achieve those outcomes. We will provide rich resources to assist you in your vocational discernment, we will help you to secure internships and other forms of experiential learning to prepare you for employment, we will prepare you for the job hunt, we will match you with prospective employers, and we will continue to support you as your career develops after you leave the college. We will measure and report publicly and in a comparative context how well we are doing at achieving these results.”

This is the message St. Olaf has been sending to students and their families. As the financial downturn was happening in 2008, we convened a task force of faculty, staff, and students to ask what we were doing well to assist students in their vocational discernment and career placement and to make recommendations on how we could do better where there was an opportunity to do so. There were many such opportunities. Based on that task force’s recommendations, we made a decision to re-name, significantly to expand, and to refocus our office that helps students find their path forward after graduation; we changed its reporting structure; and we solicited and received a large gift to support it ([Center’s website](#)). We moved that office immediately inside the door and immediately adjacent to the President’s office of a newly renovated building in the center of campus to make a point about our

commitment to this task. We spent a significant amount of time and energy creating a process that enables us to report every year in great detail the post-graduation plans of the graduating class. We post those results on our website. You can visit it today and see where 92% of the Class of 2012 is employed or engaged in further study, and those results are sorted by major, as well as in other ways. Self-reported income levels are there as well. In fact, you can go to our website and click on "[outcomes](#)" in the upper right-hand corner and find many kinds of data related to the outcomes of our liberal arts education, from our results on the National Survey of Student Engagement to the Collegiate Learning Assessment to our retention and graduation rates.

Whether we think they ought to or not, students hunger for this kind of support. From September 1 to October 15, 2013 St. Olaf students scheduled 1,200 career-coaching appointments vs. 700 in the same period in 2012. In 2010-11 there were about 2,000 career coaching appointments. In 2012-13 there were 3,000.

We have to talk about employment and earnings. We owe it to prospective students and their families so that they can factor this information into their decisions about college; we owe it to alumni and friends of our institutions who support us with gifts in the expectation that we are delivering value through our operations; we owe it to legislators who grant us tax-exempt status, who—for better or for worse—regulate our industry, and who fund significant portions of our revenue through Federal student loans and state support.

Being direct, forthright, transparent and specific about our students' actual outcomes after college is the precondition to extending the conversation to the outcomes of a liberal arts education that are less tangible, though not less important. I call it the "precondition" because it takes off the table—assuming we have good outcomes to report—the greatest challenge to the liberal arts, which is to convince prospective students and their families that a degree in English—I pick on my own discipline—however fulfilling and gratifying it might be during the college years, is not going to be a liability in the competition for jobs with students who majored in a subject with a much more direct path to employment. By leading with this information we establish our bona fides as institutions committed to the long-term happiness and prosperity and success of our students, not just to the tuition revenue they bring us while on campus.

Gathering, forthrightly displaying, and discussing publicly information about careers and earnings should not threaten our institutions or the liberal arts. If we can't show that the experience we offer results, among its many other benefits, in our graduates being able to live independently, to repay their student loans, and to support families if they choose to have them, then I'm not sure why we should continue in operation. If studying the liberal arts doesn't result in those same outcomes for our graduates, then frankly I question their utility and hence their value. Moreover, the constituents I mentioned a moment ago—students, families, alumni, friends, legislators—are going to talk about this subject whether we do or not. We can helpfully contribute to that conversation or we can sit on the sidelines and risk irrelevance. The conversation happens either way.

So let's imagine that we take the nobler path here, that we not only openly engage in this conversation but also that we raise concern for our students' post-graduate outcomes into the few top-of-mind issues that we focus on, that we invest in being very good at making sure those outcomes are as good as they can be. What would it look like if our institutions embraced a role in preparing students for careers and if we took concrete and meaningful steps to ensure that liberal arts students were being prepared to flourish in the workplace post-graduation?

We would begin by teaching vocation. As you know, this is a word with a broad range of connotations, some of which grate on the ears of proponents of the liberal arts. In its deepest sense, however, vocation is a key element of each of our identities. Vocation represents our understanding of what we have been called to do: what the abilities and passions with which we have been gifted enable us to accomplish. A sense of vocation gives us purpose and direction and meaning. It is a most helpful concept for an undergraduate to think about because it connects "Here's what I'm good at and what I like to do" with "here is a need in the world that I am suited to meet." When I say that we would start by teaching vocation I'm not advocating one more general education requirement. But I am encouraging an institution-wide commitment to providing students in the liberal arts with this rich way of thinking about who they are and what they can do.

Vocational discernment takes time, and it's often a messy business. That's okay. Colleges are messy places because learning is a messy process. So teaching vocation doesn't mean that a sophomore wakes up one day and says, "I have great people skills, and I'm an excellent communicator, so I should pursue a career in human resources." Rather, guided, intentional reflection by students about how to align what they are learning, what they do well, and what brings them joy in the doing, with what the world needs to have done and done well puts students in a better

position to chart their path forward after college than they would be in if we professed to be agnostic about their choices and left them to work it out on their own.

It's probably best to think about the process of vocational discernment by analogy with a college's curriculum. It's something intentionally designed by the college. It happens over all four years of the undergraduate experience. It moves from the general to the specific. It encompasses different kinds of learning appropriate to different stages of the student's development. It has a goal. So, for first-year students perhaps the process begins with exploring something about themselves. For example, our incoming first-year students all take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), an assessment tool that helps you understand how you perceive and respond to the world, and having the results interpreted for those students when they come to campus is an occasion to bring them into the Center for Vocation and Career. In the second year the curriculum might focus more specifically on what vocation is and how it works. We offer a retreat to sophomores—Quo Vadis? Or “where are you going?”—that introduces the concept of vocation and includes faculty, staff, and alumni who talk about their own process of vocational discernment. The third year of this curriculum could provide options to try out specific possible vocations—internships, externships, career shadowing, mentored research experiences, and so forth. This curriculum I'm imagining concludes in the fourth year with the business of actually choosing a direction and taking a job: resume writing, interviewing, negotiating, and all of the things that go with that process.

Who teaches vocation? Everybody does. Faculty in their classes, in advising sessions, and in workshops on vocation; staff who deliver many of the services that are part of this process, from organizing retreats to bringing hiring companies to campus, to offering mock interviews; and alumni of the college who, in my experience are always more than willing to be part of this process with students. I often think that for many of our institutions our greatest untapped resource is our graduates, and one of the side benefits of this approach I am describing is deeper engagement of our alumni with our students and thus with the College.

Just because you have been guided through a process of vocational discernment and arrived at a sense of what you can do that the world needs to be done doesn't mean that you are able to connect your liberal arts education—what you can do—with what employers are hiring for—what the world needs. We had an interesting insight into this at St. Olaf recently when we analyzed our most recent results on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Our students don't seem to understand the extent to which their broad liberal arts proficiencies are excellent preparation for the workplace. When asked how much their St. Olaf experience contributed to specific abilities that employers value – writing, speaking, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, working with others, problem-solving, and ethical understanding –an average of 78% of seniors responded “quite a bit” or “very much” across all these proficiencies. But when asked how much their St. Olaf experience contributed to “work-related skills,” only 60% responded “quite a bit” or “very much,” which not only doesn't correlate with the first response but also represents a lower percentage than among their peers at other schools (66%).

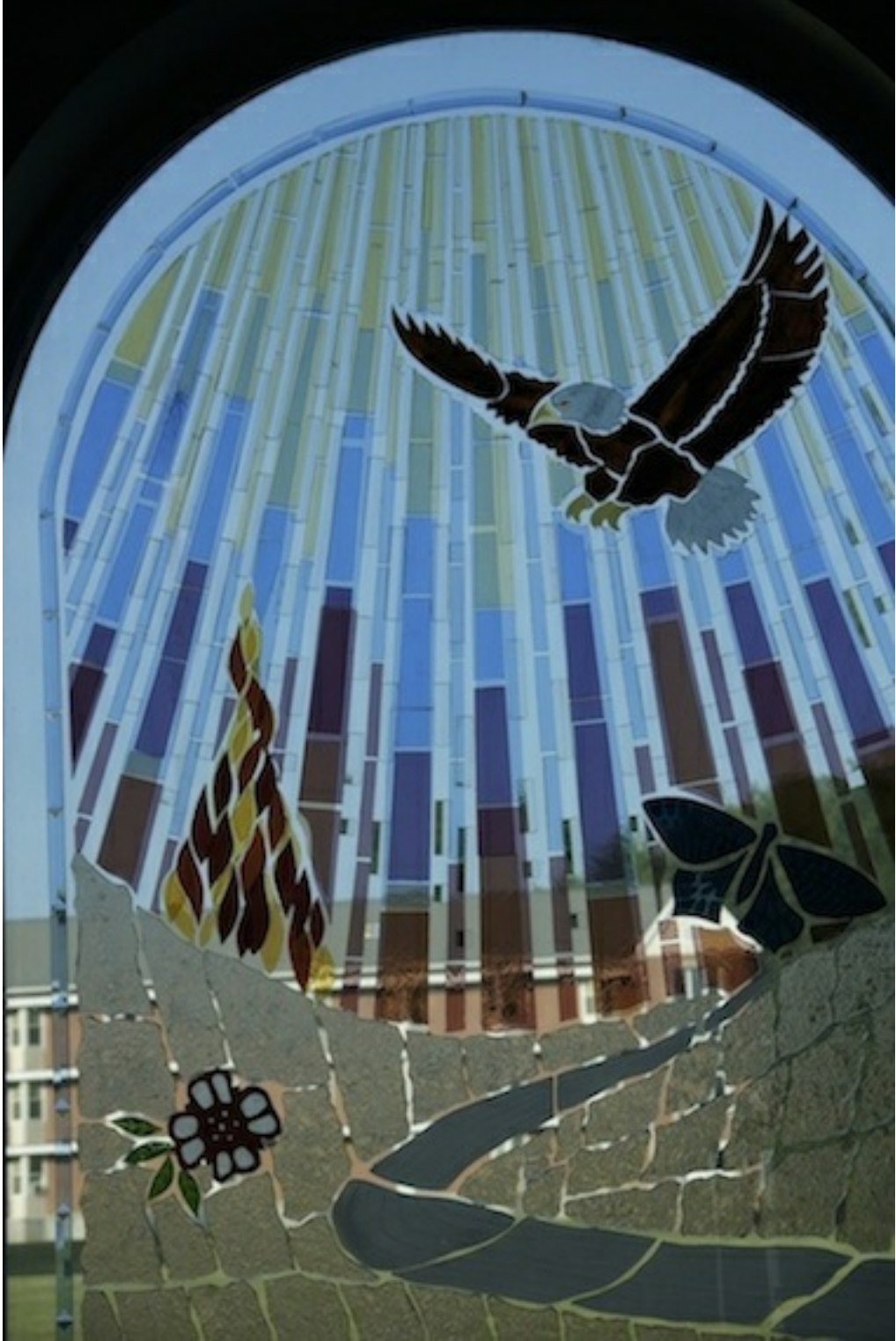
Helping students to make that connection and thus to enter the job search with confidence at their superior preparation rather than feeling at a deficit because they majored in one of the liberal arts is part of the institution's responsibility. I would argue that the greatest challenge many students in the liberal arts face when trying to chart their course after graduation is precisely making the connection between what they are studying and what the hiring market is looking for. It's easy if you major in accounting to know where to go with your degree to look for a job; it's less obvious if you're an English major. The problem is compounded if you're twenty-one and don't have much life experience or knowledge of the workplace, and it's further compounded if your advisor, who is admirably equipped to help you navigate the curriculum and to plan a coherent course of study has never worked anywhere outside the academy and may not have the right tools to help you match your knowledge and passion with a job.

If we believe what we say about the liberal arts, then we believe that a Religion major can help prepare you to be the CEO of a company that sells robots that make tiny components of medical devices visible only under a microscope—that's a real example of one of our alums, and I'm sure that everyone here can match that with examples from your graduates. So, how do we help students to discover and to articulate that connection? That's largely going to be the product of what I'll broadly call experiential education: internships, job shadowing, externships, and that sort of thing. You can't really see how the knowledge, skills, and competencies you developed in the classroom serve you in the workplace until you are in the workplace, and so it's our job to get students there. When I say, “it's our job,” I mean that in the same way that it's our job on residential campuses to house them, to feed them, to provide co-curricular opportunities, and so forth. If the value proposition of our institutions includes the expectation, implicit or explicit, that our students will move on to careers or further study and not move back to their parents' basement, and if creating experiential educational opportunities helps us to fulfill that expectation, then it's our job

to provide them, just as it's our job to help students prepare for interviews, to present themselves well on resumes, to negotiate advantageous terms on job offers, and really to succeed in all the phases of the recruitment and hiring process.

If your institution is like mine, and your institutional leaders are like ours at St. Olaf, you aren't necessarily out there looking for more responsibilities for the college to assume. I do think that over time many institutions have taken on, or been forced to take on, too many responsibilities, and that's one driver of cost and perhaps more importantly one more set of things that nag at you and distract you from the core mission of educating students and creating and disseminating knowledge. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the responsibility I have been urging us to take on, or to take on with renewed urgency, in this essay is the right thing to do and ultimately is good for us to do. Our country needs an educated workforce that will drive creativity and innovation. We need prosperous citizens who can support a growing economy. And our institutions need the support of grateful graduates who recognize the value their liberal arts education added to their lives and want to acknowledge that value with gifts to their college. And all of our institutions need a culture of measurement and accountability that enables us to demonstrate the value we create for individuals and for institutions through the education we offer. To meet all these needs and to attain all these goals we are called on to attend to vocation in the liberal arts.

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## Reinvention



# Strategic Reinvention: Insights from Leadership

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**Ann Hill Duin**

“You’re from Luther land!”

Upon entering the conference room where our meeting was about to begin, President Wayne Powell (Lenoir-Rhyne University) greeted me with this exclamation. Having served the past 30+ years as a professor and administrator in land grant institutions, I had never been greeted in such a manner, and I pondered the distinction. President Powell continued, “You’re from the midwest, the land where there’s a larger percentage of students in our Lutheran colleges who actually come from a Lutheran background. Here in North and South Carolina, we’re surrounded by Bible belt institutions, but we are distinct as Lutherans. In fact, the identity of Lenoir-Rhyne is stronger than at any time in the last 50 years.”

As a graduate of two private liberal arts institutions, Waldorf College (AA) and Luther College (BA), and as a former regent and a current class agent, I am proud of this residential, personalized, liberal arts educational model. This most distinctive higher education model, however, faces challenges that include competency-based credentialing, the cost of residential education, competition from new providers, and a job market in transition.

Project DAVID is about showcasing strategic reinvention underway across higher education. We use a set of themes--Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, Digital opportunities (thus, DAVID)--and associated framing questions to identify and share how institutions are positioning themselves for future success. Together, Eric Childers and I are investigating these key questions:

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

Intended outcomes are many but certainly include a common conversation among these institutions about the keys to their future success and the degree to which those keys are shared.

This work builds on Eric Childers’ (2012) findings on the impact of leadership on organizational identity as described in *College Identity Sagas*. Childers explored the impact of secularization, financial viability, and faculty professionalization on organizational Lutheran identity in ELCA colleges, 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).

Thus, during 2013, I reached out to presidents and other senior administrators at 20 colleges, visiting 16 of them, and holding phone/conference calls with another four. Prior to these visits I studied each institution’s mission/vision statements, strategic plans, re-accreditation reports, and/or other detail available online. Given my previous service as an associate vice president for information technology, I also reached out to chief information officers, in particular, for additional perspective on digital opportunity. I also met with Mark Wilhelm, Executive Director for Educational Partnerships, and Jonathan Strandjord, Director for Seminaries, at the headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The notes and findings from my research largely follow grounded theory methodology, a research method in which, rather than beginning with a hypothesis, one begins with purposive sampling and initial coding, followed by concurrent data generation and collection, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and category identification (Birks & Mills, 2011). A goal in a grounded theory study is to discover the participants’ main concern and how they are working to resolve it. The questions the researcher repeatedly asks are "What’s going on?" and "What is the main problem of the participants, and how are they trying to solve it?" ([wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/grounded_theory))

In most studies, a research question directs how a study proceeds. With grounded theory, it is the research process that generates the question. This research process began in early 2013. As part of my candidacy for president of

Luther College, I studied in depth this college's history (Bunge, Mohr, & Nimrod, 2011); its mission and vision statements; strategic planning and re-accreditation reports; Task Group 150, a set of recommendations for enhancements, investments, savings, and benchmarks; its administration, board leadership and regents handbook and associated meeting minutes and reports; shared governance system including minutes from faculty meetings; financial management and audit reports; common data sets, deployment of academic analytics, and ranking comparisons with peer institutions. From this research, I initially coded two sets of themes: REFORM and DAVID. The first, REFORM, indicated the need for Luther College, in order to be sustainable, to focus on Relevance, Excellence, Financial strength, learning Outcomes, Residential rejuvenation, and Mission. The second, DAVID, called for Luther College to pursue greater Diversity, Affordability, Value, Innovation, and Digital opportunity.

After this initial coding, as part of the interview process, I spent 2+ days visiting with leadership across Luther College and the Decorah community: regents, administration, faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community leaders. Reflecting back on the overall experience, and after reviewing all documents and notes, I generated the larger question: Amid the immense change underway in higher education, how might a liberal arts college (such as Luther College) reinvent itself for sustainability, for future success, for survival?

This research journey has since led me to study and visit additional liberal arts institutions which in turn has led to the hope of bringing their leadership into even greater dialogue and partnership. As Ernest Simmons (this collection) states, "The common good for any situation must be discerned through dialog and mutual participation by all parties involved. Vocationally inspired leadership will seek such dialogue."

This work has again ignited my vocational commitment to Lutheran higher education. My goal is to showcase strategic reinvention for sustainability, for where there is no strategic reinvention, the colleges perish.

A goal of strategic reinvention is certainly not new. Over the last few decades any number of scholars has issued a call for strategic reinvention of higher education. Zemsky (2013) states that "higher education's truth tellers and prognosticators [including himself] have been predicting that American higher education is about to change because it has to change." In chronicling such efforts from the 1980s, he notes that first came *A Nation at Risk* (1983) with the requirement for a Learning Society in which all are engaged in continuous learning and self improvement. Then *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (AAC, now AAC&U, 1985), an indictment of higher education that stated "We have reached the point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its contents and purpose" (2). Then *Diversity, Competition, and Costs: A Candid Look at Selective Admissions* (COFHE, 1987) documented "unimaginable financial shock" (Zemsky, 11) and how the cost of admitting each new college class was increasing faster than inflation. And the inaugural issue of *Policy Perspectives* (1988) included the article, "Seeing Straight Through a Muddle," that cautioned, "The agenda for reform has come to resemble the campus kiosk--plastered with redundant bills layers thick. No group or faction today hesitates to shout its opinions on what higher education should be or do...Cut Costs! Make professors teach! Measure value added! Reward excellence!" (PHERP, 1988, 1).

Fast forward to 2013. Zemsky writes, "Those of us in higher education really are living in an Ecclesiastes moment--change may be all around us, but for the nation's colleges and universities there really is precious little that is new under the sun" (15). His conclusions:

1. Colleges are largely unable to control costs.
2. Change will not be stimulated either by reports or analyses.
3. Reform will not come to higher education until and unless the federal government becomes an active sponsor of change. (16-17)

Zemsky proposes a 27-point checklist for change (included in the appendix to this chapter); its major categories include the importance of ensuring a stronger faculty voice; the development of more competent curricula; and the guarantee of federal policies in support of "a national process of purposeful change" (216).

Every leader with whom I have visited has spoken in some way about the need for purposeful change. According to Davis, Kee, and Newcomer (2010), institutional change requires three phases: visioning, strategy, and implementation along with ongoing dialogue and engagement through a common language and vocabulary. Leadership is responsible for "developing and articulating the vision, assessing the risk involved, and determining the organization's capacity to overcome associated barriers" (Kinser, 2012, 8). A purpose in project DAVID is indeed ongoing dialogue and engagement through a common language and vocabulary.



Also more recently, Drake and Sparks (2012) explored key factors supporting institutional transformation in three successful private non-profit colleges and universities in the Southeast United States.[1] Through interviews with key leaders at institutions, they identified nine critical factors supporting transformational change:

1. focused, visionary leadership
2. strategic planning
3. building facilities, then endowment
4. expansion of graduate programs
5. intentional community relations
6. faculty and curriculum development
7. mission-centrism
8. market niche
9. lower-need students

In the remainder of this paper, I share insights from my visits with presidents and/or their cabinet leadership during 2013.[2] As part of each visit, we discussed the DAVID themes, and from these conversations, I worked to discern their approaches to strategic reinvention. In contrast to Zemsky, the colleges I visited are very much working to control costs; these presidents are authoring reports and analyses that are clearly being used to determine and implement strategic reinvention; and while these presidents and administrative leadership are acutely aware of the importance of federal direction, support, policy, and regulation, they are not willing to wait for the establishment of a new federal agency (i.e., Zemsky's suggestion) and its new rules and regulations as the means to strategic reinvention. In comparison to Drake and Sparks, each leader here is also focused on strategic planning, facilities (the residential experience) and endowment, mission centrism, and faculty and curriculum development. In several cases institutions have expanded into graduate education, and "location" and its associated intentional community relations is imperative. Each institution is working to leverage its signature programs to increase brand recognition and achieve differentiation; and similar to the three institutions studied by Drake and Sparks, the majority of these institutions continue to work to attract students with a greater ability to pay.

## **Insights from leadership**

In the following sections, through sharing notes from interviews along with quotes from other chapters in this collection, I provide a snapshot that begins to illustrate "what's going on" in this set of liberal arts institutions.[3] Amid the immense change underway in higher education, each leader is passionate about how his or her liberal arts college is working to reinvent itself for sustainability, for future success, for survival. As with grounded theory, readers should constantly compare the different statements and suggested directions. Readers also should keep in mind that the insights shared here are not comprehensive; rather, they are intended to inspire dialogue, conversations of consequence within and across schools and stakeholders, and ultimately, strategic reinvention of our campuses and curricula.

In the preface to this collection, Eric Childers and I share factors, forces, and challenges facing higher education. Common across a number of institutions was work underway by leadership—regents and trustees, presidents, and their cabinets—to attend to these and by so doing, to clarify exigency for strategic reinvention.

President Pribbenow writes: "At the heart of planning for the future we must face the difficult, complex and challenging questions that portend change—change that is inevitable, some would argue; but change that will not be easy, we all agree."

Associate Provost Buckman from Wittenberg University writes: "After the advent of the 'Great Recession' in 2008, a narrative took hold in the media that has gone largely unchallenged: rising levels of student debt paired with tuition increases that outpace inflation have collided with a prolonged recession to make the case for seismic change in higher education self-evident to any serious observer."

Executive Dan Currell, a trustee at Gustavus Adolphus College, writes:

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.

At Capital University, board member Harry Raduege, Chairman of the Center for Cyber Innovation at Deloitte, is leading an effort on the future of higher education. They are attending to these “perfect storm” issues: cost of higher education, value and accountability, online learning, reduced ability to pay, demographic shifts, and growing for-profit competition.

At another institution, one cabinet member shared her honest frustration: “How are we reinventing ourselves? We and the board have a hard time getting to any major seismic shift.”

President Lemons at Susquehanna University shared about their university-wide conversation on [The Future of the Academy](#). He stressed how the future is moving from “content” to “connected learning,” and that “the present is more an evolution rather than a revolution.”

And President Powell succinctly stated that “Pure liberal arts only works with a large endowment.”

## **Distinction and Value**

In nearly every case, presidents and other administrative leadership talked about their need to identify distinction as a means toward reinvention. Clear identity and identification of fundamental value and distinction is a prerequisite to strategic reinvention.

President Powell described Lenoir-Rhyne University's character as having four distinct qualities: liberal arts; a reputation for personal attention; connection to the church; and connection to community. “The future is about continuing to leverage these traditions across all LR programs and campuses. What is your mission? If it's not mission-driven, it won't work.” And regarding students, he commented that “liberal arts is about asking people to identify their identity, asking students to find themselves.”

Provost Macur spoke of how Bethany College has refocused their campus on distinction and innovation by going back to their core identity; as a result, they have a new “Lutheran identity” group.

President Anderson at St. Olaf College shared that distinction across colleges “is like comparing excellent bottles of cabernet. Distinction comes from the unique way that we combine strengths.”

At the ELCA headquarters, Mark Wilhelm and Jonathan Strandjord talked about the historical relevance of colleges organized as a gift to a larger community: education for vocation. This is in contrast to catechism education or a continuation of Biblical training into college age. Mark shared that, “Operationally, each college acts like any other institution; there's no other way to ‘do’ higher education unless secularly. We would have closed 70-80% of the colleges if they existed only to serve our ELCA kids.”

We also discussed the demographic shift and new immigrant populations. Mark Wilhelm asked, “Can our ELCA colleges effectively reach out to more diverse students? We market our traditional ‘distinction’ to traditional students. How do we explain the value of this form of college (private residential liberal arts) to more diverse potential students?”

I recalled this visit later when President Scherrens shared that Newberry College is the most diverse liberal arts college in South Carolina; its students of color are primarily African American and are athletes. In terms of distinction, he emphasized that Newberry College is “distinctive as a Lutheran college.”

And Sara Dziuk, Executive Director of College Possible--Twin Cities, provides guidance on how liberal arts colleges can provide the community, financial aid, and academic excellence in support of diverse, low-income

students: “We know that private liberal arts colleges are a wonderful place for College Possible students – our students’ graduation rates on these campuses are higher on average than at other types of institutions... We are fortunate to have so many high-caliber liberal arts colleges in Minnesota and across the country that are focused on attracting more low-income students and supporting them through graduation. It’s important to know that if you bridge the gap, students from low-income backgrounds will thrive and add incredible value to your campus.”

In terms of distinction, President Henning at Grand View University emphasized the importance of changing the discourse to “What do we do well, and how do we get better at it?”

Provost Ramsay shared about Muhlenberg College’s work to create a new form of college -- an inter-faith college. This new college will build on their new science identity, new social science identity, and new arts identity. The emphasis on inter-faith dialogue was mentioned at many of the institutions.

Vice president Waldstein at Wartburg College shared that, from an enrollment management perspective, “Value cannot be a traditional academic argument. Our current students need and deserve a different articulation of the message. We have internal challenges to shaping a message to prospective families. Faculty are not in full agreement with the message prospective students receive. We need to segment the Value proposition and communicate it differently to different audiences.”

President Rosenberg shared that “The fundamental value of Macalester College lies in how it brings together people from all over the country and the world to create a community with strong and lasting bonds. In such a community we learn better, live better, and undergo a more profound transformation than we would alone.”

President Ries at Concordia University--St. Paul shares that “despite my preoccupation with finance, I contend that colleges and universities do not improve financially by focusing on the money. Instead, institutions become stronger financially when a clear sense of institutional identity, a strategy constructed around goals congruent with that identity, and fundamentally sound financial management practices are integrated.”

Former President Paul Dovre (Concordia College) shares that “In my view, the next decade will require significant change for most colleges if they are to survive and prosper as distinctive centers of learning.” He notes the following as key variables in shaping identity and mission of Lutheran colleges: the student marketplace where students are committed to social action and are close to their parents; faculty recruitment of those willing to engage in identity dialogue; a school’s logos; and how an institution navigates the identity/diversity paradox: “This identity becomes an asset, something to build on and never be apologetic about.”

President Pribbenow (Augsburg College) emphasized that colleges are the most vital part of the church. “Is there a common statement of identity for our institutions? How do the theological underpinnings lead us to a distinctive future?” And in this collection, he shares that we “have the gift of the theological concept of *semper reformanda* which offers a framework that may be more relevant than ever to helping us negotiate a path forward together, faithful to who we are and at the same time fresh and relevant to the needs of the world.”

## **Analytics**

President Anderson states that “all of our institutions need a culture of measurement and accountability that enables us to demonstrate the value we create for individuals and for institutions through the education we offer. To meet all these needs and to attain all these goals, we are called on to attend to vocation in the liberal arts.”

Former Interim President Baer shares: “Change in higher education is real. Whether it’s pressure for more accountability, assessment, student learner outcomes, competencies or a more affordable model, institutions are being pressured from local, state, regional, federal, parental and citizen levels. The change to date has often been tweaking around the margins without really facing up to the massive change needed to adequately serve the students of today and the future....Analytics provide higher education with the capacity to review past trends, plan in the present circumstances, and anticipate the future. What a treasure trove of information! But does this stay a buried treasure? Or if institutions develop reports, what is done in response? Leaders today need to claim the power of data, trends and metrics for improved student success and institutional performance.”

Baer provides an excellent overview of the use of learning and academic analytics and suggests that institutions

follow this three-part approach:

- First, build an analytics foundation with ready access to data, analysis and predictive analytics that will enable the institution to know where students are, where they need to go and how to get there.
- Second, assess policies and practices to see where institution can improve its rules to enhance student success.
- Third, build an environment that welcomes and supports open discussions regarding change innovation and reinvention.

## **Affordability**

A number of leaders indicated the criticality of building an analytics foundation that also provides ready access to data and analysis regarding affordability. Kinser (2010) and others have documented that federal and state student aid to students at private institutions increased over 80% between 1998 and 2008, but this was still not enough to counter tuition increases. Private colleges and universities provided over \$29 billion in institutionally-funded aid to students in 2007-2008, a 78% increase over the prior ten-year period, resulting in increased competition among institutions and a barrier to enrollment growth.

According to President Henning, “the disruption that’s needed is in the way we price, package, and finance the education we provide, more so than in the delivery of education. The real issue is cost. Among myriad criticisms being leveled at higher education, the most prevalent and enduring are the concerns about cost. Middle-income and low-income families are being priced out of the higher education market. ‘Net tuition discounting’ has run its course... We are affordable and can remain so. An institution needs to package the whole degree: Here’s what four years will cost; here’s how you will get through in four; here’s our pricing and services....

We created an ‘affordability index’ that we track annually. We now calculate the net price (i.e., our published tuition, fees, room & board less scholarships and grants) that each incoming first-year, full-time, residential student pays. The innovation we want families to see is their ability to have a price and a plan for financing their entire Grand View degree.”

## **Innovation**

While faculty and curriculum development is imperative for strategic reinvention, every institution visited thus far also is focusing on student success and working to provide a large number, if not all, of these high impact practices ([AAC&U](#)):

- First Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

President Scherrens at Newberry College shared about their FastForward program for degree completion, a clear commitment to the needs of the greater community where 58,000 adults in the seven county area have 60 credits but no degree. The program also indicates a clear focus on student success.

Former Interim President Baer writes: “What is clear is the need for a rethinking, realignment and reinvention of institutional policies and practices around a culture of student success. At the most basic level, colleges must do the following:

Compare themselves to similar institutional types on degree completion

Provide equations that institutions can use to evaluate rates relative to others

Use the degree completion calculator to allow institutions to evaluate how their own rates can be improved using alternative scenarios.

Vincent Tinto makes it perfectly clear: ‘In admitting a student, a college enters into a contract—indeed, takes on a moral obligation to establish those conditions on campus, especially in the classroom, that enhance the likelihood that students who are willing to expend the effort will succeed.’” (Tinto, 2012, 120)

President Anderson shares that “you can go to our website and click on ‘[outcomes](#)’ in the upper right-hand corner and find many kinds of data related to the outcomes of our liberal arts education, from our results on the National Survey of Student Engagement to the Collegiate Learning Assessment to our retention and graduation rates,” and emphasizes that “being direct, forthright, transparent and specific about our students’ actual outcomes after college is the precondition to extending the conversation to the outcomes of a liberal arts education that are less tangible, though not less important.”

### **Controlling costs**

While this set of colleges and universities is deploying high impact practices in support of student success, these clearly come at a cost. Professor Breneman writes that “A business model can be broken if the institutions are unable to innovate and alter their production processes as a way to lower costs while sustaining quality...Few institutional leaders have undertaken the hard tasks of rethinking the university strategically and systematically reallocating resources to permanently lower costs.”

Provost McNair at Wagner College shared about their current task force on Learning, Value, and Cost and their consistent focus on the importance of rethinking the business model through increasing learning outcomes, demonstrating increased value, and lowering delivery cost.

While all colleges demonstrated work underway to control costs, a more specific example is Luther College’s Task Group 150, created in Luther’s sesquicentennial year, for the purpose of “carefully assessing future opportunities and challenges” and asking “Is Luther College using its resources to the greatest advantage to fulfill its mission?” The task group operated with the following four goals:

- to challenge academic and non-academic programs to think about positioning for the future, keeping the liberal arts mission of the college as their central focus while formulating benchmarks to define success;
- to propose a budget strategy tied to enrollment goals that are defined by current assumptions and historical achievements;
- to identify strategic cost reductions, revenue enhancements, and resource re-allocations to bring program infrastructure in line with the proposed budget strategy and academic goals; and
- to suggest new ideas for investment, achievement, and accountability (Task Group 150 Final Report, October 17, 2011)

The resulting report included an action matrix defined by four quadrants: enhancements, investments, savings, and benchmarks. The savings quadrant included the need to review criteria for awarding merit and need-based financial aid, replacing faculty retirees selectively and considering early retirement incentives for staff, implementing program expense reductions, closer evaluation of under-enrolled courses, and discontinuing a number of special programs.

During my time visiting with multiple constituencies at Luther College, it was clear that this report, while a result of many open and transparent conversations, still brought angst throughout the college. As Associate Provost Buckman (Wittenberg University) writes, “For that kind of adaptation...we need ‘institutional proprioception,’ efficient internal communication and the basic level of trust required for people to believe the messages they receive from each other.”

Indeed, as President Rosenberg at Macalester College shared, “the hardest thing to do is, via shared governance, to determine what to no longer do so as to move the college forward on strategic directions.”

### **Residential experience**

Presidents also emphasized the importance of a vibrant, rich, residential experience: that education happens best in the context of a deeply personal, highly engaging environment. President Pribbenow also noted that reform happens in the context of communities of memory and faith and values.

President Henning spoke about how Grand View University “stands out from other institutions because of its

partnerships with leading businesses and organizations in Des Moines, which has led to challenging internships and, for more than a decade and a half, nearly 100 percent of students finding jobs right after graduation or continuing their education.”

### **New academic and business models**

President Powell shared that Lenoir-Rhyne’s partnership with the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, SC “worked because of the close collaboration, trust and transparency on the part of both presidents. While financial exigency (on the part of the seminary) played a role, more important was the philosophical and academic underpinning for this direction.” President Powell gave great credit to the seminary: “They had to give up some identity. They are now part of Lenoir-Rhyne University. We have no ‘main campus;’ we have three main campuses, three main locations. Key is intentionality within mission. Our next steps include strengthening LRU through leveraging the new opportunities that a three-campus university offers.”

President Helm at Muhlenberg College shared that “Project DAVID can be most helpful through sharing of alternative business model options for liberal arts institutions.” He shared about consortial work underway for shared business services to address affordability and also encouraged me to investigate Bennington College in Vermont where President Elizabeth Coleman discontinued the tenure system.

At LRU’s Asheville campus, there are no tenured faculty. Each new faculty member is also required by contract to be engaged in recruiting and retention of students to its masters programs. They also do not use the term “adjunct” for these faculty.

The chief financial officer at Luther College talked about the need for greater collaboration on the back office side. Her work with Mellon and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest provided encouragement that they would “take the best minds and come together for back office collaboration.”

President Guarasci at Wagner College shared about his work as a founder of the New American Colleges and Universities, a national consortium of 22 selective, small to mid-size independent colleges and universities dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal education, professional studies, and civic engagement. Together with the NAC&U colleges and universities, Wagner is working on a “free trade zone” model for liberal arts education, and part of this “free trade zone” work may well extend globally, as Wagner recently established collaborative work with Kibbutzim College in Tel Aviv.

Associate Provost Buckman shares (in this collection) that “Beset by macroeconomic challenges on every side, and saddled with a business model that did not look sustainable even in the years of plenty, like many of its peer institutions, Wittenberg University has decided to stop laying up provender for the long siege against the forces of change and compromise. In the spring semester of 2013, Wittenberg’s new President, Dr. Laurie Joyner, appointed a university-wide Innovation Task Force to: ‘identify, explore, and help develop programs, initiatives, and campus improvements that are both consistent with Wittenberg University’s mission and likely to provide enhanced revenue toward the fulfillment of that mission.’ [...] The early work of the Innovation Task Force has focused on two areas that align well with the Distinction/Analytics/Value/Innovation/Digital opportunities (DAVID) rubric, and together represent Wittenberg’s initial response to the imperative for change.”

### **Shared leadership**

Leadership across these institutions emphasized the need for shared leadership at the highest levels.

Linda Baer and I, in our continuing scholarship on shared leadership, emphasize that higher education organizations must evolve from being seen as machines with leaders at the top to being seen as living, dynamic systems of interconnected relationships, ready to change in smart ways to meet and exceed new expectations and demands. Such dynamic systems require new models of leadership (Duin & Baer, 2010). These new models “conceptualize leadership as a more relational process, a shared or distributed phenomenon occurring at different levels and dependent on social interactions and networks of influence” (Fletcher & Kaufer 2003, 21).

The table below includes characteristics present in more traditional (i.e., vertical) as compared to shared leadership situations. According to Pearce, Manz, and Sims (2009), “Shared leadership entails broadly sharing power and influence among a set of individuals rather than centralizing it in the hands of a single individual who acts in the

clear role of a dominant superior” (234). Therefore, for shared leadership to be successful, there needs to be balance of power, shared purpose and goals, shared responsibility for the work, respect for each person, and a willingness to work together on complex issues.

Vertical Leadership	Shared Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identified by position in a hierarchy and downward influence from a superior</li> <li>● Evaluated by whether the leader solves problems</li> <li>● Leaders provide solutions and answers</li> <li>● Distinct differences between leaders and followers</li> <li>● Communication is formal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identified by individuals’ knowledge sets and consequent abilities to influence peers</li> <li>● Evaluated by how well people are working together</li> <li>● Leaders provide multiple means to enhance process</li> <li>● Members are interdependent</li> <li>● Communication is critical</li> </ul>

While the set of colleges and universities visited thus far (as part of Project DAVID) largely embody vertical leadership models, given the complexities of the challenges ahead, these leaders are working proactively to identify, understand, and foster shared leadership.

President Rosenberg shared that “There’s ambivalence in society toward leadership [and shared leadership]. It’s easier for leadership [and shared leadership] in institutions in distress.” Perhaps it’s easier in part because a leader, at the point when an institution is in distress, has an even clearer sense of the need for shared leadership.

Most recently, in his chapter titled "The future of liberal arts begins with collaboration," Eugene Tobin, Mellon Foundation program officer for higher education and the liberal arts, writes: "Collaboration lacks the heroic exceptionalism that serves as the foundation of so many organizational sagas. when it comes to foundation grants, collaboration may feel like a consolation prize. Collaboration is neither a panacea nor a silver bullet, but it is the most underutilized resource in the liberal arts college toolbox" (2013, 133).

### Digital opportunity

President Anderson emphasized that “We need the option of being relevant in a digital world. Digital opportunity is about building capacity for the future.” How to build such capacity is a definite item of deliberation, debate, and ultimately, strategic reinvention.

President Rosenberg cautioned that “The same tools, in other words, that have the power to reduce inequities also have the power to increase them. The difference between these two outcomes lies not in the tools themselves but in the determination and goals of those who wield them. We will decide whether technology shrinks or expands the yawning gulf between the most and least fortunate in our state, our country, and our world. We will decide whether technology strengthens or dissipates community. We will decide whether reality becomes a luxury good.”

At a board retreat in June 2012, President Helm issued a charge statement for task force work to determine online direction for Muhlenberg College. A later report stated “What worked: visits to other schools (e.g., Johns Hopkins); everyone on the committee enrolled in a MOOC; the leader of Penn State’s Global Campus visited Muhlenberg; visits with professionals who are taking online courses; visits with students who are taking online courses. They put aside \$1M for implementation of recommendations for online courses. Collaboration of students, staff, trustees.” He shared, “Thinking big, might Muhlenberg set up a large studio concept for development of online courses; consider a model where faculty, along with instructional designers, come here for professional development?”

Associate Provost Ty Buckman writes: “the promise of reducing costs and increasing efficiency through technology

has not materialized at traditional institutions. Despite considerable pressure to bring technology into the classroom – or to use it to replace the classroom altogether – the educational experience offered by most colleges and universities has remained stubbornly consistent and resistant to change. The people who populate those classrooms, however, have changed. Ubiquitous technology and the expectation of instant access to the entertainment and information it provides, as well as an unbroken communication link to family and friends, have changed the way we interact, how we learn, and what we expect from our institutions. And this attitude is not limited to our students. Many junior faculty now arrive at liberal arts colleges and universities having taught online as graduate students or in previous positions, thus dispelling by their presence the claim that faculty at small private institutions ‘don’t teach like that.’”

## Conclusion

Professor Brennan at California Lutheran University writes: “When these elements [DAVID] come together, we all share in that joy of witnessing the development of an authentic action-oriented energy toward purpose.”

How does reinvention happen? By identifying distinction, identity, and value and claiming an institution’s character. Reinvention happens through informed and intentional strategic planning that includes the creation of structures for open conversations. Reinvention includes focus on student success (retention and graduation) and being “direct, forthright, transparent, and specific” (Anderson) about students’ actual outcomes. Reinvention fosters a culture of measurement and accountability, a proactive culture of self-evaluation (Brennan), and attention to controlling costs (Breneman). It welcomes the stranger and practices inter-faith dialogue (Jodock, Helm/Ramsay). Reinvention celebrates giftedness (Jodock) and a “gift economy” in liberal arts higher education (Lagerquist). It is open and dialectical (Simmons) and works to address limits to broader access and opportunity (Breneman, Dziuk).

How are our colleges and universities reinventing themselves? Ultimately, perhaps reinvention means seeking a third path. As Jodock shares: “The third path seeks to hold together things that others claim should be separated—such as faith and learning, freedom and community, a determination to learn more and a readiness to live with unanswered questions, religious conviction along with civil discourse and inter-religious dialogue. It is precisely this kind of unexpected linking that enables Lutheran colleges and universities to make an important contribution to our society.” We hope that Project DAVID might serve as a means of holding together things that some claim should be separated—distinction and digital opportunity, value and innovation, analytics and distinction.

Unexpected linking. Shared leadership. Strategic reinvention.

## Notes

[1] Drake and Sparks analyzed the growth and change achieved by Belmont University, High Point University, and Elon University over seven years.

[2] During 2013, I visited with presidential and/or other leadership at the following institutions: Augsburg College, Bethany College, California Lutheran University, Capital University, Concordia College, Concordia University--St. Paul, Gettysburg College, Gustavus Adolphus College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Luther College, Macalester College, Muhlenberg College, Newberry College, Roanoke College, Saint Olaf College, Susquehanna University, Thiel College, Wagner College, Wartburg College, and Wittenberg University. The next volume of Project DAVID will include insights from additional institutions as well as continued theoretical sensitivity and depth of analysis of each DAVID theme.

[3] Use of the past tense (e.g., described, spoke, shared) indicates a quote from a meeting held during 2013; present tense (e.g., writes, states, emphasizes) indicates a direct quote from this eBook collection.

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## Appendix

From Zemsky, R. (2013). *Checklist for change: Making American higher education a sustainable enterprise*, 216. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

To ensure a stronger faculty voice:

- Relearn the importance of collective action.
- Put an end to rhetorical excesses.
- Empower a different kind of faculty leader.
- Recast the faculty staffing table.
- Make the academic department the unit of instructional production.

To develop more competent curricula:

- Commit to a designed curriculum.
- Substitute competencies for seat time.
- Explore learning pathways and cohorts.
- Offer credit by examination or demonstration.
- Develop a three-year baccalaureate degree.
- Invest in learning management.
- Establish a credible testing regime.

To guarantee that federal policies support a national process of purposeful change:

- Provide incentive funding to institutions for graduating disadvantaged learners.
- Make students enrolled in remedial education programs eligible for Pell grants.
- Make institutions active players in the student loan system.
- Establish a federal regulatory environment distance from accreditation to oversee federal student aid.
- Change the timing and flow of federal student aid dollars.
- Fund a national testing regime documenting undergraduate learning.
- Establish a new federal agency responsible for monitoring institutional compliance with the rules and regulations governing the disbursement of federal student aid.

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# Opportunity in Necessity: Distinctiveness, Innovation, and the Historical Moment for Liberal Arts Institutions

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**Ty Buckman**

My favorite definition of a liberal education does not come from the famous entry in the Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (1910), but from a yet more venerable British source, William Johnson Cory, a poet and master at Eton who told a group of his charges in an 1861 address:

You are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism. A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed with average faculties acquire so as to retain; nor need you regret the hours that you have spent on much that is forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions.

But you go to a great school, not for knowledge so much as for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice a new intellectual posture, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the habit of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness. Above all you go to a great school for self-knowledge. [1]

By way of bookending Mr. Cory's peroration on the role of humane learning, in our own time John Sperling, founder of the corporate parent of the University of Phoenix, had this memorable statement about the kind of education his institution endeavors to provide its students: "This is a corporation . . . Coming here is not a rite of passage. We are not trying to develop [students'] value systems or go in for that 'expand their minds' bullshit." [2]

As an English professor and academic administrator at a Lutheran-affiliated liberal arts college, I would like to claim, as I probably would have fifteen or even ten years ago, that it is possible to plot institutions on an Eton-Phoenix axis, with their distance from each pole corresponding to their relative success in protecting their educational mission from the dark forces of encroaching corporatism and an attendant and ruthless anti-intellectualism.

But the world is no longer so simple.

Much has changed since the first Internet revolution roiled what were disdainfully called in the late 1990s "bricks and mortar" universities, before the revolution collapsed with the 'dot com bubble' and seemed, improbably, to have restored the status quo in higher education. The respite was short lived.

Tuition-driven colleges and universities that were paying attention began to notice their financial positions eroding under them, for a complex assortment of economic, demographic, and cultural reasons. At the national and state level, the trend of decreasing public financial support for higher education continued even as the calls for a more educated workforce and higher and higher numbers of graduates grew louder. Between 1996 and 2010, the total number of first-time first year students in all post-secondary degree granting institutions rose 39 percent; between 2010 and 2021, the projected rate of growth will drop to less than half that rate, or 14 percent. [3]

After the advent of the 'Great Recession' in 2008, a narrative took hold in the media that has gone largely unchallenged: rising levels of student debt paired with tuition increases that outpace inflation have collided with a prolonged recession to make the case for seismic change in higher education self-evident to any serious observer. Few were prepared to recall Ben Franklin's aphorism on the wisdom of investing in education: "If a man empties

his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest,” or to observe that the average student loan debt of 2012 graduates (\$29,400) was comparable to the average amount of a new car loan in the same year (\$25,714), or to notice the glaring difference in student debt and default rates between borrowers at for-profit institutions and everyone else. [4] College had simply become too expensive.

To further confound the problem, the promise of reducing costs and increasing efficiency through technology has not materialized at traditional institutions. Despite considerable pressure to bring technology into the classroom – or to use it to replace the classroom altogether – the educational experience offered by most colleges and universities has remained stubbornly consistent and resistant to change. The people who populate those classrooms, however, have changed. Ubiquitous technology and the expectation of instant access to the entertainment and information it provides, as well as an unbroken communication link to family and friends, have changed the way we interact, how we learn, and what we expect from our institutions. And this attitude is not limited to our students. Many junior faculty now arrive at liberal arts colleges and universities having taught online as graduate students or in previous positions, thus dispelling by their presence the claim that faculty at small private institutions ‘don’t teach like that.’

Beset by macroeconomic challenges on every side, and saddled with a business model that did not look sustainable even in the years of plenty, like many of its peer institutions Wittenberg University has decided to stop laying up provender for the long siege against the forces of change and compromise. In the spring semester of 2013, Wittenberg’s new President, Dr. Laurie Joyner, appointed a university-wide Innovation Task Force to: “identify, explore, and help develop programs, initiatives, and campus improvements that are both consistent with Wittenberg University’s mission and likely to provide enhanced revenue toward the fulfillment of that mission.” As co-chairs of that Task Force, I and my colleague Karen Gerboth, Executive Director of University Communications, have led a group of faculty and staff in a process of reviewing ideas and proposals to better position the university for a financially sustainable, mission-centered future.

The early work of the Innovation Task Force has focused on two areas that align well with the Distinction/Affordability/Value/Innovation/Digital opportunities (DAVID) rubric, and together represent Wittenberg’s initial response to the imperative for change. One subgroup has looked at improvements to the university’s core enterprise of educating undergraduates, as well as more compelling ways of presenting the distinctiveness of that education to our constituencies. The other subgroup is focused on innovation as a means of generating new revenue and expanding the university’s reach into new markets. [5]

## **How to Talk about Liberal Education without Mentioning Liberal Education**

In his 2011 book, *Liberal Arts at the Brink*, President Emeritus of Beloit College, Victor Ferrall, Jr., includes an entire chapter on “The Declining Demand for Liberal Arts Education.” Here he offers an array of survey and interview data to support the confounding observations that prospective students and their tuition-paying families are not interested in liberal arts education, nor do they actually understand what it is. [6]

A number of our liberal arts peers recognized a generation or more ago that the liberal arts ideal was difficult to communicate effectively beyond the limits of one’s campus, and so presented themselves to the public in a different way. These colleges essentially ‘differentiated their product’ by offering a list of ‘deliverables’ – both opportunities and outcomes – that students could be assured of if they attended the college.

Among the earliest of these was Kalamazoo College, which offered its “Kalamazoo Plan” starting in 1962. The K-Plan, as it is known on campus, has evolved modestly from its original template, and now includes a study abroad experience, a faculty-supervised individual research project, and an internship. Other examples of more recent vintage include Centre College’s “Centre Promise” and Hendrix College’s “Odyssey” Program.

I suspect that the institutions involved would prefer to frame their innovations in different terms, but these ‘value-added propositions’ in essence serve as an extra layer of packaging or a ‘wrapper’ around the liberal arts orientation of the college. Ferrall’s research is persuasive: exceedingly few higher education customers ‘go shopping’ for the liberal arts. Instead, they are seeking an educational experience – a whole college experience – that will result in a set of desired outcomes, or, increasingly, one key vocational outcome.

A coherent combination of value-added features enables those who represent the institution to the public to set aside the difficult task of explicating the philosophical tradition behind the liberal arts – from its classical Greek roots through the medieval Trivium and Quadrivium to its reappearance in remote locations in nineteenth century America

and onward to its genealogical development on a particular campus – and why that history matters to current students and families. Instead, the value-added approach presents in concrete terms how this long tradition gets translated into the student experience at the current moment in the college’s history, what the liberal arts “looks like now” for students.

Wittenberg University’s Innovation Task Force worked most of a semester to identify themes and outcomes that were indigenous to the institution. The draft that resulted (“The Wittenberg Commitment”) is being shared out to the campus community and stakeholders beyond campus at the time of this writing, but we are confident that in its final form it will include the key elements that the task force identified in its development phase: an emphasis on programming to help students make a successful transition to Wittenberg, a more robust vision of the academic advising relationship between faculty and students, high impact pedagogical practices and the faculty development necessary for their expansion, and new ways for alumni/ae to engage in the educational mission of the university. While none of these elements appears distinctive in a list, each is being pursued or delivered in a way that reflects Wittenberg’s own culture and heritage.

The questions that our prospective students and families ask about Distinctiveness, Affordability, and Value, are questions that have an economic base. The answer that we provide is, to some extent, an operationalized version of our mission statement, designed to bridge the gulf between the idealism of the German American Lutherans who founded Wittenberg College in the 1840s, and the material reality of the twenty-first century consumer of higher education who is anxious about the return on a tuition investment in a difficult economy.

Because the articulation of a value-added proposal does not involve a radical rethinking of the institution’s mission or structure, the work of developing the “Wittenberg Commitment” involves listening carefully and building consensus. Not so with issues of ‘Innovation’ and ‘Digital opportunities.’

### **Innovation, Mission, and the Paradox of Scale**

Fifteen years ago, calls for increasing the role of technology in education could mean incorporating a web component into an existing course (the threaded discussion board, for example), or offering that course in a completely different format. Though we seem to be in the midst of an unprecedented period of disruptive technological change and accelerated innovation, the place of technology has not changed much at small colleges and universities in those years. At Wittenberg, for example, early adopting faculty have experimented with new ways of delivering classroom content and most now incorporate some online resources into their courses, but only in our School of Community Education do we offer blended online and in-person classes that challenge our traditional course-delivery paradigm.

When reformers talk about “innovation” and ‘digital opportunities,’ they typically have other changes in mind: “Most of higher education’s innovations have been what Christensen calls sustaining innovations. They are layered atop existing processes, creating improvements, but typically raising costs and failing to reinvent the core business model” (24). [8] The phrases that bring wincing of painful recognition for many of us in higher education are “layered atop existing processes,” and “raising costs.” Most colleges and universities – and my own is no exception -- are exceptionally skillful at incorporating the new into our existing structure, in the sense that we layer it on and increase our operating expenses as a result.

But to ascribe the ‘layering on’ approach to the use of technology and new media as the defensive reaction of the academic guild, a predictable response from a sclerotic, bureaucratic, even feudal institution, is a reductive oversimplification of the real challenge. To “reinvent the core business model,” in another key phrase from the quotation above, cannot be attempted in a serious way without challenging the very nature of our institutional missions. The fundamental paradox for colleges and universities like Wittenberg hinges on the idea of scale. The promise of access to new students beyond our campus and the tuition revenue they would bring -- in large enough numbers to justify the investment to reach them -- does not easily reconcile with the story we tell to our prospective students and our new faculty about what it means to be a residential liberal arts college in the Lutheran tradition. Many of the operative words in our mission statement could be adapted to learning in a non-synchronous, non-residential context (e.g., “intellectual inquiry,” “wholeness of person,” “responsible global citizens,” “discover their callings,” and “creativity, service, compassion, and integrity”), but those are not the outcomes that most non-traditional students are seeking or for which they are willing to pay. Economic necessity eventually forces institutions into compromises they would not otherwise choose to make and some of our peer institutions have

found creative ways to develop successful online initiatives while maintaining their traditional campus culture. However, it can be difficult to convince key stakeholders on and off campus that doing this ‘to scale’ – beyond the operationally discrete adult learning/continuing education model -- is something other than an orderly retreat from a college’s founding vision and mission.

Not surprisingly, then, the approach that the Innovation Task Force has taken in its initial work in the areas of innovation and digital opportunities can only be described as incrementalist. In the example I will highlight here, we are testing some modes of delivery of course content that could expand our traditional student base of undergraduate students and eventually help us adapt to coming demographic challenges as well as the changing expectations of students.

Under the auspices of the Innovation Task Force, our Business Department is piloting a topics course this spring that is designed for on-campus, segmented, and online delivery. Business 290: Leveraging the Internet to Drive Business Performance is the work of three of my colleagues: Director of Enterprise Applications and Portal Services Sam Howard (who will teach the course), Business Department Chair Tom Kaplan, and Chief Information Officer Rick Mickool. The course meets for three hours in the evening once per week for fourteen weeks. In its fully developed form, Business 290 will simultaneously address three audiences: traditional Wittenberg students, members of the local and regional business community who are interested in one or more session topics, and a wider audience of online users who will eventually have access to the content from a single session or group of sessions.

The first audience was secured late in the fall semester when twenty eight Wittenberg undergraduate students signed up for the course. We are targeting the second audience through a marketing partnership with our local chamber of commerce, inviting local business people and entrepreneurs to go online and register for one or more evening sessions as stand-alone, non-credit bearing seminars at a fraction of the price that they would pay for comparable professional seminars. [9] Plans to reach the third audience, those participants without a geographic connection to Wittenberg or those unable to attend a campus session, are in development. For now, sessions on topics with the widest appeal will be recorded for later editing and augmentation for delivery over the web a la carte or by subscription.

If the course pilot is successful, it could be the first step toward the development of one or more certificate programs in high demand fields, all available to local and online learners. One of the advantages of this approach from the perspective of the task force is the use of a local audience beyond campus as a test market, to give us an indication of the potential for the idea to scale up before we make a significant investment.

A second advantage speaks to the concerns I noted above about reconciling new ways of reaching new students with the imperative to maintain the integrity of our residential campus experience. In developing Business 290, we recognized early on the potential for the multiple audience approach to significantly enhance the learning of the traditional Wittenberg students enrolled in the course. By welcoming into the classroom members of the local business community who bring with them questions and challenges that are ‘live’ in the field, our undergraduates can participate in the application of what they are learning to the world beyond their campus. In this way, a hybrid course skillfully constructed could enable a problem-based or case-based pedagogy in which some members of the course bring the problems and cases with them. To go a step further, we can imagine a fourth audience reached by a carefully managed synchronous version of the same course, this time in a webinar format that would allow traditional and non-traditional students in the classroom to interact with participants from anywhere in the world, multiplying the target market for the course and greatly enriching the problems and cases that could be considered.

There are other modes of innovation and benefits of scale that are available to us at Wittenberg. As I noted above, our School of Community Education is the locus for such innovations, having offered hybrid courses for a number of years and with new web-based programs in development. The Business 290 class, however, suggests a different path, one that could lead to benefits for our traditional students and for the new students who join them via other means: innovation that complements rather than revises our mission.

## **Institutional Proprioception**

In 1906, British neurophysiologist Sir Charles Sherrington published *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* based on a series of lectures he had delivered two years earlier at Yale University. One of the breakthroughs that

Sherrington offered in his highly influential monograph concerned the mechanics of ‘position sense,’ in particular, the way that the brain incorporates internal signals in directing motion: “Such afferents are, in his term, ‘proprioceptive’ because they are activated by the organism’s own movements, as distinguished from ‘exteroceptive’ afferents that convey information from the environment.” [10]

Sherrington’s discovery that the brain’s ability to effectively direct motion depends upon two complementary data sets, one from the external world, one from the inner world, provides fertile metaphoric ground for institutions struggling to find their way in difficult times. One of the challenges for very old institutions is to understand their position relative to their current historical moment and all of the forces – cultural, economic, ideological, and so on – that are acting upon them. [11] That many of our institutions have survived a civil war and world wars, depressions and recessions and pandemics, suggests that while we may not be able to ignore the exteroceptive sensory data of our institution’s position in a given historical and cultural milieu, we may safely refer those signals to institutional organs adapted to that purpose, primarily our admission, development, and marketing offices.

A general sense of the external challenges facing us is not, by itself, sufficient to spur a whole institution to adapt successfully to a changed environment in a comparatively short period of time. For that kind of adaptation – probably without precedent except in the earliest years of a college’s founding – we need ‘institutional proprioception,’ efficient internal communication and the basic level of trust required for people to believe the messages they receive from each other. In this regard, the muscle spindles and nerves that signal to each other through the nervous system are another way of describing a sense of community. Resilient, healthy institutions benefit from their proprioceptive sense without realizing it, drawing upon networks of deep relationships between on-campus and off-campus stakeholders as they move forward. Cautionary examples are multiplying of institutions that have attempted radical changes and realignments based on their decision makers’ sense of the demands of the historical moment, but have foundered because not enough stakeholders were convinced of the rightness of their view. Without a consensus or at least a broad level of agreement on the exteroceptive data – the position of the institution within the landscape of higher education and the macroeconomic and cultural forces that are shaping the present context – as well as the proprioceptive data – the internal sense of the institution’s situation, as communicated by stakeholders to each other – then change comes with a much higher level of risk.

As the Innovation Task Force looks forward to expanding its work beyond our initial attempts to address the need for ‘Distinction’ and ‘Innovation,’ we do so animated by a sense of possibility and the conviction that the impetus for effective change needs to come from within. And with no excuses. If institutions like Wittenberg University, with faculty and staff and students prepared to grapple with challenges in nearly every field of human intellectual endeavor and on a scale to allow for meaningful and collaborative effort, cannot find innovative means to solve the riddle posed by a rapidly changing economy and the needs of a new generation of learners, it will not be for lack of resources.

## Notes

[1] Quoted in Henry Rosovsky, *The University: An Owner’s Manual* (NY: Norton 1991) 108.

[2] Quoted in Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (NY: Fordham UP, 2008) 97.

[3] “First-Time Freshmen Enrollment,” *Projection of Education Statistics to 2021*, National Center for Education Statistics, January 2013, Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2021/sec5d.asp>.

[4] *The Quotable Teacher*, ed. Randy Howe (Globe Pequot 2006), 22); *USA Today*, 5 Dec 2013, available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2013/12/04/>; “Car Buyers Stretching Out Payments,” *MSN Money*, 2 Oct 2012, available at: <http://money.msn.com/car-buying/car-buyers-stretching-out-payments>; Emily Dai, “Student Loan Delinquencies Surge,” (Spring 2013) *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: Inside the Vault*, available at: <http://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/itv/articles/>.

[5] In fact, without knowing their work, the task force divided itself into two subgroups corresponding to

the two “tracks” proposed by Clark Gilbert, Matthew Eyring, and Richard Foster, in their article, “Two Routes to Resilience”: “First, major transformations need to be two different efforts happening in parallel. “Transformation A” should reposition the core business, adapting its current business model to the altered marketplace. “Transformation B” should create a separate, disruptive business to develop the innovations that will become the source of future growth.” *Harvard Business Review*, December 2012. 1. (I found Gilbert, Eyring, and Foster’s work in *Transforming in an Era of Disruptive Change*, see n. 8 below.)

[6] Victor E. Ferrall, Jr., *Liberal Arts at the Brink* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2011) 40-59. It is this contradiction that the American Association of Colleges and Universities has targeted with several well designed and smartly marketed initiatives in the past ten years, especially Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP).

[7] As a college and then a university with a long history of offering pre-professional degrees in Business and Education, Wittenberg theoretically has the further challenge of explaining how these additions to the traditional liberal arts corpus fit into the institution’s offerings. In fact, because the development of the liberal arts college in America is such an arcane topic, few students or families ever ask.

[8] Donald Norris, Robert Brodnick, Paul Lefrere, Joseph Gilmour, Linda Baer, Ann Hill Duin, and Stephen Norris, *Transforming in an Age of Disruptive Change* (Strategic Initiatives, Inc., 2013).

[9] The course topics and registration page can be seen accessed at this site:  
<http://signup.wittenberg.edu/SignUpCategory.aspx>.

[10] Robert E. Burke, “Sir Charles Sherrington's *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*: A Centenary Appreciation,” *Brain* (2007) 130 (4): 887-894. Doi: 10.1093/brain/awm022.

[11] Wittenberg is fortunate in this regard to have been the subject of two works of impressive historical scope and depth by President Emeritus and historian William Kinnison: *Wittenberg: An American College* (Xlibris, 2008), and *Modern Wittenberg* (Xlibris, 2011).

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# Reinvention Strategies: Analytics, Policies and Politics

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**Linda Baer**

*I've had a long career in higher education with over thirty years of experience in land grant and regional comprehensive universities as a faculty member, a Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, Interim President, Interim Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs for a large system. I am a member of the ELCA church, serving three times as chair of church councils. I care deeply about higher education and the capacity for sustainability among all who serve our students and citizenry. I am a scholar of the future because I believe we must be constantly assessing how we can be better at what we do. It is within this context that I share this paper, with a call to action for reinvention.*

In January, 2013, the National Commission on Higher Education Attainment (NCHEA) wrote an open letter to college and university leaders. The Commission, made up of six presidential associations in Washington DC, included representatives from small liberal arts colleges to community colleges to large research institutions. The leaders of the Commission reported:

The strength of America's future depends on the ingenuity spared by our college graduates. Now more than ever before, our nation needs leaders of higher education to recommit themselves to making college more accessible and, ultimately more attainable. The report calls to action every college and university president and chancellor to make retention and completion a critical campus priority. Every institution must pay as much attention to the number of degrees it grants—completion—as it does to success in admissions and recruitment. It is time for all colleges and universities to marshal the resources needed to make completion our strategic priority. (NCHEA, 9)

Why do liberal arts colleges need to embrace reinvention strategies?

Change in higher education is real. Whether it's pressure for more accountability, assessment, student learner outcomes, competencies or a more affordable model, institutions are being pressured from local, state, regional, federal, parental and citizen levels. The change to date has often been tweaking around the margins without really facing up to the massive change needed to adequately serve the students of today and the future.

In this paper, I share perspectives on the importance of a three part strategy for reinvention that includes analytics, policies and politics required for launching, nurturing and sustaining change in higher education. It is critical for leaders to understand the deep changes on the horizon so they can equip the institution with the culture that embraces change to improve how we deliver on our promise to education for the future. To be fully engaged stewards of the future, all need to be aware of the importance of analytics in developing the backdrop to continuous improvement, the role of policies in supporting the framework for how we deliver on the promise and the politics that form the complex environment for sustaining the current ways of doing business or supporting and enhancing the new opportunities for the future.

## **Analytics**

Analytics in higher education is a major focus at many of today's institutions. Many campuses are claiming the power of analytics to improve student success. Analytics provides the tools to assess, analyze and change what institutions do in relation to students, faculty and the learning environment. President Michael Crow of Arizona State University determined that we need to develop an environment of "no more excuses," and he set goals to accomplish improvements:

## The Goals of Arizona State University 2002

Goals 2002	Outcomes 2011
Increase Graduate Numbers	Increased degrees awarded by 52%
Increase graduation rates	Increased 6-year grad rate by 19%
Increase freshman retention rates	Increased freshman persistence to 84% (up 9%)
Expand ethnic and economic diversity	Increased minority enrollment as % of total population by 52%
	Increased enrollment 30%

Crow believes that the solutions were made possible through a comprehensive use of analytics. If you use these analytical tools, you will know where you are, what you're doing, if what you are doing is working or not, whether or not you need to be doing new things customized to fit your particular school or demographic, and infinitely more information to help students be successful. [1]

Analytics provide higher education with the capacity to review past trends, plan in the present circumstances, and anticipate the future. What a treasure trove of information! But does this stay a buried treasure? Or if institutions develop reports, what is done in response? Leaders today need to claim the power of data, trends and metrics for improved student success and institutional performance.

### **Past -- Data and Analytics**

Higher education began to take increased notice of enrollment management in the 1980s when enrollments were stagnating. The management was largely tied to influencing enrollments as the traditional high school numbers started to decline. Campuses began to move to more targeted marketing and yields from feeder high schools to improve enrollments. But few activities were focused on the retention side of enrollment management. (Seidman, 24-25)

Most institutions have largely remained at this reporting level of data utilization. This status of buried treasures continues to be characterized by large amounts of data, sometimes even "awash in data" with few people ever accessing the data for basic reporting and fewer still using data for decision making.

Through analytics we can revisit past activities from student enrollments, admissions characteristics, and persistence. We can identify courses that have high dropout rates, withdrawals and failures. We can identify past trends in majors as well as local, regional and state needs in the labor market. We can begin to move an institution past the buried treasure status of student information.

### **Present -- Data and Analytics**

Indeed, over the years, we have seen the emergence of student success scientists. There is a long tradition of research in what matters in college and what improves student success. However, much of that work has focused on what the students do. Today, we are looking at what students do as well as what institutions are doing to improve success. Campus teams assess data, trends and outcomes. They evaluate practices to determine what works and for whom. Some have moved to predictive models that assist in bringing more insight to the student completion agenda.

Metrics move from the reporting and analysis levels to action where higher education can make sense of what is going on with students. Currently, higher education is challenged to account for low rates of persistence, high dropouts and low completion rates even as costs for education have skyrocketed-- for students, parents, states and the nation. Analysis has moved to research-based promising practices with focused strategies; with serious concentration on the first days, weeks, and year of a student's learning life and beyond; and with the commitment to know and deploy interventions so that more students can persist. Practices now can be more intentional and can

empower learners to succeed. Learning management systems and learning analytics tools provide the opportunities to gather data to assess what is happening now and what can happen. The hidden treasure trove of data is now being made available to more faculty, staff and advisors.

A key example is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that grew out of research at Indiana University where researchers began to explore what practices resulted in active and engaged learning environments and experiences. Surveys accumulated data from students and faculty about practices that resulted in increased student engagement and retention. George Kuh and his colleagues then studied those institutions with Documented Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) that were consistently doing better in student engagement, persistence and completion. The High Impact Practices from Kuh's research are known to improve student engagement, persistence and success. Kuh's work resulted in reports on [Six Conditions that Matter to Student Success](#). [2] These include:

1. Living" mission and "lived" educational philosophy
2. Unshakeable focus on student learning
3. Environments adapted for educational enrichment
4. Clear pathways to student success
5. Improvement-oriented ethos
6. Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success.

Exemplar campuses employ these practices for the majority of students, and evidence shows that they have higher student completion rates. Yet, even when we know what practices work, there are resource issues at stake. Intervention practices for at risk students are "labor intensive" and costly; they require intrusive advising and ongoing connections and communications with students. (Kuh, 2010)

We know more about what interventions work the best given the cost of the practice. Long term research from NSSE and others resulted in the development of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) high impact practices. The areas that enhance student engagement include the following:[3]

- First Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

Which of these high impact practices do you support on your campus, and how many students and faculty are involved?

What efforts will it take on your campus to scale and sustain what is known to improve the student learning environment and ultimately student success?

## **Future--Data and analytics**

Every student who is serious about succeeding will do so. Analytics at the predictive levels can provide the road map to maximize student learning success, personalized to the individual learner. Improved alignment with K-12 for readiness, focused advising and support in the first year, ongoing training for faculty and staff on student learning needs, and course schedules developed for the student's success are among the components of taking student success seriously.

The future includes data tools that motivate students to succeed. Adaptive learning platforms will move students at a pace that they can master. Personalized learning tools will allow for smart data so that students can improve their success across an academic timeframe. Tools will include "nudge" technologies that support the "right choice" architecture for students and advisors; they will adapt to student motivation, behavior and record of achievement. These tools will begin to incorporate non-cognitive behaviors, and they will help faculty and advisors intervene and improve advising. These tools will capitalize on the fact that people make the difference in student success.

Exemplar campuses will wrap the student experience around integration with faculty, financial aid, advising centers, tutoring centers, transfer advisors and counselors all working on the same goal--student success. Some are calling this a student success network that takes on the total institutional environment including instructors, admissions, residential hall directors, tutoring, advising, deans, disability services, financial aid and other student focused services. With powerful personalized learning systems, students will take the right courses, at the right time, matched to the right major cluster of career/training opportunities that match their interests. They will follow a career pathway for their success guided by the advisors, faculty and staff on their success team. Thus the treasure trove, previously hidden or open to a few, is now open and transparent for the student, faculty, advisor and student success team to access.

What is clear is the need for a rethinking, realignment and reinvention of institutional policies and practices around a culture of student success. Such a rethinking has been developed; it is known as the Predictive Analytics Reporting (PAR) framework, aThe Predictive Analytics Reporting, PAR, framework, is a collaborative, multi-institutional effort that brings two year, four-year, public, private, traditional and progressive institutions to collaborate on identifying points of student loss. It focuses on using predictive analytics to improve student success for all students. Deliverables include flexible predictive models, openly published common data definitions and a student success matrix that links predictions with intervention and student supports, making prediction actionable.

The PAR partners developed a robust [Student Success Matrix](#) (SSM) that provides predictive categories based on the research literature and partner experience. The categories include the following predictors cross referenced with time of student experience at connection, entry, progress, and completion. This matrix is a powerful resource of inventorying, organizing and conceptualizing supports aimed at improving student outcomes. It connects various student risk types/predictors with supports that have the potential to appropriately and effectively address the specific risk issues at the points the supports will be most likely to have the greatest positive effect. PAR institutions invest time, people, resources and long-term strategies to address each component in this matrix.

### The Student Success Matrix™

<b>Predictors</b>	<b>Connection</b> Application to enrollment (advising to enrollment)	<b>Entry</b> Completion of gatekeeper courses (beginning of class)	<b>Entry into program to 75% of requirements completed</b> (middle of class)	<b>Completion</b> Of course of study & graduated with market value (end of class)
Learner characteristic				
Learner behaviors				
Academic Integration				
Social/Psychological integration				
Other learner support				
Course/Program characteristics				
Instructor characteristics/behaviors				

### Policies and Practices

If institutional goals include improving student success, then policies and practices will be required that align to maximize readiness, support remediation for success, maximize the first year experience, and monitor and mentor learners through the subsequent years to completion. Critical elements include adequate advising, success coaches, tutoring, gateway course scheduling for success, consistent and regular advising for majors, and placement for internships and practicums.

The institutional framework required to support this reinvention will include strategic policies and practices linked to student success. While higher education has been well aware of the high impact practices that support and

encourage student engagement and success, evidence reflects fragmented approaches to delivering on these practices. In addition, there are mixed practices of requiring what is known to support student engagement versus making it optional, thereby sending a message that these opportunities aren't required or vital to student success. A basic issue is what is communicated to students about the information institutions gather about them that is intended to assist in adequate placement. For example, many transfer students are not informed about transfer credits accepted until after they are already in a term.

College degree completion rates are considered to be among the most important indicators of institutional quality. If this is indeed the case, we would see a culture of student success permeate the institution. Everyone would be part of the success team. This requires new expectations, ongoing professional development and a deep culture of data and analytics.

## **The Political Landscape**

Colleges and universities are now called upon to address low graduation rates. President Obama's American Graduation Initiative has a goal that the US must add 5 million more graduates to the workforce this decade to remain competitive in the global market place. In order to meet this goal, higher education must radically improve degree completion rates and achieve equity in attainment gaps between groups and decrease the time to degree. "If institutions are to improve their degree completion rates, they must first be able to accurately assess how effective they are in moving student they enroll towards graduation." (Tinto, 2012, 4) The focus must be on creating conditions for all students who begin college. Institutional goals should be to establish cross- institutional conversations and actions around how to reduce detrimental factors and increase success factors.

At the most basic level, colleges must do the following:

1. Compare themselves to similar institutional types on degree completion
2. Provide equations that institutions can use to evaluate rates relative to others
3. Use the degree completion calculator to allow institutions to evaluate how their own rates can be improved using alternative scenarios. [\[4\]](#)

What research, data, organization infrastructure is needed to support the change? Why are the numbers so difficult to move? Why is building the student success environment so slow?

While we may now be increasing the gathering and use of data, we lack the alignment with institutional policies to sustain a changed environment. The strongest motivators for strategic reinvention come from local and state boards of trustees and regents, from state legislators and governors, and from mandates from regional accreditors that require evidence and progress on student persistence and completion. The federal government is debating the concerns around how much federal financial aid goes to support students who never complete. Conversations are focused on supporting institutions that have strong persistence and completion rates. Currently, the federal government is discussing the use of a ranking system among colleges and universities based on the metrics for success.

## **Regional Accreditation**

In February, 2012, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association, HLC, adopted new criteria for accreditation, assumed practices and obligations of affiliation effective for all institutions January 1, 2013. Under Criterion 4.C., Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement, "The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs":

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.



4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures. [\[5\]](#)

To support this commitment to persistence and completion, the HLC has launched an Academy for Persistence and Completion in 2014. This academy provides a four-year sequence of flexible events and activities designed to build institutional capacity to improve persistence and completion of its students. During the Academy, institutions focus on (a) effective collection of data and other information to identify student persistence and completion patterns, (b) evaluation and improvement of current persistence and completion strategies, and (c) development of new student persistence and completion strategies for specific cohorts of students. Other regional accreditors are providing similar language and expectations to institutions.

### **National and State Efforts**

Dennis Jones from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) recently reviewed "Outcomes-Based Funding: The Wave of Implementation." He reflects that outcomes-based funding has moved into the mainstream of state-level higher education financing policy. The NCHEMS staff developed a scorecard on implementation with the following summarization of activities:

- Outcomes-based funding models have been developed in the context with state or system goals
- Almost all allow for mission differentiation.
- Recognize the importance of successfully serving underrepresented students.
- Some are year-to-year rewards based on improvements while others are on a recent year or 3-year average.
- Using completed credit hours instead of enrolled credit hours as a driver.
- Proportion of state funding varies enormously from .5% to 100%.
- Most have carved out the outcomes-based funding from base allocations.

According to Complete College America (CCA), over sixteen states are implementing performance based funding with ten more developing plans to adopt performance based funding. While performance based funding will not guarantee more college graduates, CCA believes that it is an essential game changer strategy to ensure that the necessary conditions exist for other reforms to succeed. CCA asks the question: Are states implementing the best reforms to get more college graduates? Are they linking the best research on practices with changes on the campuses? [\[6\]](#)

Complete College America has developed the institutional roadmap to increase student success. The components include:

- Performance Funding
- Co-requisite Remediation
- Full time is full time
- Structured schedules
- Guided pathways to success

Some national organizations are focusing on board member training in data that supports student success. The Association for Community College Trustees (ACCT) is committed to increasing the engagement of community college trustees and governing boards in the student success movement. Effective governance with an emphasis on student success is a priority for our nation's community colleges.

ACCT has developed a toolkit designed to provide community college leaders with resources to create a culture of data-informed decision making that leads to measurable and meaningful improvements to student success.

- Readiness: Determine the institution's readiness to create a culture of evidence and inquiry prior to engaging in student equity, success, and completion initiatives.
- Planning: Engage in a planning process to improve student equity, success, and completion.
- Implementation: Establish policies to advance a shared vision for closing achievement gaps and improving academic quality, equity, success and completion.
- Outcomes: Assess how students are progressing, whether achievement gaps are closing, and whether

policy changes will be required. [7]

President Obama challenged every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or post-secondary training. The President has also set a new goal for the country: that by 2020, America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

According to the [White House College Scoreboard](#), “earning a post-secondary degree or credential is no longer just a pathway to opportunity for a talented few; rather, it is a prerequisite for the growing jobs of the new economy. Over this decade, employment in jobs requiring education beyond a high school diploma will grow more rapidly than employment in jobs that do not; of the 30 fastest growing occupations, more than half require postsecondary education. With the average earnings of college graduates at a level that is twice as high as that of workers with only a high school diploma, higher education is now the clearest pathway into the middle class.”

To make college selection easier and more streamlined, the federal government has established the College Affordability and Transparency Center. The website indicates that the College Scorecard has been designed by the U.S. Department of Education to provide better information to students and parents about college affordability and value. Each scorecard includes five key pieces of information about a college: Costs, Graduation Rate, Loan Default Rate, Median Borrowing, and Employment. Users can search for a college by name or by selecting factors that are important to the student’s college search (e.g., programs or majors offered, awards offered, location, undergraduate enrollment size, campus setting, etc.) [8]

## **A Call to Action**

In summary, student success depends on a wide range of factors. States have been divesting in public higher education for public education over the years. The federal government must keep the commitment to student aid which has been the bedrock of meeting the promise of higher education for low-income Americans. In addition, the nation needs better data to measure how well we do at retaining and graduating students. Finally, students bear a substantial share of the responsibility for their own education. We know what to do and now it is time to do it! (NCHEA 25-26)

Vincent Tinto makes it perfectly clear: “In admitting a student, a college enters into a contract—indeed, takes on a moral obligation to establish those conditions on campus, especially in the classroom, that enhance the likelihood that students who are willing to expend the effort will succeed.” (Tinto 120)

Tinto provides an institutional call to action for improving student success:

1. Develop cross functional team dedicated to student success
2. Assess student experience and analyze patterns of student progress
3. Invest in long term program development and ongoing assessment of program and institutional functioning
4. Coherently align institutional actions to key progression points identified by the analysis of institutional data
5. Change the way we focus on developmental education
6. Align academic support to key first year courses
7. Establish early warning systems for key first year courses.
8. Ensure all first year students have experience in learning in community with others
9. Provide advising to all new student and those who change majors
10. Invest in faculty development especially new faculty who teach first year courses
11. Systematically align student experiences from entry to completion. (Tinto 120)

## **Higher Education: 2020**

In “Transforming in an Age of Disruptive Change,” Donald Norris and colleagues indicate that: “Today, higher education is pressured to transform broadly and rapidly, partially because we have failed to achieve significant and needed change. We are starting to face multiple combinations of challenges. In previous decades, these challenges occurred singly and independently. If the multiple-challenge trend continues, then higher education could face a new ‘perfect storm’: declining authority, unfavorable economics, new competition, and reduced career opportunities for new graduates. This could translate into declining value propositions for stakeholders all around. Taken together, these factors are truly disruptive to business-as-usual approaches in higher education. They call for fundamentally

different strategies, business models, and emerging practices to deal with the Age of Disruption that extends forward toward 2020 and beyond.”

In the Harvard Business Review article, “Two Routes to Resilience” by Clark Gilbert, Matthew Eyring and Richard N. Foster, the authors identify a crucial strategy for reinvention. In order for organizations to reinvent in the context of disruptive change, they need to develop a two-track approach to transformation as the best path to organizational resiliency (Gilbert, Eyring, and Foster 2012):

- Transformation Track A (Reshape/Reinvent the Core Model) should reposition the core business of the enterprise, adapting the current (or legacy) business model to the altered marketplace. For higher education this means adapting existing programs, experiences, and outcomes to be competitive with emerging alternatives.
- Transformation Track B (Discover Future Business Model) should create a separate disruptive business to develop innovations that will become the source of future growth. For higher education this means discovering offerings to address new or unmet value propositions that were not possible in the past but that are now possible in the Web 3.0 world of the 21st-century Knowledge Age.

The demand for significant change in American higher education will require most, if not all, institutions to adopt variations of the two-track model to thrive in the years ahead. At the very least, institutions will need to take seriously the adaptations required by Track A in order for their legacy programs and experiences to remain competitive. (Norris et al. 2013)

### **Blow Up the Current Business Model**

President Paul LeBlanc of Southern New Hampshire University(SNHU) is approaching transformative change in this very manner. SNHU invites students to choose the format that works for them: traditional on campus daytime programs; evening and weekend part-time and hybrid courses on location at regional centers; and courses and programs offered through the Center for Online and Continuing Education. The innovative approach to distance learning has made them the nation's fastest-growing online school. In addition, SNHU recently received authorization to provide competency-based education. [\[9\]](#)

SNHU is busy questioning the shape of its own future. “We want to create the business model that blows up our current business model,” LeBlanc says, “because if we don't, someone else will.” The brand-new Innovation Lab intends to roll out a new degree program this fall. Based in part on free Creative Commons-licensed open educational resources that can be delivered on e-readers, the program will be self-paced and will give students access to multiple kinds of support: peers online, faculty experts, and people from their local communities. LeBlanc envisions making the learning materials available for free, much like MIT's Open Courseware; students would pay only for faculty time if they need it and for competency-based assessments, including portfolio reviews, in order to get course credit.” [\[10\]](#)

Southern New Hampshire University has set the course to be the transformative institution. In so doing, the leadership established three separate educational models with three separate business models to support each. This is a variation on Gilbert, Eyring and Foster’s Transformation Track A and Transformation Track B. Track A is claiming a creative space in online education with multiple levels of support for learners. Track B is the competency-based model that requires a totally new approach to education in response to the rapidly changing skills, knowledge and competencies required in th 21st Century Knowledge Age. This approach by SNHU is brilliant in that other institutions have tried to add educational models to the existing traditional one; in essence, bolting the new on to the old, only to have it fail. As has been the case, the new cannot exist bolted on to the old policies, practices and culture. In order for the new to thrive, it needs a space, model and culture that support the unique existence rather than competing with the traditional model.

### **Three-Part Approach to Reinvention**

After determining a strategy mapping for reinvention based on Track A and Track B models, the next step is to build the approach for reinvention.

First, build an analytics foundation with ready access to data, analysis and predictive analytics that will enable the institution to know where students are, where they need to go and how to get there. The smart systems are improving students’ choices and matching their interests, skills and aspirations with college and majors that better



fit their needs. Leaders need to assess what their data and analytics capacities are and determine what they need to do to improve data, the enterprise supporting data, the leadership to invest and sustain the efforts, the technical infrastructure and the people needed to run the data and analytics enterprise for the institution.

Second, assess policies and practices to see where institution can improve its rules to enhance student success. The Linking Institutional Policies to Student Success Center has found that even when campuses may have many high impact practices in place, they have small percentages of students participating. If the practices are known to improve all students' chances for success then it is critical to build the student success service infrastructure to insure all students participate in orientation, first year experiences, mentoring and advising, ongoing major and career exploration and decisions.

Third, build an environment that welcomes and supports open discussions regarding change innovation and reinvention. In the end, the major change factor is developing a culture that can embrace and implement change. In his essay "The Challenge to Deep Change: A Brief Cultural History of Higher Education," Sanford Shugart (2012) points out that "culture trumps strategy" (p. 2) and that culture-changing leadership must take seriously the deep roots of the attitudes and behavior of faculty and those institutional leaders who have come up through the faculty. It is not surprising that past successful efforts to change strategies, business models, and best practices have either created new institutions where new approaches could be developed or have focused on new offerings that were not seen as substitutes for core institutional programs. Leaders will need to create strategy maps for sustainability. They will need to assess what continues to be important to educating learners. They will also need to assess what policies and practices support or hinder student success.

## Conclusion

Where do leaders see their institutions in the future? Do they have teams exploring new or different approaches that can improve access, success and student completion... better meet the vision and mission of the institution? These may include expanding online education, serving different learner populations in different ways, building student success systems that can maximize student learning and engagement, unbundling education into smaller "bursts of knowledge" that might be easier to understand, or moving to competency-based education. These are already examples being deployed to improve student learning. What's next?

Leaders must take this call to change culture very seriously. In order for education to meet the growing need for improving student access and success to more underprepared students, the call requires new models, new thinking and a new culture. Every leader must look at whether sustainability will be supported by small, evolutionary changes where we think we can wait out the latest tsunamis of change or where we boldly embrace the future that clearly meets students where they are and takes them to where they need to go to be successful, contributing citizens of a global community.

## Notes

[1] <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM1241P.pdf>

[2] NSSE Institute Project DEEP Related Papers

[3] <http://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm>

[4] <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/GradRateCalculator.php>

[5] <http://www.higherlearningcommission.org/Information-for-Institutions/criteria-and-core-components.html?highlight=WyJwZXJzaXN0ZW5jZSIsImNvbXBsZXRpb24iXQ>

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# Bridging the Gap

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**Sara Dziuk, Anna Rockne, and Brooke Hanson**

LaCresia graduated from college in 2012. She was the first in a family where graduating from high school was an uncommon achievement. Her family was trapped in a cycle of generational poverty. With no guides, no reason to think they could afford to go to college, none of LaCresia's siblings did. LaCresia worked long hours throughout high school to help her family pay the bills. There just wasn't space in her life to focus on school and her grades made college seem even further out of reach.

Today only 8 percent of low-income students earn a college degree by age 24. This is a social injustice and a threat to the health of our economy as more and more jobs require a college degree. It's critical that we make a college education accessible for every student regardless of their family's income. There are unique challenges facing liberal arts colleges in serving low-income students, but they possess the unique assets to bridge the gap.

As executive director of College Possible, I have seen that it IS possible to bridge the gap. College Possible students are graduating at the same rate as their peers from all income levels, effectively closing the educational achievement gap. College Possible is a national nonprofit making college admission and success possible for low-income students. Our award-winning model partners idealistic Service Corps members with low-income students to guide them through everything from ACT prep and college applications to FAFSA renewal and applying for internships and jobs. With our support College Possible students are five times more likely to graduate from college than other low-income students.

On average 98 percent of College Possible students earn admission to college and 92 percent go on to enroll – this is the same rate that high-income students enroll in college nationwide. For our students who choose to attend private liberal arts colleges, their six-year graduation rate is 64 percent, compared to 67 percent nationally for students from all income levels as reported by the U.S. Department of Education. This tells me we can do better to help all students persist in college, not only those from low-income backgrounds.

But what about those low-income students that don't have a program like College Possible supporting them through college graduation? The odds are stacked against them. Today only 1 in 11 will reach their ultimate goal of earning their degree. So what's getting in their way?

First, finances. Often the biggest challenge to low-income students enrolling or persisting in college is finances. They may experience sticker shock, not realizing what financial aid is available, and never apply in the first place. Or they may not realize they need to renew their FAFSA and they don't know where to turn for help. They may even need to work to support their family and struggle to balance schoolwork with family needs.

Second, culture shock. The transition to college is challenging for low-income students, who often go through culture shock when they find themselves surrounded by few people who share similar backgrounds. The transition is even more challenging for first generation college students. Their families may be proud of their accomplishments but can't offer any help along the way. These students can feel isolated if they grew up in a community that lacked a college-going culture and their peers aren't going through the same things they are. They lack a guide to help them navigate the resources on their campus, and the self-assuredness and skills to navigate the system and self-advocate.

When LaCresia first set foot on the Concordia College campus, she realized how different her future would be from her past:

It was unlike any place I had ever seen before. It was so peaceful and it just had this calm that I had never experienced amid so much chaos. In college I went to a farm, I saw the stars for the first time, I got to travel abroad. I had never been on an airplane before. All of these phenomenal experiences that without College Possible I never would have been able to have. I would never have been able to navigate through the system of applying for college without someone supporting me and helping me along the way. Whenever I think back to those experiences it's like, "How did I end up here? How did I, who didn't get

good grades, who came from a deep, engrained cycle of poverty, from a family having babies at 14 and 15 years old, come to this affluent community that I fit in and I love?"

But LaCresia didn't fit in immediately. Her first year was incredibly challenging as she adjusted to life on campus in a small town. She found her niche on campus sophomore year after taking an introductory social work class and falling in love with her major.

Third, lack of cultural capital. To someone who hasn't been in their shoes, it can seem that when a student from a low-income background becomes isolated it's because they aren't trying to get involved or they're underprepared for college. But in reality they lack the cultural capital to navigate this new world – they don't speak the language and in some ways they may feel that they have to leave behind parts of their identity to fit in. When they are already feeling uncertain that they belong in college at all, putting themselves out there or asking for help doesn't feel safe.

We know that private liberal arts colleges are a wonderful place for College Possible students – our students' graduation rates on these campuses are higher on average than at other types of institutions.

What can small liberal arts colleges uniquely provide to help low-income students thrive?

First, community. Liberal arts campuses come with a sense of community and abundant resources like multicultural programs targeted at reaching underrepresented students. We've heard from some students that they felt uncomfortable being singled out or separated from their white peers, but others found their college family through multicultural programming. A support structure of peers, professors and staff is crucial. Encourage staff and professors to make an effort to reach out to students who don't seem engaged on campus. Family obligations, an off-campus job or financial limitations that require a student to live at home may make it impossible for them to form deep bonds on campus through organizations or residential programs. Think about ways to build community among commuter students.

Our college coaches work one-on-one with students, helping them learn the unwritten rules and making sure they know what resources are available to them and feel comfortable taking advantage of them. A student navigating these systems on their own may need a support structure to help them become strong self-advocates. Creating a mentoring program to pair first-years with older students or alumni could help students develop a network of support. Encourage College Possible students on your campus to form a network of support with each other.

Second, financial aid. While sticker prices are higher, with financial aid private liberal arts colleges can be a better fit financially than some state schools. Work to prevent sticker shock by showing examples of aid packages for students with a low expected family contribution. Offer scholarships that are need-based rather than merit-based keeping in mind that if merit is determined based on test scores or GPA's, low-income students will be at a disadvantage if their strengths aren't reflected in numbers. For this same reason boasting high average ACT/SAT scores and GPA's alone may alienate prospective students who could bring assets beyond numbers to your campus. Think about other ways to reflect the caliber of the college.

Third, academic excellence. Private liberal arts colleges provide so many resources to help students thrive in their classes. Encourage tutoring centers and other support services to reach out to students in case they are afraid to seek out the help that they need. Host an open house for students to meet the staff. Make sure resources are available at times when students are most apt to use them, including evenings and weekends. Make sure they are just as accessible for commuting students – could they email a paper in or call for help with a math assignment over the phone? Building relationships with professors will help students feel connected to your campus. Make sure first-years learn why and how to attend their professors' office hours. For a student who is struggling, making that effort to show the professor they're engaged, even if their participation or work doesn't seem strong, is crucial.

We are fortunate to have so many high-caliber liberal arts colleges in Minnesota and across the country that are focused on attracting more low-income students and supporting them through graduation. It's important to know that if you bridge the gap, students from low-income backgrounds will thrive and add incredible value to your campus. LaCresia graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead in 2012 with a double major in sociology and social work. Today she is a social worker serving teens who have experienced abuse. She takes pride in being a trusted role model for her clients, and telling them things her College Possible coach told her.

"It's amazing to see that thanks to College Possible this generational poverty can be beat," LaCresia says.

“Luckily for me and my peers, we were able to join a program that allowed us to break these chains.”

Join us in ensuring the future of America’s children is determined solely by their talent, motivation and effort. You have the power to help students like LaCresia live a life they would never have access to without a college degree.

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# Experiential Workplace Education: Missing Piece of a Liberal Arts Education

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**Ryan LaHurd**

Nearly every week my inbox receives a dozen or so college alumni magazines and higher education publications. In the past year or so, these periodicals have included numerous essays arguing that the so-called “crisis in liberal arts education” can be solved by better marketing. If colleges would tell their story better, the authors contend, enrollments would rise and the “narrow career-mindedness” of parents and prospective students would be overcome.

Indeed, in the past, I myself -- as a professor, a dean and a president on liberal arts college campuses -- made similar arguments. A dozen years away from life as a liberal arts college president, however, I have expanded my view. While I still think that liberal arts colleges can do much better at apologetics, my recent experience running an experiential professional development program for college students has shown me a gap in the approach most colleges use to prepare students for life after graduation.

I now think that not only the story being told has to change; colleges have to change as well.

No one who has not done the job really knows how difficult being a college president is. As in most leadership positions -- probably more so for college presidents than others -- the hardest part is creating change. Despite their cultural reputation for liberalism, colleges are essentially conservative places. The good news is that the change I recommend can potentially be easy to make because it fits so well with the values and traditions of liberal arts colleges and offers no real threat to those values.

I went to school at age five and never stopped being involved fulltime with one campus or another until over fifty years later. Hence, I find it awkward to admit having learned what I think is a partial solution to the “crisis in liberal arts education” not from an academic but from a business leader.

As president of the Chicago-based James S. Kemper Foundation, I have the privilege of administering and being actively involved in the sixty-five-year-old Kemper Scholars Program. The Foundation’s flagship program, it is based on the philosophy of James Scott Kemper, founder of the former Kemper Insurance Companies, who also created and funded the foundation.

While the James S. Kemper Foundation makes grants, its main mission from the beginning has been to support the Kemper Scholars Program. This operational effort responded to one of Mr. Kemper’s most strongly held beliefs: liberally educated persons are the best candidates for organizational leadership and make the best employees. Mr. Kemper once stated that he did not seek to hire people who had all the answers, but preferred those who knew which questions to ask and possessed the intellectual ability to seek the answers. (Now there is a notion that could find its way fruitfully into a revised retelling of the value of a liberal arts education!)

The Kemper Scholars Program each year supports sixty students from sixteen liberal arts campuses across the country through scholarship assistance, active mentorship, and paid summer internships. It encourages and assists students with an education in the liberal arts and sciences to make the transition to positions of leadership in American for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

For most of my career on liberal arts college campuses, I devised various ways to argue the value and importance of an education in the liberal arts and sciences. Despite pressure to accept a contrary view, I have always held that a liberal arts education’s essential value lies within the studies themselves even though it additionally has many applications. I also know from experience that an often-contentious quarrel occurs on many liberal arts college campuses between proponents of the so-called pure liberal arts and proponents of studies in the professions.

The Foundation’s experience with Kemper Scholars has demonstrated that no such conflict -- but rather mutual

support -- actually exists. James S. Kemper was wise in recognizing that active involvement with professional life allows students to experience the value and applicability of their liberal arts education.

Based on what the Foundation has learned over the past six-and-one-half decades, I suggest that what is missing from most liberal arts colleges is the easy opportunity -- perhaps better, the requirement -- that students become experientially involved in internships or mentored work during the years they are students.

Following are some findings from the long experience of the Kemper Scholars Program, that support my recommendation:

Like anyone else, students need to understand a profession before they can imagine doing it themselves. Few students have any experience of what it means to be a leader in an organization outside of a campus. When students experience the role through direct involvement, they can see it as a possibility for their own future. The program has seen a number of music and theatre performance majors recognize the possibility of making a career managing arts organizations. Experiential professional internships broaden their choices and possibilities by showing them that their liberal arts education has, in fact, prepared them for many career roles. Understandably, this is not something they will, or necessarily should, learn in the classroom. Such experience is not the purpose of academic courses, and few faculty have themselves had career experience outside the academy. Observations or interviews of professionals at work, such as "job shadowing" programs, are really an academic exercise and are not a substitute for direct experience.

Professional experience enhances students' academic experience. Even students with very high grade point averages and with genuine success in the academic environment, express great excitement and satisfaction and an enhanced sense of self-confidence and motivation when they are told by their internship supervisors that they have accomplished a workplace task with professionalism. Few students have tested their work-related abilities beyond the campus. Experiential internships give students renewed energy for and satisfaction with their education because they see that it has worked. A common refrain of Kemper Scholars is something like "Wow, I didn't know I could do that until I did it," when, for example, they are told they have written a very professional report.

The professional world can play a critical role in bolstering liberal arts education. Most CEOs of organizations express an appreciation and preference for employees with broad, liberal arts backgrounds because they are curious and analytical, good at communicating and solving problems, adaptable, and ethically aware. At the same time, it is clear that few of such CEOs transmit these values to those in their human resource departments who hire recent college graduates. Hiring personnel tend to value specific technical skills over broad educational background. Unfortunately, theirs is the message seniors in the job market bring back to their colleagues on campus after interviewing for jobs. Liberal arts interns show professionals what their education has given them while learning firsthand the marketplace value of what they have learned. In addition, they often get to work with supervisors who have liberal arts backgrounds similar to their own. Kemper Scholars are encouraged to ask their work supervisors to tell the story of their own career path. Students are often surprised to find that the mentor they assumed had been a business major studied philosophy instead.

Encouraging students to be reflective about their work experience is a valuable tool. The Kemper Scholars Program requires students to reflect formally about how their experience in internship placements relates to and draws upon their college academic work, about what they are learning regarding themselves and other people, and about what they have yet to learn. This technique turns out to be a most valuable pedagogical and developmental tool. Students learn to apply, analyze, and synthesize by using their experience as the subject. They make astute and positive observations about their college academic work, often expressing great appreciation for what they learned in the classroom. Many redraft their planned curriculum to include courses like Logic, Ethics, or Public Speaking that will fill the gaps in what now looks like a narrower education than they had previously assumed.

Students in all academic fields can benefit from professional experience. Colleges have already demonstrated the value of experiential education on campus in majors like Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Theatre, and Music. No one thinks students have adequately completed a major in these fields unless they have been in the laboratory, on stage, or in the practice room or studio. Before graduating, they are expected to have done the things that professionals working in those fields in the non-academic world actually do. In many majors of the humanities and social sciences, however, rarely do students experience what professionals other than academics do. Their experience is often limited to writing papers and making scholarly arguments akin to those in academic journals. It is difficult or impossible for these students to see the connection between their education and some future career unless they plan

to be a professor.

Students need not, and often should not, complete internships obviously related to their major area of study. In the rare instances when humanities and social science students do complete internships, they are nearly always led to discipline-related experiences. History majors are guided to internships at the history museum; English majors, to newspapers or advertising agencies; Philosophy majors, to a hospital ethics panel. This limited view plays into the hands of the cultural mythology that says humanities majors will end up flipping hamburgers because they are prepared to do so little. Our approach in the Kemper Scholars Program places students in management areas in internships that draw on the widest variety of skills and abilities, those garnered through a liberal arts education. Although students are often attracted to what they know best, we generally discourage them from working in an organization related to their major. The result is that students come to understand that with a History, English, or Philosophy major they are prepared to work in just about any kind of management or leadership position.

Making internships credit-bearing often complicates the situation. While I understand the various pedagogical and economic reasons why colleges make internships credit-bearing academic courses, I would argue that doing so creates more problems than it solves. Understandably, faculties want to maintain control over anything that gains college credit. However, faculty often lack time and experience to oversee internships profitably. Determining how to give faculty credit for the work involved in overseeing work experience can become complicated and expensive. Because most faculty cannot visit students regularly at their internship sites, they often base their evaluation on an academic paper students write after their internship. Such an assessment lacks the kind of feedback about a student's professional readiness that could be most helpful, and it assesses not workplace, but academic skills. Workplace supervisors and mentors, perhaps with training from college staff, are the best persons to assess students' experience and learning in an internship and the best persons to shape their workplace behavior. I know of no evidence that argues for the value of having an internship listed on a transcript. Transcripts are for the academy; the résumé is the appropriate "transcript" for employment. Work experiences and accomplishments are properly listed there.

All of these points, demonstrated by the success of the Kemper Scholars Program, are valuable, I think. But they are less important than the overarching principle I am trying to argue: that a liberal arts education will be enhanced, supported, and completed by the active involvement of students in the workplace during their college years. Further, such an addition will contribute to overcoming some of the most common criticisms with which liberal arts colleges must deal today.

In my time on campuses, I observed that efforts to argue abstract correspondences of usefulness between liberal arts courses or majors and professional skills are often demeaning to both the liberal arts and the professions. I mean, for example, something like telling students: "English majors are educated to be good writers, and many jobs require communication skills. An English major could help you get a job." Such a statement may be true, but it gives a severely limited view of the relationship between a liberal arts education and a professional career.

I have learned from working with college students in an experiential program that intensive internships in a professional environment are not a threat to liberal arts education but a strong argument for its value. Experiential education does not become a demonstration of a liberal arts education's incompleteness. It turns out to be a testing, shaping and proving -- not so much of the liberal arts education but of the liberally educated person. Experience in the workplace makes students appreciate the deeply useful nature of their education.

In the professional workplace with challenging work to do and a helpful mentors, students experience what they can do and cannot do (usually much more of the former), and what they know and do not know. In their reflection, they come to see how much they have learned in school and how much they yet need to learn. They are often surprised by the skills they actually need and use as opposed to those they had imagined they would need and use.

Perhaps the best illustration I can think of occurred a few years ago at our annual conference during which students make public presentations about what they learned in their internships during the summer. A communications major who had worked at a public television station told his fellow scholars that before that experience he had thought he would have most use for his communications courses during his internship. In fact, he said, the course he used most turned out to be one in theology because it had taught him to be a critical thinker, and his work had demanded that he solve many complex situations on the fly.

As his comment illustrates, through work students come to know experientially that their liberal arts education is valuable because they themselves -- the products of such an education -- are valuable to their supervisors and



organizations. They can articulate exactly how their education has developed them so far. They experience the gaps in their education and make plans to fill the gaps when they get back to campus. They apply their education beyond the tasks of the job into such areas as analyzing organizational culture, ethical behavior and human interactions in the workplace. They see that most specific skills, like how to prepare a budget, can be learned on the job, while general skills, like correct speaking and writing, are developed over time and must be brought to the job.

Based on my work with the Kemper Scholars Program over the past eight years, I assert that the most persuasive argument for the value of a liberal education will happen in experience more than in the classroom, college publications, or speeches by college leaders. It will be better for colleges if such experience happens well before students graduate and under the college's guidance.

I once overheard a college professor answering the question of parents of a prospective student about whether as a philosophy major their son would learn anything useful for a career after college. "Well," said the professor with a grin, "he'll have something to talk about at cocktail parties." I know scores of students with whom I have worked who could offer a much more astute response.

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# A Primer for Strategic Reinvention

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**L. Jay Lemons**

*What follows is an abridged version of a strategic planning primer that I created for the Susquehanna University Board of Trustees and campus community.*

*Every strategic planning effort is shaped by a unique set of institutional and external opportunities and constraints. The current challenges facing higher education made it especially important to be knowledgeable about the ways our enterprise is changing and to consider how these forces might facilitate the fulfillment of our mission or lead to its evolution.*

*This primer laid the groundwork for an inclusive planning process in which the campus community is contributing to an examination of our mission and guiding values, the development of the strategic priorities and initiatives to support that mission, and the specific outcomes, actions, and benchmarks necessary to realize them.*

## **Introduction**

The contemporary landscape for colleges and universities, especially private liberal arts colleges, appears particularly perilous. Reports chronicling economic challenges, technological change and demographic shifts all contribute to an environment where some are questioning the value of higher education and the viability of traditional institutions. As but one extreme example, billionaire Mark Cuban has suggested to high school students and their parents that they need to seriously consider whether the colleges they are interested in will exist by the time that they are ready to graduate (2013).

Against this backdrop, it is important to note that institutions of higher education, including liberal arts colleges like Susquehanna, are among the most enduring organizations of human kind. These are remarkably resilient institutions. Yet they are also regularly accused of resisting change and ordering and conducting themselves in the medieval-style established more than 800 years ago with the founding of the first universities at Cambridge, Oxford, Paris and Bologna. Fred Rudolph, in *The American College and University: A History*, chronicles the development of American higher education from the colonial colleges through the advent of community colleges. Rudolph's work documents the paradox that while these institutions have been conservative with regard to change they have also been highly adaptable (1962).

We need look no further than our own beloved liberal arts institutions for evidence to support this paradox. Indeed, the changes at Susquehanna University in the past 50-60 years, or even the past 25-30 years, are truly remarkable. Among the recent changes are an innovative and highly progressive new curriculum required of all students, a larger and much more diverse student body, growth in the number of faculty and staff serving our students and major building and land additions to the Susquehanna campus. We are an institution where the nexus of learning is bound up in the relationships between professors (and others) and students in what Lafayette University President Dan Weiss calls a "hand-tooled education" (2012). We remain an institution where the physical campus is a learning tool in its own right and facilitates the holistic learning environment we prize. In addition, we remain an institution dedicated to producing citizen leaders who are expected to contribute to the betterment of society.

Yet questions remain about what the future will hold for liberal arts colleges. The questions are serious ones centering on affordability, effectiveness, efficiency and whether the value added for this type of experience is worth the investment for our students and their families. Moreover, there are emergent forms of accessing knowledge or content that may prove to compete with, complement, or potentially replace some of what we do.

At Susquehanna University, we enter 2014 both more prosperous than we have ever been but also with some vulnerability and attendant budgetary constraints as a result of student recruitment variability and a dip in our historically outstanding student retention performance. Susquehanna has experienced such cycles many times in the

past and the modesty of our long-term resource base (endowment) was a likely catalyst for the change and adaptation that took place.

Susquehanna has rigorously embraced strategic planning during the past 30 years through a series of three to five year planning documents. In the periods following these episodic planning processes, disciplined attention by the university community and trustees guided institutional thinking and resource allocation in achieving plan goals. These efforts affected every aspect of the institution and Susquehanna is quantitatively and qualitatively stronger as a result.

Given the turbulent economic environment in 2008-9 when we last engaged in a strategic planning process, we opted to move from a five-year planning time horizon to a three-year model. This was later extended to four years to ensure coordination of our planning efforts with our decennial evaluation by the Middle States Association's Commission on Higher Education. This change was also influenced by the work of higher education governance expert Dick Chait and others who champion the benefits of dynamic and on-going strategic thinking as opposed to over dependency on episodic strategic planning (Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2004, pp. 56-65).

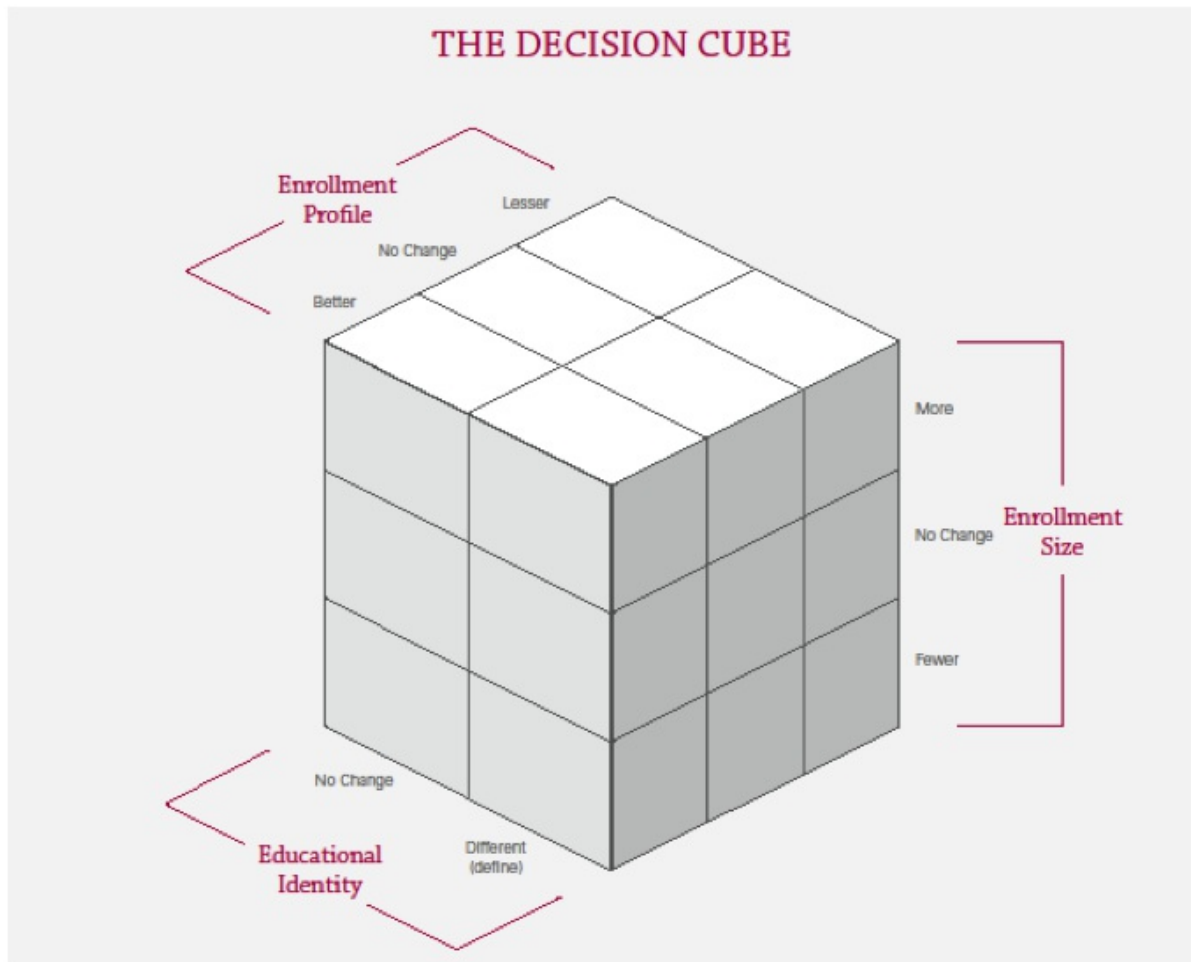
In fall 2012, we began the *Future of the Academy* series as a way of trying to stay abreast of changes that are impacting higher education on a regular and on-going basis rather than relying solely on traditional planning cycles. We will continue this series in the years ahead to enrich our understanding of the environment and to engage the community in strategic thinking. As we approach a new planning cycle, in addition to surveying the current developments and considering strategic change for the next three to five years, we will be well served to look forward to where we collectively want to move Susquehanna by the year 2020 and beyond.

While there are critical tactical changes to be implemented with regard to our recruitment, retention, and communication efforts, these are intended to be immediate responses to the short-term challenges of under-enrollment. Resolving these challenges is important and urgent work; however, our planning process needs to look beyond the immediate and seek to consider how the current winds of change may require greater adaptation by Susquehanna.

During a visit to campus for the *Future of the Academy* series this past year, Jeff Selingo, editor at large of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and author of *College (Un)bound: The Future of Higher Education and What it Means for Students*, remarked that he believes colleges and universities are overestimating the speed of change that will come to higher education and underestimating the extent of the change (2013). This reinforces the wisdom of attending to change while engaging in longer-term strategic thinking, as there is not yet an emergent consensus in the exploding literature about the future of higher education. It is valuable to know and understand the developments and to think about the impacts over a longer time horizon than simply limiting ourselves to three to five-year plans. Yet there is great value to the discipline of strategic planning processes, which have served Susquehanna University so well during the past four decades.

### **Framework, questions and time schedule for strategic planning**

The planning process in which we will engage may well involve consideration of a larger number of possible options than any previous planning effort. It will be a highly inclusive process that will include trustees, faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni and friends. As we begin this process, it will be necessary to have a framework for evaluating the many ideas that will emerge. Jon McGee is the vice president for planning and public affairs at the College of St. Benedict's and St. John's University. In a piece on the impact of disruption on colleges and universities, McGee shares a framework developed by the Lawlor Group for considering adaptation to change based on considerations related to institutional size, profile and identity. He argues that size, profile and identity define the market and mission dimensions that must be considered in thinking about change or adaptation.



*Figure 1. A Contextual Tool for Addressing Disruptive Adaptation: The Decision Cube. (McGee, 2012, p. 7)*

McGee further posits that evaluation of change in light of those characteristics must be defined by financial requirements, program requirements, recruitment requirements and communications requirements. The principle challenge for institutions McGee asserts is to “determine whether their current market position is sustainable” (2012, p. 9). Whether utilizing a framework such as McGee’s or some other, there will be value in using a tool for evaluating suggestions and ideas about the major themes that emerge from campus wide discussions. Other frameworks may be of help to us such as one from health care that uses a rubric that evaluates change through the prism of quality, access, and cost/efficiency.

There may also be value in developing a set of guiding questions that we might return to during the course of the planning process. These might include McGee’s questions regarding the sustainability of our current market position as well as explorations about how possible alternatives square with our mission, retain a focus on our students and their learning, and help assure the resources needed to fulfill our mission.

## Conclusion

Significant change and transformation lies ahead for the higher education landscape. Technological advances and demographic, social, political, and economic forces will drive this change. The degree and specifics of that change are unknowable at the present time. However, they will inevitably have an impact on Susquehanna and how we fulfill our mission.

While many prognosticators expect this to be an epochal period of change, we should remember that these are not

the first such predictions of significant tumult and disruption. Nor is it safe to dismiss the possibility of cataclysmic change. It is prudent to be attending to the possible changes in the higher education landscape and to be considering their impact on Susquehanna. It is about balancing strategic planning with strategic thinking.

Our present circumstances are not acceptable or sustainable. We must restore financial equilibrium by improving our recruitment and retention of students. We must understand how all areas of university activity can be strengthened. As we consider and plan for the future, we must not lose focus on the students who are with us now.

Let me close by revisiting the work of Jim Collins, which former Board Chair Terry March embraced and used to guide the work of the Board. From his research on highly successful organizations, Collins concluded that “greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline” (2005, p. 31).

Whatever initiatives emerge and whatever direction Susquehanna moves as a result of our planning deliberations, may we be mindful that it is not circumstance but conscious choice and discipline that will move us toward our goals. Ultimately, that is the benefit of both strategic planning and strategic thinking and the most certain way we can assure the future of our great institutions.

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# Civic Education for the Strategic Reinvention of Liberal Arts Colleges

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**Richard Guarasci**

We have entered an age of global transformation that is ushering dramatic shifts in economic, technological and political exigencies. Undergraduate residential liberal arts colleges are far from immune to these social forces. We are facing severe challenges threatening our historic commitment in preparing students to become open minded, engaged and broadly educated citizens. In the everyday campus dilemmas, we confront a variety of forces involving issues of college access, demographic change, campus diversity and social equity, tuition pricing and affordability, governmental regulation, dramatic technological change and outright challenges to the way we teach, how students learn and how we best deliver quality education. More punitive, too many opinion shapers are questioning the mission and core values of liberal learning, especially in the arts and humanities.

We also live in a time of expanding inequalities oddly mixed within an era of seemingly ubiquitous communication and ever expanding social media. Never have the failures as well as the potential of human possibilities been so transparent. But it is also a moment when we have historic opportunities for remarkable breakthroughs in human knowledge counter posed with a rising tide of global ethnocentrism and anti-intellectualism. All of these factors require deep reflection regarding the essential elements of liberal education as well as a reassessment of how to present them for maximum effect. What is it that distinguishes liberal arts education at this particular historical moment? What are our unique and needed attributes? How do we best reinvent our institutions for this global moment?

In the American context, reinvention necessitates a return to our founding mission of educating students for comprehensive knowledge, cosmopolitan thinking and democratic citizenship. Liberal arts colleges mostly were founded by religious institutions emphasizing spirituality and self meaning. But they were American colleges founded just before or soon following the origins of the American Republic, or later, following the debacle of a Civil War that would have ended the American experiment with democracy as we know it. In both cases the conjunction of a liberal education and engaged citizenship were seen as necessities for America's economic and social progress. Independent thinking, knowledge of the breadth and depth of the human experience and social responsibility were understood to be essential elements for an educated person and essential for a democratic culture. Today's global challenge necessitates the development of leaders, far and wide, global and local, who can foster a politics, economics and culture that will lead us to social solutions, scientific advances and cultural awareness. The goal of a liberal education is to "liberate" individuals and nurture their societies so that the best of human possibilities overwhelm those human instincts that yield to violence, hatred and ignorance. This renewal of our mission asserts that a particular emphasis on the civic component of liberal education is now an imperative for our time. At their core these institutions were founded to become beacons of knowledge in search of the liberated self and the good society. The civic component of liberal education defines the societal promise that this form of higher learning at its core is a public good. Rediscovering the civic remains the niche element of this form of learning.

When understood in this way, civic learning becomes a strategic reinvention as well as a moral and intellectual element of the liberal arts college. It restores our proper place in society as well as grounding learning within what we call at Wagner College "the practical liberal arts." Wagner emphasizes the interplay between theory and practice, learning and location, classroom texts and experiential learning. In so many ways this paradigm integrates student learning as well as faculty research around the creation and application of knowledge, addressing concrete problems embedded in our local and global community partnerships.

Rejecting the false divide between the Platonist vision of learning for its intrinsic value and neo-Deweyian assertion that learning only occurs in applied settings, Wagner's practical liberal arts reconciles these different modes of learning through a four year interdisciplinary curriculum, student learning communities, civic engagement and reflective practice. More specifically, in 1998 the Wagner Faculty led by its provost adopted the Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts, requiring all entering students to complete specific first year, intermediate and senior

programs in addition to the usual majors and core requirements.

In their fall semester all first year students select from one of 20+ learning communities that include two disciplinary courses organized around a common theme and a reflective tutorial (RFT) that includes a roster of integrated writing assignments, speaking events, and 30+ hours of experiential learning directly related to the operational theme connecting the two disciplinary courses. I participated in the first year program (FYP) in its early years. I taught a political science course for 24 first year students (typical size for the FYP), and my English department teaching colleague taught the cohort class on the introduction to American Literature. I taught "Democracy and Diversity" and we focused on the different American ethnic experiences in the 19th and 20th centuries. We fully integrated the two disciplinary courses. For instance, when I would focus on particular African American political and social experiences, my colleague would be discussing the literature of, by and about African Americans at the same time with exactly and only the same students. Like all the RFT's, we each taught 12 of these students in our respective tutorials which also met weekly. We maintained the same vigorous writing and speaking program, and we occasionally merged these tutorial groups for a common discussion, speaker or film.

In addition, we placed our students in the field with contemporary immigrant community organizations within Dominican, Mexican and Liberian communities on Staten Island, comparing their respective experiences as newcomers to New York with each other and with the different 19th and 20th century immigrants studied in our classrooms. They engaged in civic work within these organizations. A few were placed at Ellis Island, the essential museum of immigrant life in New York, so that they would understand how memory and history are communicated and interpreted. Every freshman student would be able to select from a menu of 19 other FYP learning communities organized around interesting combinations of disciplines, each framed on integrating themes chosen by the participating faculty teams. Each of these faculty teams stays together for at least three consecutive years as a means of building pedagogical skills and program stability. The FYP Faculty are all tenure track colleagues and in addition to their respective traditional departmental affiliations they are members of the FYP Faculty as well where they elect a coordinator, make educational policy and assess each other, the program and student outcomes.

This pattern repeats in the intermediate program and again in the senior program, the latter a learning community in the student's major. Each academic department offers a combination of a capstone course, senior RFT, senior thesis or project, and 100 hours of experiential learning.

Since 2006, Wagner added the civic engagement program within the Wagner Plan. The CE program maintains curricular, co-curricular and extra curricular components. The program is predicated on linking student disciplinary learning with civic competency and community impact. In order to move beyond the idiosyncratic model of service learning with its episodic entry and exit from the community based on the rhythms of academic life, Wagner designed a model comprehensive community partnership. Here students can opt for courses that follow and build on one another around particular policy areas in a local neighborhood, Port Richmond on Staten Island in New York City. In addition, students participate in intentionally aligned co-curricular programs within Port Richmond that track these policy areas. Beyond that, extra curricular voluntary service from clubs, organizations and teams allows for additional involvement as direct service.

The community is made up of 60% Mexican immigrants, 20% African Americans, and the remainder white working class New Yorkers. The expected recurring pathologies of inner city life haunt Port Richmond; these include dramatic health inequalities, unacceptable learning outcomes and persistent dropout rates, fatigued local economies absent meaningful employment opportunities for personal advancement and a plethora of issues surrounding a very high number of undocumented hard working, family oriented new immigrants. Joining with the community in a formal partnership model, our goal is to join a liberal education with an active engagement of moral purpose and reflective civic practice. To us the point of a liberal education is to liberate individuals so that they learn how to let knowledge serve society. Students not only identify and engage the community's challenges as partners but they soon identify the usually unrecognized rich assets within the community and their non-profit organizations. Schools, churches, foundations, and hospitals all play a role as anchor institutions within Port Richmond. Students develop a genuine sense of empathy and reciprocity with their new neighbors. Students will sometimes identify these new learning sites as another home for them, one filled with new opportunities to learn, and as one recently said, "a second important faculty from which to grow and learn." Because of the consistent community presence of the students, faculty and administrators working with and in the community, Port Richmond feels the light of more attention and an increased sense of hope within the existing partner organizations. While many obstacles are ever present and with the need for constant vigilance and assessment of our roles, practice and impact, Wagner's commitment remains resilient. This work is not for those interested in public relations gains or half-hearted, well-

intended efforts. It requires much planning and heavy lifting. It becomes a very high priority. It has proven to be a pivotal part of the renewal of the College and a definite asset to our local neighborhood and borough.

This reinvention has made a tremendous impact. Over 15 years of The Wagner Plan, our educational model transformed what was once a predominately nondescript urban commuter institution into a national residential institution with a clear mission and focused educational program. All of our educational and fiscal metrics demonstrate remarkable growth and success. Once a school with high attrition rates and predominately a local student body, Wagner now is a selective institution with students from 49 states, 29 countries, an 84% student retention rate and remarkable demonstrated student outcomes indicative of a first rate undergraduate residential liberal arts college. In 2002, the audited financial statements listed the College's endowment as \$4 million and it's debt at \$45 million. Today the endowment is over \$80 million and the overall fiscal position is the strongest by far in its 130-year institutional history. Students seek out Wagner from all 50 states citing the Wagner Plan, New York City and our civic engagement model as their most oft mentioned reasons to attend.

The civic purpose and practice of this College resonates with prospective students and their families. They want a deep and engaged educational life during college. Like our liberal arts sister institutions, our students struggle with issues of affordability and worry about developing meaningful careers after Wagner. Wagner is demonstrating the links between civic engagement, college success and significantly desirable employment skills. The civic is becoming the signature for learning at Wagner. More of our faculty are aligning their teaching with community issues as well as positioning their research in these directions.

The full impact of the civic focus at Wagner is the change in the campus ethos. Students most often define their success around civic accomplishments as well as academic achievements. More and more, we define the Wagner Plan as an educational program that prepares students for a life of civic professionalism, where they learn to link their chosen career with the various publics that need them to practice it with integrity and social purpose. Be it a business major who will need to respect the needs of consumers and investors or a career in the helping profession concerned with students or patients and their families, or those who find themselves in the arts and must be concerned to honor their text, art and audience, all of our students will become professionals. Our goal is to prepare each student to be the type of leader who brings together diverse individuals and groups for the successful achievement of uncommon goals to advance the worlds they will inhabit. This is a not a new moral purpose for modern liberal arts colleges, but in the current global moment it must be reinvented by rediscovering and rededicating themselves to the civic foundation of this mode of learning and living.

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# Is the Business Model of Higher Education Broken?

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In recent years, several industries in the United States have struggled with failing business models. The examples are numerous: automobile manufacturers, newspapers, electronics manufacturing, textiles, clothing, shoes, and airlines, to name but a few. Recently, the business model concept has been applied to non-profit organizations as well, including colleges and universities. In that framework it's legitimate to ask whether, and to what extent, the business model of higher education is broken, or unsustainable, in its current form. This chapter, originally prepared for The Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia as background for their National Debate and Discussion Series, provides a context for the chapters that follow.

When the business model concept is applied to for-profit industries, the focus is primarily on the survival of firms in the industry. In most cases, there is limited public interest in preventing firms from failing, as new suppliers, often with lower production costs or new technologies, enter the marketplace, displacing older industries and providing consumers with newer, often better, products.<sup>1</sup> Non-profit higher education differs from the case of for-profit firms, however, in that a public interest exists in the education of our citizens, not only for careers but for civic and community leadership. Both public and non-profit private institutions of higher education, and their students, receive billions of dollars in public subsidies to ensure adequate investment in the nation's human capital.<sup>2</sup> For institutions charged with broad public purposes, many would argue that the concept of a broken business model must be enlarged to consider how well these broader purposes are being achieved. Even if the majority of institutions manage to survive, it is possible that in so doing they may fail to accomplish the public purposes for which they were founded and have been supported historically.

In addition to providing educational opportunity for all citizens able to benefit, the nation also relies on higher education for developing new knowledge and sharing that knowledge through education, public service, and supporting economic development. Evaluating the higher education business model must, therefore, consider not just the solvency of the providers but also their ability to meet these vital social responsibilities. This chapter discusses the financial and organizational challenges confronting the higher education industry, and threats to its ability to perform effectively. Those who assert that the business model is broken argue that shifts in the way higher education is financed render it increasingly unaffordable to many students, and that institutional incentives toward increased status and prestige distort internal resource allocation in wasteful and inefficient ways. Others argue that the benefits of higher education accrue primarily to the recipient, and thus it is desirable (and efficient) for students to pay a higher share of the cost, borrowing if necessary to make that investment. The next section provides information relevant to these positions, followed by key "pro" and "con" arguments on the topic.

## **Background**

Many of us aged 60 or more remember when tuition in public higher education was extremely low, or even non-existent, as state governments provided the bulk of operating support for state colleges and universities. That pattern of high state support, and low (or no) tuition, began to change in the 1980s, as the state share of institutional budgets began a secular decline that continues to this day, although with some ebb and flow corresponding to the business cycle.<sup>3</sup> Measured in constant (2008) dollars per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, state support in public institutions in 1985 was \$7,269; in 2005, that number had fallen to \$6,445, a drop of 11.3 percent.<sup>4</sup> Institutions responded to the declining share of state support by seeking funds from other sources, including philanthropy and research support, but the primary source they could directly increase was tuition. Over the same time period noted above, net tuition revenue (gross tuition and fees minus state and institutional aid and

tuition waivers) climbed from approximately 22 to 36 percent of public institution educational revenues (the sum of state appropriations plus tuition).<sup>5</sup> The College Board reports in its 2009 publication on college costs that public four-year in-state tuition and fees average \$7,020 and that total expenses for a residential student for one academic year averages \$19,388.6 (The comparable figure for private four-year schools is \$39,028.) At these rates, students and families are looking at a sticker price of roughly \$80,000 for a public four-year degree, and nearly \$160,000 for a private four-year degree, a sharp and dramatic increase in prices from the world of 30 years ago.

The National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education has examined college affordability in a somewhat different fashion. Figure 1 compares the growth in current dollar prices of tuition and fees to the growth of median family income and to a variety of other spending categories.<sup>8</sup> While median family income in the period 1982–2006 rose by 147 percent, college tuition and fees soared by 439 percent, outstripping all of the other expenditure categories listed. The Center then compared net college costs (tuition, room and board minus financial aid) at public four-year and two-year colleges to median family incomes by quintile, lowest to highest (see Table 1). In the relatively short time period from 1999 to 2007, public four-year costs jumped from 39 to 55 percent of the median income of the lowest income quintile families, an indication of how rapidly college costs are outstripping ability to pay.

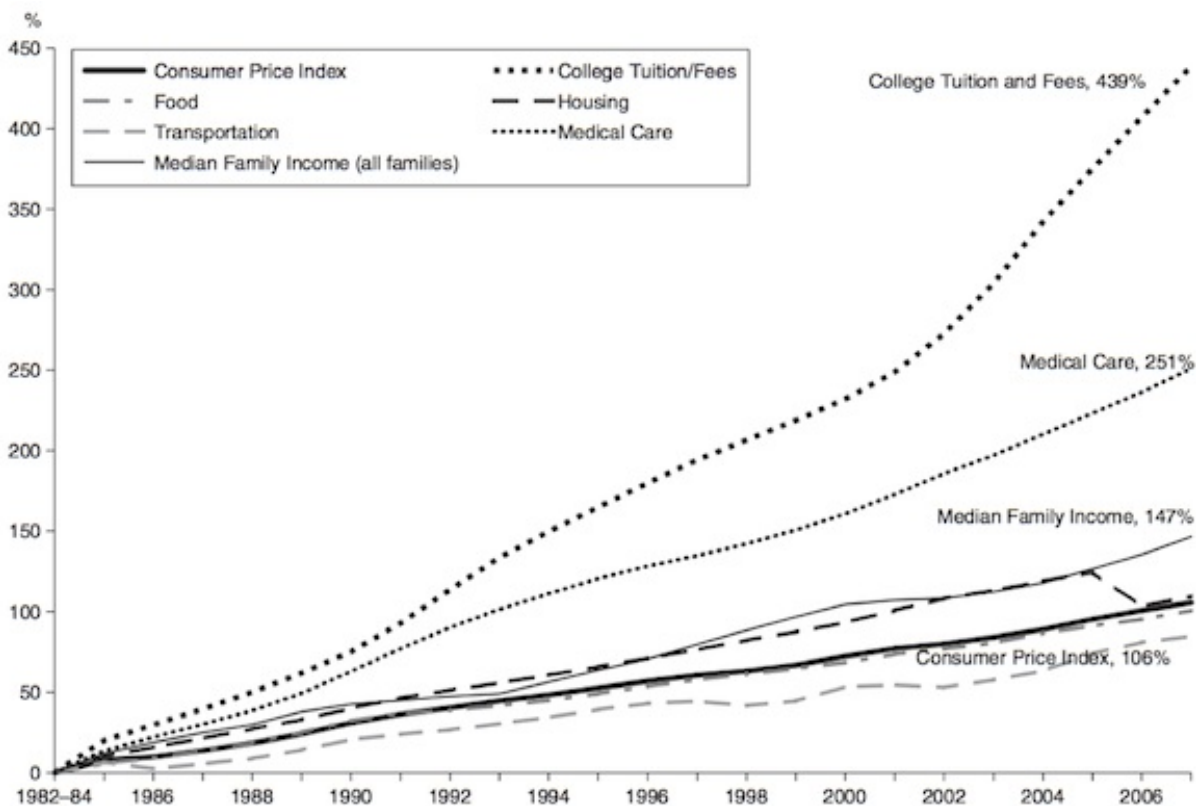


Figure 1.

	1999–2000	2007–2008	% increased
<i>At public 4-year colleges and universities</i>			
Lowest income quintile	39%	55%	16%
Lower-middle income quintile	23	33	10
Middle income quintile	18	25	7
Upper-middle income quintile	12	16	4
Highest income quintile	7	9	3
<i>At public 2-year colleges</i>			
Lowest income quintile	40	49	9
Lower-middle income quintile	22	29	7
Middle income quintile	15	20	5
Upper-middle income quintile	10	13	3
Highest income quintile	6	7	2

Table 1 Net college cost as ratio of median family income

Note: Net college cost is tuition, room and board, minus financial aid.

Source: Measuring Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2008). Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, All Urban Consumers. Median Family Income is from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, and American Community Survey.

What we have witnessed over several decades has been a steady shift- ing of the costs of public higher education from the general taxpayer to the student and family. Public institutional leaders initially decried this trend, but as state government budgets have slipped further and further into structural deficit,<sup>9</sup> many college leaders have given up hope that the country will ever return to a time of significantly higher state support and lower tuition. Talk of privatization of higher education is now often heard, and although somewhat exaggerated, that term certainly appears to describe the direction that finance is taking.<sup>10</sup> The concern, obviously, is that rising prices, even when offset to some degree by financial aid, will discourage many low and middle income young people from considering college a realistic option, thereby lowering our national educational level, reducing future economic growth, and undermining the promise of equal educational opportunity.

Coupled with this concern is the claim that higher education cannot (or will not) control its cost increases, and thus the production cost of higher education (not the same as tuition) also rises at rates above the Consumer Price Index (CPI). As a consequence, some argue that in the face of declin- ing state support, colleges have chosen to pass on costs to students rather than seek operating efficiencies to reduce costs. It has also been argued that the growth of federal student aid, in the form of Pell Grants and Guaranteed Student Loans, has contributed to rising tuitions, either by analogy to the third-party payer argument applied to medical costs, or by arguing simply that the existence of financing has enabled the colleges to raise prices sharply.

Economists have made two principal arguments to explain why educational costs increase at 2–3 percent above the rate of inflation annually. The first argument, put forward by William Baumol and William Bowen, is that the very nature of educational production, essentially a handicraft activity, precludes productivity gains, but wages of faculty nonetheless rise, resulting in a steady increase in the unit cost of production.<sup>11</sup> The second argument, advanced by Howard Bowen, is that higher educa- tion has an endless array of worthy activities seeking support, and thus institutional leaders raise all the money they can, and spend it all on these valued activities.<sup>12</sup> Under this argument, the only way to reduce cost is to reduce revenue, for the institutions are constrained only by the non-profit requirement that costs do not exceed revenues. A related argument is that higher education is a “positional” good in that its value to the recipient is a function of its scarcity at the highest levels of quality and prestige, and thus ambitious students will pay virtually any price to attend a highly selective college or university.<sup>13</sup> Another way of stating this point is that a handful of highly selective institutions face a virtually price-inelastic demand curve, coupled with heavy demand for places, so that one might wonder, for example, why Princeton’s tuition is not

higher than it already is. These price-leaders, by this argument, provide an umbrella over the entire price structure, and allow other institutions to settle in at somewhat lower levels, sheltered by the higher prices of the leading institutions.

For those students who do enroll, a shockingly large percentage, close to one out of every two, will fail to complete the bachelor's degree. Thus, even if a student gains access to higher education, a problem remains with poor completion rates. Compared with other developed countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States has slipped to 15th in college completion, just as we have slipped to 7th place among OECD nations in the percentage of young adults (18–24) enrolled in college.<sup>15</sup> These international comparisons indicate that the performance of our “system” of higher education has declined relative to peer countries, and that we have lost the first-mover advantage that we had for a generation in developing mass higher education before other countries. Many of them have caught up and are surpassing us now on these key measures of educational attainment.

A final point to mention as background is the growing concern many knowledgeable observers have about the financial future of the public research university. It is unclear whether states will be able to provide the resources that they did in earlier days to keep their public research universities competitive with the best private universities and, increasingly, with rapidly advancing research universities abroad. While the principal focus of this debate will be on student access and completion, our ability as a nation to remain competitive in scientific and engineering research is key to our economic future, and we no longer have as dominant a position as we did in the latter half of the previous century.

### **The Model is Broken: Supporting Arguments**

A key argument supporting the proposition that higher education's business model is broken is found in the divergent growth trends of tuition versus median family income; it seems implausible that this can be sustained. Economist Herb Stein famously proposed Stein's Law in the 1980s – “If something cannot go on forever, it will stop.” A reasonable argument, therefore, is that colleges and universities will be unable to continue raising tuition at the rates of the last two decades without pricing hundreds of thousands of students out of the market. Various estimates have been made of the price and income elasticity of demand for higher education, and the research clearly indicates that the laws of economics are not overcome in this instance. Higher price, all else equal, means lower demand. While many efforts at the state, federal, philanthropic, and institutional levels have been made to cushion price increases for many students, the fact remains that higher education absorbs a growing portion of most family incomes. The effects of this changing pattern of finance include increased student borrowing and higher debt burdens, longer hours spent working for pay while enrolled, increased part-time attendance, and lower completion rates. While it is impossible to state with precision how many potential students will not enroll because of current and prospective pricing policies, we know that many students and families are reluctant to borrow heavily for something as uncertain and risky as higher education, a factor particularly true of families without prior college or university experience. Such families make up a growing portion of the relevant population, which puts the current financial model increasingly at odds with much of the population meant to be served.

A related aspect of this argument about diminished opportunity is the behavior of institutions which, even with increased tuition, still face budgetary problems. Increasingly, public colleges and universities have been cutting enrollments in response to sharp drops in state support.<sup>16</sup> Many campuses are also cutting course sections and course offerings, making it difficult for students to enroll in courses needed to graduate on time. Growing use of adjunct, part-time faculty is widespread, as a budgetary move to save money, but often at the expense of quality and consistency of instruction. Student support services, such as counseling and advising, have been scaled back at many institutions, thus reducing the resources that can help student retention. All of these institutional adaptations to declining budgets mean that even at current growth rates, tuition has not been able to fully offset the decline in state support; another sign of a failing business model.

The privatization discussion earlier needs to be qualified by noting that only a handful of highly selective public flagship universities can hope to succeed at becoming “privately financed public universities,” and even for that handful, the potential is limited. A small number of state universities have significant endowments and a history of successfully raising large amounts of private money; similarly, a very small number of state universities have the capacity to raise tuition to private market levels, typically in professional schools such as Law and Business. For the vast majority of public two-year and four-year institutions, however, these sources of revenue are pipe dreams at

best. Privatization is simply not a serious option for maintaining a strong and effective public higher education system, and thus the attempt to move in that direction for most institutions is not a viable business model.

A word should be said about the several hundred private, non-profit colleges and universities that collectively enroll over 20 percent of all students in the United States. A relatively small number of these institutions have sizable endowments and excess demand for enrollment, but most have modest endowments, are heavily dependent upon tuition, and struggle annually to fill their entering classes. Analysts have been forecasting the demise of hundreds of these small undergraduate colleges for years, but they have proved to be remarkably resilient and innovative in finding ways to survive. They have, for example, altered curricular offerings rapidly in response to shifting student interests, and have become expert at price discrimination by using financial aid as a tool for enrollment management.<sup>17</sup> Each year a few of these small colleges close their doors, or merge with a stronger, nearby institution, but they are not “too big or too important to fail,” and policymakers are not likely to intervene to save those that falter financially. A handful of closures does not imply that the private sector business model is broken; however, their need to attract students from higher income families means that many of them will be unable to enroll substantial numbers of low-income, first-generation college students in future years. As such, from a national, policy perspective, their business model limits their ability to serve the broader public purposes of access and opportunity.

While much of the discussion has centered on the search for new and increased revenues, one might also note that a business model can be broken if the institutions are unable to innovate and alter their production processes as a way to lower costs while sustaining quality. Higher education is not known for organizational flexibility and adaptability, and the tendency among most colleges and universities when confronted with recessions and reduced support has been to cut costs temporarily through pay and hiring freezes, reduced travel, buying fewer books for the library, and so forth, while waiting for things to get better.<sup>18</sup> Few institutional leaders have undertaken the hard tasks of rethinking the university strategically and systematically reallocating resources to permanently lower costs. This “hunker down and pray for better times” approach has worked during past recessions, but it may not work as well going forward. In their recent report on United States higher education, Moody’s Investors Service comments that: “Given their reduced resources, colleges and universities will need to consider a fundamental restructuring of their business models to regain financial stability. Responses like freezing hiring, furloughing faculty members and suspending capital projects are all short-term solutions.”<sup>19</sup> Given that few leaders have demonstrated the ability to make such fundamental changes, one might argue that the business model is broken, or at best, highly vulnerable to extended periods of economic decline.

From the narrow perspective of institutional survival, the business model of higher education is not broken. Few institutions, public or private, are likely to close in coming years, and the social need for higher education will increase, not diminish. From the perspective of meeting the public purposes of access, opportunity, affordability, completion, and international competitiveness, however, one can make a strong case that current methods of financing and organizing higher education are not well aligned with our national needs. In that sense, the business model is definitely broken.

### **The Model is Broken: Arguments Against**

A key argument against the proposition of a broken business model in higher education is simply to point to current enrollment levels, which have never been higher, at 18.2 million students in 2007.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, enrollment rates of recent high school graduates have not dropped, as one might expect if the proposition were accurate: “The rate of college enrollment immediately after high school completion increased from 49 percent in 1972 to 67 percent by 1997, but has since fluctuated between 62 and 69 percent.”<sup>21</sup> If the business model were broken, numbers such as these would not be possible. Effective demand for higher education has not declined, and these figures demonstrate that students are finding a way to pay for college.

A central part of the argument that the business model is broken is based on the assumption that affordability has been severely compromised by rising tuition. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in its biennial report on state performance, *Measuring Up*,<sup>22</sup> had 49 of the 50 states with an ‘F’ on affordability, and yet millions of students are still enrolling. An economist might argue that there can be no true affordability problem provided students do not face credit constraints that limit access to loan capital. The argument (analogous to that made for the social benefits of perfectly competitive markets) is that students can calculate the increased income they will earn with a college degree, and thus will be motivated to invest in themselves via borrowing so long as the rate

of return is positive. Like so many other theoretical models, the kernel of truth in this position is swamped by numerous limitations on such rational calculations in the real world. Future earnings are uncertain and subject to wide variation, students may be unable to predict their success in an academic environment, many students and parents are risk-averse and reluctant to borrow, time horizons are often shorter than required by the investment model, and credit constraints do exist in the student loan market. Nonetheless, the argument has the merit of highlighting two distinct ways to view affordability – as investment, in which case current income is irrelevant, or as a purchase analogous to consumption, in which case current income is highly relevant. Most economists would argue strongly for the investment approach, but interestingly, the needs-analysis system built into federal, state, and private student financial aid programs encourages the consumption view of affordability. (Measuring Up also uses that view, relating college costs to family income.) All of this is to argue that defining affordability is far from simple, but ignoring the investment dimension overstates the problem.

One might also argue with the belief that the United States needs to increase the number of college graduates substantially over the next decade or so.<sup>23</sup> If the market needs more graduates, then wage differentials between high school and college graduates will increase, thereby sending a signal to potential students that enrolling in college is a wise investment. So long as the financial rate of return on a college degree exceeds the interest charged for student loans, then the market can be expected to function effectively in determining the “right” number of college graduates.

A further argument is that low (or no) tuition is a highly inefficient way to subsidize higher education enrollments. The shift since the 1980s has been from a low tuition, high appropriation model to a high tuition, high student aid model. By concentrating financial aid on individual students based on financial need, subsidy dollars are allocated more efficiently than by providing across-the-board subsidies to all students regardless of income, as the older model did. The low-tuition model, it is argued, effectively awards a scholarship to all students enrolled, regardless of income, an allocation policy that few would adopt in designing an efficient scholarship program. Thus, the new model is designed to use subsidy dollars to get the most for the money. Students from wealthy families are able to pay the higher tuition, and thus the low tuition of the old model was simply a dead-weight loss in that it did not influence their enrollment behavior.<sup>24</sup> The epic battle in the early 1970s over federal student aid, and whether it should be directed to students or to institutions, hinged on a similar consideration, and was decided in favor of direct grants to students, based on financial need.

Two further issues have been proposed as threats to traditional higher education and its business model. First, might not technology and the digital revolution have a negative impact on universities similar to that experienced by the newspaper industry? Might not online learning systematically replace face-to-face teaching and learning in the classroom? Might not entire introductory courses be developed online and used as substitutes for faculty-taught courses at many institutions? While it is true that technology is having an impact on the education process of both traditional universities and for-profit providers, the results thus far are decidedly mixed, both educationally and financially. Hybrid courses that involve a mix of online and face-to-face instruction are growing in use, and may represent the most promising direction for future development, but the wholesale replacement of faculty, or the erosion of markets for traditional instruction, have not yet occurred, and seem unlikely to happen. Pure online programs seem most effective for older, part-time adult students, who can work at home one course at a time; for younger students, the benefits of living on campus as a full-time student retain considerable appeal. Steadily increasing costs of residential higher education, however, might induce some shift to online programs, but most observers think this effect, if it occurs, will be modest.

Another perceived threat to traditional higher education has arisen in the last decade or so in the form of regionally accredited, degree granting, for-profit institutions, with the University of Phoenix as the poster child for that movement. Indeed, during the current recession, the for-profit sector has generally continued to grow and perform well on the stock exchanges, while traditional institutions have suffered significant revenue loss. Some of the early claims about the impact of the for-profit sector appear, in retrospect, to have been linked to the false belief that they were all, and only, online providers, and that digital technology would erode face-to-face instruction, as discussed above. Subsequent research has indicated that they are significant niche players, and particularly successful with older, adult students, a group largely ignored by many traditional universities. As such, they compete with some universities that rely on the adult market, but there is little evidence that they will become a viable substitute for most students.<sup>25</sup> In general, they appear to extend the market for higher education to populations who otherwise might not enroll at all.

## **Concluding Observation**

The arguments supporting the proposition of a broken business model in higher education stress the social functions of higher education and the belief that, even if most colleges and universities survive, their accomplishments under the evolving model will be much less than a just and progressive society needs from its institutions. The arguments opposing the proposition stress the value of increased market orientation for higher education and the sense that the evolving model is designed to produce an efficient allocation of resources. To a degree, the different perspectives can be viewed as representing the age-old trade-off between equity and efficiency, but that would oversimplify matters. The first position includes an efficiency concern that the nation runs a risk of under-investing in higher education relative to economic needs, while the second position suggests that if subsidies are accurately targeted on the needy, social justice is thereby served.

## Notes

1. Recent exceptions to this rule would be large banks and related financial institutions, deemed “too large to fail,” as their demise would have crippled the nation’s financial system.
2. A growing for-profit sector of higher education also exists, currently enrolling about seven percent of students in postsecondary education. These institutions receive indirect subsidies through federal financial aid to their students. Their special case will be discussed subsequently.
3. Thomas J. Kane, Peter R. Orzag, and David L. Gunter, “State Fiscal Constraints and Higher Education Spending: The Role of Medicaid and the Business Cycle,” Discussion Paper No. 11, Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, May 2003.
4. State Higher Education Executive Officers, State Higher Education Finance, FY 2008, Boulder, CO, July 2009, p. 18.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
6. [http://www.trends-collegeboard.com/college\\_pricing/1\\_2\\_total\\_student\\_budgets.html?expandable=0](http://www.trends-collegeboard.com/college_pricing/1_2_total_student_budgets.html?expandable=0)
7. These figures are before any financial aid that students might receive, although such aid is increasingly loans, not grants.
8. <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/print/NCPPHEMUNationalRpt.pdf>, p. 8.
9. National Association of State Business Officers, Fiscal Survey of the States, Fall 2009, and [http://www.rockinst.org/pdf/government\\_finance/state\\_revenue\\_report/2010-01-07-SRR\\_78.pdf](http://www.rockinst.org/pdf/government_finance/state_revenue_report/2010-01-07-SRR_78.pdf)
10. Christopher C. Morphew and Peter D. Eckel (eds), *Privatizing the Public University*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. The University of Virginia, for example, is often referred to as a “privately financed public university.”
11. The argument was first developed in William Baumol and William Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1966, and extended to higher education. See William J. Baumol and Sue Anne Batey Blackman, “How to Think About Rising College Costs,” *Planning for Higher Education*, vol. 23, Summer 1995, pp. 1–7.
12. Howard R. Bowen, *The Costs of Higher Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980.
13. Henry Hansmann, “Higher Education as an Associative Good,” in Maureen Devlin and Joel Meyerson, (eds) *Forum Futures: 1999 Papers 11-24*, Foundation for the Future of Higher Education, 1999.
14. William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Also, see <http://www.edtrust.org/>
15. <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/print/NCPPHEMUNationalRpt.pdf>, p.6
16. <http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=cuts+in+university+enrollment&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
17. See David W. Breneman, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994, and Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro, *The Student Aid Game*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 for discussion of these issues.
18. College and university behavior may have inspired the observation that “Hope is not a strategy.”
19. Moody’s Investor Service, “Annual Sector Outlook for U.S. Higher Education for 2010”, January 2010.

20. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2008, Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2009, p. 278.
21. <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=51>  
Is the business model of higher education broken? 25
22. <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/print/NCPPHEMUNationalRpt.pdf>, p. 11.
23. See the paper by William Zumeta, "Does the U.S. Need More College Graduates to Remain a World Class Economic Power?" prepared for the first debate in this Miller Center series, for discussion of labor-market needs for college graduates.
24. Some analysts argue, however, that as costs are shifted to students and families and as these costs increase more rapidly than family income, middle class families demand a larger share of financial aid, resulting in tuition tax credits, state and institutional merit aid, and more borrowing, thus offsetting some of the benefits of the need-based approach.
25. David W. Breneman, Brian Pusser, and Sarah E. Turner, (eds) *Earnings from Learning: The Rise of For-Profit Universities*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.

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# From Promise through Planning to Financial Performance

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**Tom Ries**

*Map out your future - but do it in pencil. Jon Bon Jovi*

## **Introduction**

My PhD research is in the area of strategic planning and the financial performance of Lutheran colleges and universities. Prinvale (1992) hypothesized that the use of an institution-wide strategic planning process did not create greater differences in the fiscal condition of institutions which conducted planning compared with institutions which did not use institution-wide strategic planning. Her research among 873 private colleges and universities supported the hypothesis.

My own research is centered in 40 colleges and universities which identify as Lutheran, and is designed less to distinguish between planners and non-planners (since all respondents from these institutions have indicated they are planners), but rather the degree to which strategic planning is embraced and conducted. Respondents to my survey have indicated which specific topics were discussed in the planning process at their institutions, what activities are used in the planning process, levels of involvement by key stakeholders in the planning process, attitudes of key stakeholders toward planning, to what degree planning is linked to budgeting, what perceived impact planning has had on financial condition at the institution, and what financial-related adjustments, if any, the institution has made as a result of the planning process. A score on each of these inputs will be correlated, anonymously, with a five-year history of financial outcomes as measured by the U. S. Department of Education Composite Financial Score for each institution.

Unlike Prinvale (1992), my own hypothesis is that planning does in fact make a difference in the fiscal condition of these colleges and universities.

## **Personal Context**

I began my career as a Lutheran pastor, specifically as an assistant pastor at a large congregation in exurban Minneapolis. All my life I had happily prepared for the ministry as had my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before me. So it came as quite a surprise when, in my first year in my new call to my first congregation, the person who fascinated me most was the church treasurer. I was mesmerized when he showed me how double-entry bookkeeping worked and from that moment the seeds of a career in finance were planted.

Shortly thereafter I was called as assistant to the president at Concordia College St. Paul, where I rubbed shoulders with some of the most proficient financial managers I had ever met including, refreshingly, a number who were clergyman themselves. My personal journey took me to an MBA program at the University of Minnesota where I, a habitual A-student, struggled to maintain a B average in the new and unfamiliar world of business and finance. But I graduated and that single degree changed my life forever.

My personal mission statement is: To bring leadership expertise to organizations which honor Jesus Christ. I take particular delight in helping organizations become stronger financially. Today I am back at Concordia University St. Paul as President. I am completing my doctorate in Higher Education at the University of Minnesota.

## **Organizational Context**

Despite my preoccupation with finance, I contend that colleges and universities do not improve financially by focusing on the money. Instead, institutions become stronger financially when a clear sense of institutional identity, a strategy constructed around goals congruent with that identity, and fundamentally sound financial management practices are integrated. For Concordia University St. Paul those principles lead from Promise through Planning to financial Performance.

On my assuming the office of President in 2011, Concordia embarked upon a process called Uncover the Promise<sup>SM</sup>, developed by Keith Ogorek, senior vice president of corporate marketing at Cross Books Publishing. That's his day job. But, while working for a marketing consulting firm several decades ago, Keith developed his thinking on what he now calls "organizational promise" and in his spare time he works with a select number of organizations to help them uncover their Promise. "People relate to organizations like people," says Ogorek. "They want to know what you, organization, will do for me. A Promise tells me what is true and not true about you. It tells me how you can help me solve my problems, achieve my aspirations, relieve my pressures. It is, in sum, what is compelling, differentiating and true about you, as an organization, and whether what you are is what I need."

Organizations uncover their Promise by asking people who know them well, but are not enmeshed in them, to tell them about themselves. For a university the logical people to ask are alumni, followed by parents of current and former students, members of the various communities with which the institution interfaces, and students, faculty and administrators at other universities. Looking at itself through these objective but informed lenses, an organization gets a strong inkling into what people count on from it and expect of it and, as importantly, what they do not.

A good promise is clear, concise, real, and distinguishing to the point where an organization, in this case a university, can say "there is nothing else in existence exactly like us." Through this process, we at Concordia uncovered and articulated a Promise which we believe reveals us to be unique in higher education. Our Promise includes five core qualities: (1) empowering students to discover and engage their purpose, in a dynamic (2) multicultural (3) urban environment, where (4) Christ is honored, all are welcome, and (5) Lutheran convictions inform intellectual inquiry. Added together, these qualities describe only one university.

In addition to these five values, we recognized through the process that we are a "selective but not highly selective" university. We do not intend to be, on the one hand elite, nor on the other hand indiscriminate in our admission practices. We like ourselves that way. It is completely congruent with our mission and vision. It is how we live out our Promise.

Having uncovered our Promise we moved next into a 13-month strategic planning process, which ultimately led us to four corporate goals: 1) grow the enrollment, 2) increase persistence to graduation, 3) increase successful transitions to jobs or graduate school, and 4) grow the net assets of the university. The first three goals are oriented toward student success. The fourth is the financial piece, and is the handmaiden of the other three. We want to become stronger financially not for the sake of being stronger financially, but to be able to do a better job of growing enrollment, increasing persistence to graduation, and improving students' experience in transitioning to the next phase of their lives.

These four goals are amplified by measureable objectives that will tell us whether or not we are succeeding. There are metrics tied to each of the four goals. Grow the enrollment . . . by how much and when? Increase persistence . . . to what extent and how much per year? Improve transitions . . . how will we count them and when will we know? Grow net assets . . . by how much and in what asset classes? We have answered each of these questions with specific metrics, and are keeping our eye on them semester by semester, year by year, to evaluate our progress.

Contributing to the objectives and goals are tactical plans, which we believe are relevant to our situation and by which we will achieve the success we have set out to achieve. Some tactics are set in granite. For example, we announced in 2012 that we would reset our traditional undergraduate tuition by \$10,000 for the 2013-14 academic year. It is one of our primary tactics, and we are committed to it as foundational to our goals to grow enrollment and increase persistence to graduation. Other tactics are more flexible. Still others are not even in our plan, but were the result of opportunities that simply fell into our lap. The opportunity to add a world-class graphic design program, for example, came to us out of the blue late last year. We hadn't planned that, but we had planned to have the capacity to evaluate and optimize opportunities when they do arise. It's part of mapping our future – in pencil.

## **Conclusion**

For me, a clear institutional identity (what we at Concordia call *Promise*), informed and intentional strategic planning, and an expectation and skill set for financial improvement are all integral to leading a university.

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# Focus on Affordability: A Different Kind of Disruption

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**Kent Henning**

Of all the topics being discussed within and about higher education, perhaps the most unsettling to college and university presidents is the notion of disruption. Clayton Christensen's widely acclaimed articles on disruption in our industry have fueled speculation that traditional colleges and universities—particularly small, independent, church-related institutions—will become extinct, that all but a few of our institutions will be replaced by low-cost, mega-online universities and/or super-sized community colleges.

While I do not deny the disruptive nature of on-line institutions, MOOCs, and other technology-driven changes in higher education, I maintain that these disruptors will not and should not put all of us out of business. These innovations will change us, but they will not make us extinct. In this discussion of disruptors within higher education, I maintain:

- (1) Examples of how various disruptions fundamentally changed a number of manufacturing and/or information technology industries do not serve as accurate metaphors for higher education;
- (2) The disruption that's needed is in the way we price, package, and finance the education we provide, more so than in the delivery of education.

## **Disruption misunderstood (perhaps)**

How dare I question the insights of a renowned Harvard professor/researcher/author? I even used Christensen's writings on disruption as a framework for discussions with Grand View's Board of Trustees at its strategic planning retreat in February, 2012. I do not refute Christensen's work, but I believe many who quote Christensen to criticize higher education or to prognosticate about the future of this industry may be overstating or oversimplifying some of his notions of disruption.

Students are more than customers. Many examples Christensen uses to define and describe disruption come from the manufacturing and information technology industries. In those industries, customers are strictly consumers seeking the best product for the lowest price. In education, however, students (learners) are an integral part of the educational experience. The researchers at Indiana University who created the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) clearly demonstrated what matters most in college is how well students are engaged in the learning process and in experiences that augment and support their learning. Learners need to be guided, of course, by scholars who have identified certain learning outcomes. Without students' efforts, though, learning does not take place. It's a more complex process than what's involved when a bridge builder purchases high quality steel from a lower cost provider.

Despite this key difference, many critics point to on-line courses and self-guided, technology-based learning experiences as a suitable and lower cost substitute for the learning that takes place when professors and students are together in a classroom. If campus-based learning is so replaceable, why were educational institutions not put out of business by public libraries in the early 20th Century? Certainly, large collections of human knowledge are available for free in nearly every community. Further, why did campuses not close when correspondence courses became popular in the mid-20th Century? They, too, offered students flexibility and convenience as opposed to "seat time" in a physical structure. University campuses were not shuttered by these technological advances because faculties do much more than impart knowledge. They design curricula; they guide their students through specific learning activities; they adjust their pedagogies to fit the needs of their learners; they advise and motivate students along the way; and faculty members set expectations of their students and what they must do to achieve a particular learning outcome. The consumers involved in many of Christensen's examples of disruption are far less a part of the "product" as they are in higher education.

Newcomers to higher education need more, not less. Christensen's theories about disruption acknowledge that an ever-expanding base of consumers find a less expensive product that is "good enough." Personal computers, for example, were "good enough" for a wider segment of users who did not need the power of costly mainframe computers. As PCs became more powerful, they grew able to do the work of mainframes, but PCs were replaced by handheld devices and smart phones that were "good enough" for another set of users. So goes Christensen's description of disruption.

Future growth in college enrollments will come from populations that traditionally have not been represented on college/university campuses: low income and minority students and those who are not fully prepared for college work. Simply applying Christensen's phenomenon to higher education ignores a whole body of research on risk factors among low-income and minority students. Nearly all the studies aimed at improving college completion rates suggest that these at-risk students will require even more services, not less. They will require more advising, supplemental instruction, more engaging learning experiences, emotional support, and special accommodations for those with certain learning challenges. How, then, do people think that the new entrants to the college ranks will be well served by inexpensive, massively produced on-line courses or experiences that offer little in the way of support?

Indeed, early evaluations of MOOCs reveal that only tiny fractions of enrollees complete their courses. Assessments of student learning in MOOCs also is sketchy. Students who are successful appear to be the same students who would excel in a traditional classroom. There is no evidence to suggest that society's most under-prepared and at-risk students are finding MOOCs effective. Unlike the markets described by Christensen in other industries, the newest users of higher education actually need more attention and services, not less. For them, an option that is "good enough" may not produce the knowledge and skills they truly need.

Critics oversimplify what higher education is. The public discourse about higher education characterizes all of higher education as little more than job training. In the recent economic recession, the purpose of education has been reduced to simply getting people back to work. For the most part, the lowest skilled jobs were the most vulnerable and the first to disappear or be shipped to countries with a less costly workforce. The priority of elected officials has been to provide training to get displaced workers prepared to assume the next level of un-displaced employment.

Job training programs, while laudable and important, impart knowledge and skills to those who do not possess those skills or knowledge. Effective training strives for the least deviation from the best-known processes or procedures. Jobs requiring routine manual labor and/or routine cognitive skills, however, are easily replaced by such technologies as robotics and artificial intelligence.

True economic value, however, is created by those who deal most effectively with the unknown, by those who invent or discover or innovate. New drugs make the most money for pharmaceutical companies. The company or country that can harness solar energy at an efficient price will be wildly successful. These outcomes require expert thinking, complex problem-solving, and innovation. And the education that produces these higher order thinking skills requires "deep learning." Creating deep learning experiences and assessing student outcomes is neither easy nor inexpensive. Nor can that process be easily mass produced by the simple application of information technology.

For conveying large sets of known information to a large number of learners, certain technologies can be effective and efficient, provided the learners are properly motivated and engaged. The kind of education that produces researchers, innovators, problem-solvers, and leaders, however, requires a more complex learning environment. Those environments have existed on college and university campuses for centuries. They can be enriched by new technologies, but I maintain they cannot be easily replaced, replicated, or made more efficient simply by using digital communications and social-media.

The real issue is cost. Among myriad criticisms being leveled at higher education, the most prevalent and enduring are the concerns about cost. Middle-income and low-income families are being priced out of the higher education market. Students graduate with so much debt they cannot fully participate in our consumption-driven economy after they receive their degrees. The reason cited for these problems is the rising cost of education, despite data showing that the cost of independent, not-for-profit education has declined since 2008.

Yes, other concerns are being expressed. Some critics claim students are not learning enough in college or they are not learning the right things. For the most part, however, critics of higher education are not saying what we do is

not working; they are saying it is no longer affordable.

Even the Gates Foundation executives who are influencing higher education policy seem to be saying simply that education is not the great equalizer if not enough people can access it. Their agenda to push technology into the delivery of education is understandable, but their motivation has an egalitarian bent, as well. In a knowledge-driven economy, we need a greater percentage of the population to have the right skills to be productive. Traditional colleges and universities, critics say, are no longer accessible to large numbers of middle-income and low-income students. The disruption the Gates folks are pushing is a disruption in the delivery system, one that will use new technologies to lower costs. They are most familiar with that type of disruption, of course, because they experienced it in their own industry (say nothing of their vested self-interest in expanded uses of information technologies).

### **Disruption aimed at financing, not delivery**

The disruption needed in higher education, however, need not replace the delivery system (campus-based learning), but should focus on pricing and financing to keep education affordable.

Throughout history and across various industries, some disruptions have focused more on pricing and financing rather than delivery. Consider housing, for example. Our parents and grandparents paid for their houses with cash. There was no such thing as a 30-year mortgage, much less balloon-payment mortgages or adjustable-rate mortgages. And despite recent troubles in the mortgage industry, home ownership remains a part of “the American dream.”

The auto industry provides another example. At some point, Detroit realized large numbers of middle-class Americans could no longer afford to buy a car (or multiple cars). Someone determined it would be possible for consumers to pay for and finance only the portion of the car’s total lifetime value they intended to use; ergo the car lease. Now common, this approach to “owning” a vehicle did not exist for most Americans as recently as 30 years ago.

The healthcare industry is in the throes of this same phenomenon right now. Our country has pretty much agreed that a fee-for-service payment model is no longer working in our healthcare industry. Even before passage of the Affordable Care Act, private insurers and Medicare were experimenting with other forms of “value-based” payment contracts. Large employers are negotiating fixed prices for more common, high-ticket procedures (e.g., knee replacements). Private health insurance firms and Medicare together are structuring contracts with healthcare providers that pay for outcomes, not procedures. These emerging payment models are driving changes in healthcare delivery that actually make sense. Physicians, hospitals, specialists, and other providers are now collaborating to decrease costs and improve patient outcomes rather than fighting over who gets the right to order—and charge for—a procedure.

Some colleges and universities are beginning to travel down this path of experimenting with different pricing strategies. Still others are acknowledging that the current practice of raising tuition and then increasing tuition discounts is no longer sustainable. Some are cutting tuition drastically (paired with a commensurate reduction in tuition discounting). Still others are announcing tuition freezes or fixed tuition rates over a student’s four years. All this experimentation is reinforcing the claims in the higher education media that “net tuition discounting” has run its course.

Not unlike the housing, automobile, and healthcare industries, society still needs higher education. The country and the economy still need the type of education that has served previous generations very well. Our society simply needs to find better ways to finance an entire college degree, not just a single year, semester, or course.

### **Grand View’s approach: disrupting for affordability**

Since 2000, Grand View University has grown considerably in a variety of ways. Many of those trends seem to run counter to some of the criticisms of higher education.

- Enrollment has grown more than 70 percent.
- The number of students living on campus has grown from fewer than 200 to nearly 800.
- The size of the campus has doubled in acreage and more than doubled in square-footage of building space.

- In 2000, Grand View offered seven sports involving roughly 160 athletes; today we offer 25 athletic programs with nearly 700 students participating.
- The faculty has added nearly a dozen new majors, launched graduate programs, and revised its core curriculum reinforcing small, seminar style classes.
- The University has added classroom space, outfitted nearly all the classrooms with “smart room” technology and owns more than 600 personal computers.

In order to accomplish this, Grand View has invested more than \$60 million in capital improvements, has expanded its payroll considerably, and has increased the size of its operating budget by roughly 170%. We are planning to renovate and expand our Student Center with a price tag of \$17 million.

To those who believe the traditional college/university soon will be extinct, these recent investments and program expansions seem risky or even counter-productive. Some might claim we have aimed Grand View squarely at the great abyss and hit the accelerator. To be sure, whenever I read Christensen’s writings on disruption in higher education, I become a bit uneasy myself.

Reinvesting in the traditional college experience. Grand View’s growth and expansion over the past 14 years was intentional and strategic. Grand View had not prospered during the 1990s. In fact, enrollment challenges resulted in budget problems, which weakened morale and institutional self-confidence. The temptation was to ask, “What does Grand View need to do differently in order to survive?” We began the new millennium, however, by asking, “What does Grand View do well; and how do we get better at it?”

Grand View was founded in 1896 by Danish Lutheran immigrants with the same ideals of so many independent, church-related, residential, liberal arts institutions that were established in the late 19th Century. For its first 50 years, Grand View served mostly a residential student body. When demographic downturns impacted smaller private institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, Grand View looked to its location in Des Moines, IA, to establish adult-learner programs. It also pursued a strategy of being an institution where local community college transfers could finish their baccalaureate degrees. Neither of those groups of students, however, was specifically seeking Grand View’s inherent strengths, strengths that arose from its highly personal, residential, church-related heritage.

By 2000, there were enough competitors in the market to make it difficult for Grand View to compete for students who were interested solely in convenience or low-cost tuition. To reinvent ourselves as something other than what we were would have required skills and expertise we did not necessarily have. It seemed to make more sense to rebuild what once existed at Grand View and to attract and serve the students who desire the environment of a more traditional college experience.

Just as we have nearly completed this reinvestment in a residential campus, a modern infrastructure, a highly personalized academic environment, comprehensive co-curricular programming, and state-of-the-art instructional technologies, our society has begun to label us as unaffordable. In fact, several commentators unfairly blame campus facilities and co-curricular programming as the reason colleges and universities costs are so high.

Nevertheless, the institution’s leadership and Board remain committed to the type of institution we are, the educational experience we offer, and the students we have traditionally served. That student base includes more than 50 percent who are the first in their families who will earn a bachelor’s degree, roughly 40 percent who are Pell eligible, and more than 20 percent who are ethnic minorities. As recently as 2012, the Grand View Board or Trustees set the direction for the university through its leadership of our next five-year strategic plan. The direction set by the Board is best summarized in the following Vision Statement adopted by the Trustees at the conclusion of our strategic planning process.

With boldness and confidence, we will...

- Provide a rigorous education that prepares students both for successful careers and inspired lives;
- Afford this opportunity to all qualified students, including those who have been under-represented in college populations;
- Preserve the virtues of independent, residential, church-related, liberal arts education for future generations;
- Blend the strengths of engaging and interactive in-class experiences with appropriate technologies to enrich learning and extend our reach;
- Build community ties that enhance life in the region and add value for our students.

By doing these things well, we can emerge as a leader within the higher education community.

In short, Grand View has “doubled down” on the future of the traditional college experience at precisely the time when certain voices are predicting the demise of our type of institution. Innovating around affordability. So if our vision for the future will be fulfilled, Grand View must remain affordable to our traditional base of middle-income and lower-income students. Within our strategic planning process, we created an “affordability index” that we track annually. We now calculate the net price (i.e., our published tuition, fees, room & board less scholarships and grants) that each incoming first-year, full-time, residential student pays. We then compare that net price with the published in-state costs of attending one of the three public universities in Iowa. For the fall of 2013, 75 percent of our incoming freshmen were paying the same as or less than the published costs of attending Iowa’s publicly funded universities.

Grand View’s commitment to affordability does not end there. We are driven by a simple observation regarding higher education. Everyone wants students to complete their college degrees, yet our industry packages the degree, prices it, and sells it one year at a time (sometimes, one semester at a time, even one course at a time). Believing we already can demonstrate Grand View is affordable, we challenged ourselves to be able to predict our costs for four years and then to share that predictability with our students and families in the form of a commitment to certain tuition levels. In return, we are asking students for certain commitments that will help them stay on track to graduate.

We now are recruiting a set of students and parents to pilot what we are calling our Financial Empowerment Plan. Under this plan, Grand View will commit to the following:

- The participating students’ tuition, room and board charges will not increase more than two percent per year during their four-year pursuit of a degree.
- Grand View will provide tools to lay out a four-year financing plan so that families can better predict and manage debt levels.
- The four-year financial plan will be paired with a four-year plan of study to ensure on-time graduation.
- Grand View will provide financial coaching and other support services to help make sure participating students stay on track to graduate within the parameters of their financial plan.
- In return, Grand View will ask students to commit to certain things (all of which address the primary risk factors for attrition and failure).
- Students will work with their advisor to determine a major by the end of the sophomore year and craft the four-year plan of study.
- Students will take advantage of all support services in order to remain in good academic standing.
- Students and families will commit to fulfilling their financial obligations on time, like filing the FAFSA within the recommended time periods and staying current with payment plans
- Students will work with their Success Coach to monitor progress on their academic and financial plans.

On the surface, this Financial Empowerment Plan appears to be little more than what we currently do. To some extent, we want that to be the case. We indeed intend to preserve and promote the value of the academic experience students will have. The innovation we want families to see is their ability to have a price and a plan for financing their entire Grand View degree. Students in this program will graduate in four years, know how much their payments will be while in school, know how much their monthly student loan payments and terms will be upon graduation, and see a reduction in the total cost of their education. To accomplish this, we have developed a financial planning tool and a process that will enable us to assist families in their planning.

In short, this approach is meant to provide “whole-degree financing” for families who are willing to create and commit to a four-year plan. Put another way, it brings pricing, packaging, and financing a college degree more in line with earning a degree, rather than doing it one year at a time.

Other than level tuition guarantees, we are not aware of other institutions that are planning a comprehensive approach to pricing and financing an entire degree and then packaging that financial plan with academic plans and support systems to ensure degree completion in four years. There is much to be determined. We won’t know how this plan might help attract students and/or increase graduation rates for quite some time. Yet, we believe this type of pricing “disruption” aligns well with our vision statement.

Controlling the institution’s costs. In order for Grand View to be successful with this strategy, we also must continue to deliver a quality education for the net price we currently have, or one that is competitive in the marketplace. Indeed, that requires us to be vigilant about controlling our own expenses. Those efforts are worthy of lengthy discussion and deliberations in and of themselves. They also are not particularly unique or innovative. Every institution has the ability and responsibility to be good stewards of their students’ tuition dollars. At Grand



View, we believe we do not need to cut deeply into our expense base to achieve an affordable net price, rather we need to maintain our cost competitiveness through prudent budgeting.

## **Conclusion**

In order to “preserve the virtues of independent, residential, church-related, liberal arts education for future generations” (as is stated in our Vision Statement), we believe we must continue to build on the traditional strengths of our type of institution. We need to be the champions of what we have historically done very well. The innovation required of us—perhaps done in a disruptive manner—must center on the pricing and financing of the entire educational experience (and degree) to make or keep it affordable to students, even those of modest means.

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# A Time of Transition for a Lutheran Institution

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## Wayne B. Powell

The year was 2007. Lenoir-Rhyne College had just completed a good five-year run. The budget had been in the black, the relationship with the accrediting body (SACS) was strong, new programs were opening, and several endowed Centers were in place. The administration and the Board leadership held several brainstorming sessions to review some fundamental questions: Should we just sit back and enjoy this new-found prosperity? How do we leverage the strengths of that day to do even more? When we continued to grow, how would we protect all that was special about Lenoir-Rhyne?

The questions posed were very serious issues. It was the universal belief that LR could do more, but it was well known that other institutions that had made that move often tossed aside their heritage and became very different institutions, ones that could not be recognized by alumni from the past.

The result of these strategic conversations was to be very intentional and LR made a bold move. The leadership chose to be aggressive yet respectful while also being cautious yet responsible, characteristics that have described the management of LR for over a decade. The Board appointed a high level task force, the Commission for Lenoir-Rhyne, which was charged with developing a general plan for expanding Lenoir-Rhyne without changing its mission. The Commission was to be chaired by longtime Board leader Jerome Bolick and LR President Wayne Powell.

The Commission for Lenoir-Rhyne met throughout the 2007-08 academic year and engaged some 30 focus groups around the southeastern part of the U.S. These groups included faculty, students, staff, alumni, community leaders, and in fact anyone who had an interest in the future of the then college. The focus groups did not direct most of their attention to dreaming about the future. Rather, each session spent a majority of its time discussing the special nature of LR that should always be protected and that could be leveraged to serve more people. Once this context was established, the groups delved into brainstorming all the vast possibilities for an institution that held these special characteristics.

Interestingly enough, all of the diverse focus groups said almost the same thing, although from very different perspectives. The Commission for LR used this common feedback to create a list of four items that have come to be known as the Character of Lenoir-Rhyne, fundamental parts of the institution that should always be preserved:

- LR's commitment to the liberal arts & sciences as the basis for its education in all programs. Although most students at LR major in professional programs, it is the basis in the liberal arts that makes these programs strong.
- LR's strong connections to the Church and a faith-based environment on campus. Many institutions that made their moves did so by abandoning their historical connections to the Church. LR chooses the opposite path, to accentuate those connections to serve people with common values.
- Strong relationships that students develop with faculty and staff at LR. The size of the institution does not dictate these kinds of relationships; it is the mindset of those who serve there.
- LR's uncommon partnership to its local community. LR will always have a commitment to not only reside in the community but to be an integral part of it working together to address common issues.

Once these four elements of the Character of Lenoir-Rhyne were established, the Commission began to make specific recommendations on how to grow the institution while protecting and in fact enhancing its Character. The dreams for the future included such far-out ideas as starting a seminary and opening a graduate campus. To facilitate growth potential, the institution changed its name in the Fall 2008 to Lenoir-Rhyne University with four colleges, each with a specific direction and all connected by the common commitment to the liberal arts. A series of other planning processes were established, each engaging all constituencies and targeting the development options in different areas. During the next six years, in the midst of the Great Recession, LR experienced unprecedented growth

and yet remains the same principled institution as it had been since its founding in 1891.

Just a few of the actions taken over the coming six years are:

- Development of an entirely new core curriculum.
- Expansion of master's programs, so that 25% of students are in graduate programs connected directly to undergraduate majors.
- Opening of a new main campus in Asheville, one that is focused solely on graduate education.
- Merger with Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS) in Columbia, SC, and the pending opening of a broad-based graduate center on that campus.
- A \$65 million campaign that is nearing completion.
- Significant building expansion and improvement, including the latest project, the construction of a \$5 million chapel in the heart of campus.

Today, Lenoir-Rhyne University has surpassed the 2000 student enrollment number and has an endowment of \$93.5 million, fifth among the 36 institutions in North Carolina. Budgetary surpluses are the largest in history and are reinvested in new initiatives. The University has been praised by SACS for its excellent programming and management.

However, the most exciting thing about the growth of Lenoir-Rhyne through the years is that the current institution does not see a finish line. Lenoir-Rhyne has created a culture of creativity, innovation, and respect inspired by its Mission and its Character. With all that has occurred, the University has in fact created more opportunities for growth in the future. But most importantly, Lenoir-Rhyne has strengthened all of the four elements that make up its Character. Perhaps it is the commitment to enhancing these principles instead of changing direction that has been the secret.

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# DAVID: Reinvention of Lutheran Graduate Education

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**Elizabeth Brennan**

A drive down the tree-lined main road leading onto the California Lutheran University campus provides a view of the new William Rolland Stadium and Gallery of Fine Art where visitors immediately see large purple and gold banners heralding 'PURPOSE'. A short drive beyond and a visit to the University Chapel provides additional focus on 'purpose' as Rev. Melissa Maxwell-Doherty's chosen central theme of 'On Purpose, For Purpose' is articulated through spoken and written word. A visit to CLU's website and the welcome from President Chris Kimball guides new students to the important message that "Cal Lutheran is a place that helps students discover and live their purpose". All of these specific references to 'purpose' tell the story of the mission of CLU in action. Who we are and what we do. Indeed, our brand promise is that "Both in the classroom and outside of it, everyone at Cal Lutheran is committed to helping each student pursue their passions to discover their purpose, and follow that purpose to transform their community and the world". This promise is extended to students in both undergraduate and graduate programs at CLU.

For me, the discussion of passion and purpose becomes fundamental to my teaching in a graduate level program at CLU. My personal passion for learning came later in life. I did not 'find' my path to purpose until I entered graduate school to obtain a masters degree and a credential to teach students with disabilities. So it is that graduate education became central to my journey to passion, purpose, and my personal reinvention. In addition, my experiences as a faculty member in California Lutheran's Graduate School of Education confirm that graduate education propels a similar step forward in purpose for many students. Not infrequently, students will demonstrate a kind of awakening through their graduate studies. They come into the program with a strong reason or 'why' they want to be a teacher. This 'why' is displayed in a foundational project where the students present visual representations of those 'whys'. The presentations are very moving and reflect a strong rationale for the decision to teach. However, the real movement toward purpose is what happens when they incorporate theory and practice into the 'why'. That is when I have the joy of witnessing the development of an authentic action-oriented energy toward purpose.

But the path to purpose is often an extended journey. Key inspirations along the way help us to make connections and arrive at a 'bigger picture'. A pivotal inspiration for me was when I attended the 19th Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference at Augsburg College. The main theme of the conference centered on the question of vocation as a foil to the commodification of education. During the conference, conversations that were kindled heightened my interest in the topic of vocation as embedded in the Lutheran tradition. A chance meeting with Dr. Ann Duin and an introduction to Project DAVID provided me with a deeper lens and understanding of the importance of the discussion of vocation specifically in Lutheran graduate education. I became aware that the Lutheran understanding of "finding purpose" that grows from a deeper foundational perception of vocation in Lutheran higher education is particularly salient at the graduate level and may be key to our sustainability.

Students who pursue graduate degrees are often presumed to have discovered their purpose. The assumption would be that is why students are furthering their education in specific fields for specific credentials or designations or advanced degrees. In reality, many entering graduate students are still looking for signposts along the path to purpose. Graduate education becomes more about President Kimball's message of 'living' purpose or the brand promise of 'following' purpose to transformation of communities both local and global. 'Purpose' becomes important when we use it. Graduate education has a responsibility to guide students in transforming their intentions into service and in developing the tools they will need to transform purpose into action.

With an eye on this transformation and the necessity to remain sustainable and competitive amidst increasing options all leading to the same outcomes, graduate programs at CLU must consistently reinvent themselves as they respond to the ever-changing external demands, student needs, and marketplace challenges. Our Graduate School of

Education at CLU must also be highly centered on the added components of a faith-based institution so that the constant pull of external demands does not become a distraction for a graduate program that hopes to elevate student perspectives on purpose and service.

‘Purpose’ in the Graduate School of Education at CLU is evident even in our name. Our work as faculty is to prepare candidates to be teachers, special educators, counselors and administrators. The State of California calls for that preparation to be done at the graduate level. But within our programs, we recognize the need to raise professional preparation to the level of vocational preparation. We foster the search for deeper purpose and meaning within our coursework and field experiences. That is our distinction.

The Project DAVID themes provide a framework to examine strategic planning and efforts toward sustainability within a graduate program that is embedded in a Lutheran university. While graduate programs require response to field-specific external demands (i.e. fluctuating marketplace shifts, state credentialing requirements and reviews), they must also remain tethered to the whole of the university - its missions and values. The Project DAVID themes of distinction, analytics, value, innovation, and digital opportunities provide viewpoints for examining how the Graduate School of Education at California Lutheran University continues to ‘reinvent’ itself while remaining constant to its core values and the focus on living ‘purpose’.

The GSoE at CLU devotes ongoing time and resources to explore core values as woven through all levels of our graduate programs. We view our programs as distinct based on the fact that they are tied to our values and those values become the foundation for interacting with students and one another. Our core values are articulated in a living faculty-generated STRIVE statement that is posted on every syllabus and is revisited at faculty retreats and meetings. To quote the statement:

In accordance with the mission of CLU, the Graduate School of Education seeks to develop reflective, principled educators who STRIVE to:

- Serve as mentors and models for moral and ethical leadership
- Think critically to connect theory with practice
- Respect all individuals
- Include and respond to the needs of all learners
- Value diversity
- Empower individuals to participate in educational growth and change

Unlike some mission statements, STRIVE is authentically integrated into the lives of both students and faculty in the Graduate School of Education. This devotion to basic principles is one of the things that set CLU’s graduates apart.

To take this further, the faculty generated STRIVE IN ACTION points to frame our interactions. These become framed reminders in each office of how best to model what we believe. As described in the action statement: These are the consensus-driven norms that the GSoE faculty and staff aspire to live out the STRIVE statement together on a daily basis.

So as we as a faculty set ourselves apart as “principled, reflective educators”, so too do we endeavor to distinguish our teacher, counselor and administrator candidates as they move into the field. This distinction focuses not only on content and pedagogy but also the dispositional character of our candidates. To that end, the GSoE has initiated dispositional scales on which students both self-evaluate and are evaluated.

Analytics become a critical component of both reporting to external evaluators as well as self-evaluation and informing. The GSoE has gone above and beyond standard requirements and has adopted a proactive culture of self-evaluation. The measures of what we analyze are clearly articulated in our Student Learning Outcomes and are communicated to our students through program documents and course syllabi. The GSoE has been a catalyst in promoting the use of a cloud-based software for student work tracking, portfolios and analytics in other graduate programs at CLU. This software facilitates the evaluation of student work and the ability to display evaluation data. But the more elevated use of this software is in providing the students with a platform to display the essence of their purpose and passion through a personally designed portfolio. Through the use of these multileveled tools, the GSoE utilizes analytics as both a reporting mechanism and instrument for quantitative analysis but also as a more qualitative window on student success.

The GSoE works in partnership with our marketing team and committees in conveying the value in choosing CLU

for a Masters degree and for teaching, counselor or administrator preparation and credentialing. Much of the value of a CLU graduate degree lies in both the process of obtaining the degree and/or credential and what happens after a student completes. CLU is known in the field for the excellent preparation the students receive as well as the quality of the people who graduate and are providing service to our schools and communities. Our reputation and the highly respected network that a student joins upon completion is all part of the draw to CLU graduate programs. Dr. George Petersen, the Dean of the Graduate School of Education, reports “students who have graduated from our programs have told us that they feel empowered and ready to meet the many challenges facing our P-16 institutions of education”.

Part of the quality in preparation lies in the experiential learning that is required of all students from the beginning of their program. While traditional student teaching options are available to our candidates, under the direction of Dr. Michael Cosenza, the Chair of the Department of Learning and Teaching, the GSoE has developed school partnerships following the Professional Development Schools model. The PDS model embeds both instruction and experience in a local school site. School site staff and higher education faculty work together in a transactional model to transform practice. This model provides a dedicated platform to put our core values into action. But regardless of the path that a teacher candidate chooses, a deep level of mentored experience as a teacher, counselor or administrator is required as part of our programs. When students consider where to pursue their graduate education, they consider these factors as these factors frame experiences both during and after their program completion.

Innovation is a critical ongoing element required for a graduate program to be successful and sustainable. The GSoE constantly explores ways to best meet regional need in our schools and relies heavily on our advisory board to be our eyes and ears in the field. In an effort to model our evolving pedagogical and theoretical beliefs as well as our core values, the Department of Learning and Teaching recently merged the general education and special education programs into one department. This new arrangement allowed both students and faculty to come together with commonality in language and classroom experiences to meet the needs of ALL students. It also provided administrative benefits of common course offerings, scheduling and staffing. It is a win-win solution in a time of vacillating enrollment and inclusive teaching environments. This merger also blossomed opportunities to model co-teaching – an increasing best practice in today’s classrooms.

Finally, the GSoE has demonstrated significant commitment and marshalling of resources to engage faculty and students in rapidly changing and growing digital opportunities. Outside experts have been brought in for faculty training in developing hybrid and online course components. Seminars and workshops are provided with in-house expertise in both the development and delivery of coursework that embraces technology. Social media is employed to connect with students and the wider CLU GSoE family and community. These supports have been designed with the goal of widening the CLU community and influence at the heart of outcomes. And all are developed in a way that allows us to maintain and expand on our core values.

The implementation of these strategic plans, innovations and efforts toward success and sustainability within the GSoE means that the faculty and administration have been and must continue to be open to ‘reinvention’. For me, this signals a call to be open to further personal ‘reinvention’ and proactive professional development. For administration, it necessitates a challenging commitment to exploring new ways to honor both our need to be competitive and our need to be constant to our core values. Only together can we continue to meet this challenge so that we are able to shift streams in our ever-changing world while continuing to honor the common thread that holds us constant to who we are and what we do. The changes that are necessary to remain sustainable and the fidelity to our core values are not competing forces but walk hand in hand toward principled and purposeful success and sustainability. When these elements come together, we all share in that joy of witnessing the development of an authentic action-oriented energy toward purpose.

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# Engaged Assets, Shared IT Resources

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## Jerry Sanders

Over the last ten or so years, our carefully developed and well-intended approach to the management of information technologies on campus has been increasingly strained. The strain is largely due to achieving what we wished for, and have worked toward – innovative information technologies in the hands of bright teachers have led to remarkable and broad achievement in teaching and learning.

Hooray for that, absolutely. But we have created a daunting challenge – how do we acquire the expertise to manage this success? Success has generated greatly increased demand, and a hugely expanded portfolio of technology options that must be integrated into the portfolio of academic resources. As the wave of technology options grows and demands our attention, we must also manage and maintain legacy systems.

Certainly, diminished resources in a tough economy add another dimension to the challenge as schools struggle to control costs. Twenty years ago, a good campus IT staff could cover all bases, including research and development. Now, nearly all staff resources are consumed by “keeping the system going” and maintaining security. On any single campus, there is insufficient IT time and talent to adequately maintain legacy systems while giving sufficient attention to explore the new technologies. It is essential for a coherent IT environment that we are successful with both of these pursuits.

Fortunately, we in Higher Education have an asset that has gone largely untapped – we can freely share resources among ourselves. There are many opportunities to resolve common IT challenges by sharing resources, especially in the pre-competitive aspects of information technologies. Every campus has individuals who have unique skills, who can contribute to collaboration. Development of a community of practice elevates the abilities of the participants and brings collective wisdom to bear on shared challenges.

A community of collaborative practice can take various forms, but the goal is always to develop a mindset that considers best practices and shared talent first when approaching a problem, a process of making collaboration the standard. We have excellent national professional organizations, like EDUCAUSE, that facilitate sharing our professional community’s collective knowledge. Working in campus IT without using the resources of EDUCAUSE and its sister organizations is hardly imaginable. Perhaps more importantly, local collaboration provides the value of regular, face-to-face contact with colleagues across our IT organizations. Affordability is an obvious advantage – national conferences can be very motivational, but expensive and thus available to very few staff. Local events are accessible to the entire campus IT contingent. Information technology is a system comprised of specialized components and supported by component specialists. The face-to-face exchange among a local network of peer specialists from other institutions is extremely beneficial.

We are well beyond the time that any individual will be proficient with all facets of the system. We must draw on the strength of our professional community across our campuses. CIOs, and all IT staff, can be much more effective by developing shared wisdom to manage complex and diverse campus IT resources.

Encouraging collaboration is not new to Higher Education. Especially since 2008, it has received much attention as an opportunity that can resolve the shortcomings of our previous methods. However, even as we get used to the idea, some still associate collaboration with loss of control, elimination of jobs, management by committee, and unnecessary bureaucracy. Certainly, some forms of collaboration can be any or all of those. However, that need not be the case. As an example, over the last five years, the Minnesota Higher Education Technology Alliance (MHETA) has served its participants very well, without any of the problems mentioned.

MHETA is an informal association open to all Minnesota colleges and universities. There have been no dues and no by-laws. Staffing is by volunteer. Institutional representatives are mainly CIOs. Participants form collaborations around projects when it is clearly in the interest of their schools. Projects involve at least two schools and could

involve all Minnesota schools. MHETA itself is not accountable to any agency; it is only accountable to the trust established among its participants.

To borrow from the lexicon of Web Development, MHETA could be described as an example of “responsive design”: flexible, fluid, and dynamic. The objective of MHETA is to be effective as a response to a rapidly changing world. The practical results of MHETA are most apparent in the growth and maturation of the talent within our professional community.

As a result of being part of MHETA, the IT staff members at my school are in contact with colleagues from other schools several times a day. Groups form around topics which range from technical to strategic. Contacts are usually spontaneous, and meetings are informal or formal as our purpose requires. The flexibility has worked extremely well for us and for our schools; we have improved quality and reduced cost, and have invested in the development of a trusted professional community that we expect will serve us for many years. The added benefit is that it is exhilarating to exchange ideas openly with bright, innovative colleagues from other campuses.

Whether it be a collaborative organization such as MHETA, or some other structure, the principle is simply to combine resources to serve common interests. Policies and procedures may need to be modified or replaced, but the rewards justify any inconvenience. As we have been hearing for some time now, a crisis can be an opportunity for change. Collaboration, sharing resources, and creating common solutions - these are low risk, high return changes.

MHETA participants hope that successful collaboration in information technologies can serve as a model for collaboration for other areas within our schools. Some IT challenges are easy prospects for collaboration, like software, hardware, and bandwidth purchase consortiums, and shared professional development programs. As we demonstrate success in resolution of some of these obvious candidates for collaboration, we can share our experiences and new wisdom to help our schools prepare for the challenges ahead. These challenges are reflected in the themes of Project DAVID: Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, Digital opportunity. An effective IT foundation is essential to achievement within all DAVID themes.

Achievements will take various forms at each school according to mission, but the IT foundation will look nearly identical. The foundation building process begins with participation in a digitally literate campus community who can describe an IT foundation that best suits their school. General service expectations and philosophy, funding, human resources, divisions of responsibility between IT staff and clients, and IT governance structures all need to be articulated. Again, IT collaboration across campuses can help to identify the best IT foundation for a school. This approach takes into consideration that an effective IT foundation does not just mean a talented IT staff, but rather a community that identifies which of the many IT choices serve their unique needs, and which do not. The best way to build this foundation is by bringing our best resources to bear, internal and external, through collaboration.

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# On the Future of Digital Teaching and Learning at Muhlenberg College

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**John Ramsay, Randy Helm, Kent Dyer, Jane Hudak, and Harry Miller**

## **Introduction**

What follows is a report on the work of Muhlenberg College's Task Force on Technology and Online Learning. Our hope is that this essay will serve the new purpose of providing colleagues at other residential liberal arts colleges with information and insight that will clarify their own choices as they reckon with our age of digital information.

In part, it is a case study of a year (2012-2013) in the life of a research team attempting to answer the question: What are the current varieties of online learning, and what opportunities and threats do they pose for Muhlenberg College?

In part, it is a conceptual map to a liberal arts college's shared governance system with its multiple constituencies, protocols, listening posts, and protected turfs. As such, it attempts to describe how a presidential initiative found its way into the front door and the vigilant corridors of the shared governance system of a small college.

In part, it is a planning document which reports on a particular set of recommendations and the rationales for those recommendations. In this sense, it is an account of how a college prepares to innovate in the area most central to its mission: teaching and learning.

In sum, we hope it is a reflective essay about how a college learns to move in quick currents and uncharted territories and, because it moves, positions itself to possibly craft a new facet of its institutional identity.

This essay is organized to correspond to the report's nine recommendations (Appendix D). At the same time, the narrative has a rough chronological framework as well. The full timeline of the Task Force's work can be found in Appendix C.

## **Fostering a Vibrant Culture of Technology-Rich Teaching and Learning at Muhlenberg**

On June 26-27, 2012, President Helm convened a Board of Trustees Retreat titled "Muhlenberg Confronts a Changing World." Seventy members of the College's Board, faculty, staff, alumni and parents attended to hear presentations and discuss the future of the College's brand, business model, use of technology, preparation for the work place, and the liberal arts. Nine attendees of the Board Retreat were later appointed to the Task Force.

The questions and concerns of the Retreat were frequently referenced during the Task Force's work. The Retreat was a defining moment in the recent history of the College. It served as the catalyst for comprehensive and integrated discussions about the core mission, resources, and operations of Muhlenberg during a time of crisis and change in American higher education.

Economists Robert Archibald and David Feldman delivered The Keynote Address, discussing the evidence and arguments of their book, "Why Does College Cost So Much?" Bryan Alexander, Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE) delivered his talk "Technology and Liberal Arts Education – Possible Scenarios."

The Retreat opened with presentations by faculty members and staff, well-known early adapters of state-of-the-art digital teaching tools. The session, titled "Teaching, Learning and Technology at Muhlenberg – Today and Tomorrow," featured a physicist Adam Clark (classroom clickers), a political scientist Lanethea Mathews (use of blogs during a presidential election), a media scholar Lora Taub (digital storytelling), a psychologist Laura Edelman (brain-based pedagogy) and an instructional designer Ali Herb (technology and faculty development).

Board members asked multiple important questions, but one in particular became an ongoing discussion topic of the Task Force: “What percentage of the entire faculty has the knowledge, skill and experience necessary to effectively integrate these technologies into their teaching?” The Task Force came to understand that there is no one at the College who is charged with knowing the answer to this question. And it was the Task Force’s ongoing recognition of the importance of this question that led to the adoption of the following recommendation: “The Provost’s Office will document examples of digital teaching and learning for the purpose of promoting pedagogical and curricular innovations and for seeking grants to support continuing digital innovation. (See Recommendation #3).

Months later, but informed by the Board’s questions during the Retreat, one of the Task Force’s central questions became: “How does the College foster a vibrant culture of technology-rich teaching and learning?” The premise of the question was that a first-generation of early adopting faculty were already using wikis, blogs, clickers, streamed lectures, online archives, digital storytelling, and web-based social learning tools in their classes. The questions became: How does the College support that group of faculty with the refinement and assessment of their work? And how does the College support those faculty who are just beginning to experiment with the new technologies of teaching and learning?

On February 23, 2013, the Task Force moved into the research phase of its work. The College received the good news that the Mellon Foundation had funded its proposal for faculty development workshops to support its new general education program with additional monies for “digital tools infusion.” President Helm’s proposal to Mellon had stated: “We now intend to expand faculty capacity to design and teach courses using these tools, including: wikis, blogs, e-portfolios, streaming lectures/flipped classrooms, on-line archives, digital storytelling, clickers, web-based social learning tools, geospatial mapping, and electronic polling software. [1]

The Task Force posed and answered a fundamental question: “Why is it important for Muhlenberg to accelerate and broaden a culture of technology-rich teaching and learning?” They provided three major reasons:

- a. To develop best practices for collaboration among students and faculty within and beyond the classroom;
- b. To enable students to organize and connect learning across diverse contexts;
- c. To empower students to access, create, remix and share new interdisciplinary knowledge and to enhance their identities as global citizens.

Muhlenberg was one of several national liberal arts colleges deliberating about fundamental questions of mission, teaching and learning in the liberal arts. On April 19, 2013, news of Amherst College’s rejection of bids from 2U and edX appeared in Inside Higher Education. In part, Amherst faculty rejected the edX MOOC offer because the College’s mission is to provide a liberal arts education in a “purposefully small residential community through close colloquy.” [2]

The Task Force also addressed implementation questions that took into account the current commitments of the Faculty Center for Teaching and the Office of Information Technology. The core idea within their argument for wide-spread collaboration and additional leadership was “involving faculty as catalysts for change, while highlighting excellent practices already in place on campus.” The Task Force’s view of faculty commitment to pedagogical and curricular innovation stood in sharp contrast to the assumption of John Tagg’s article that asked the question: “Why does the Faculty Resist Change?” [3] (See Recommendation #3 and #6)

### **President Helm’s Charge**

Following from the Board of Trustees Retreat in June, President Helm appointed a Task Force on Technology and Online Learning on September 12, 2012. (Appendix B) As part of the preamble to his charge, the President wrote:

“Personally, I do not believe that online education will provide significant cost-savings, that it will change our business model, or that it will supplant the kind of active learning (much of it already enhanced by technology) that characterizes most of the course in our curriculum and that makes a Muhlenberg education such a high-impact, high-value experience. I certainly do not see Muhlenberg reinventing itself as an “online college” like the University of Phoenix or other institutions of that ilk. I do, however, believe that it would be irresponsible – and indeed perilous – for us to ignore the potential impact of online learning at Muhlenberg.” [4]

The President went on to list twelve specific questions that he expected the Task Force to answer. These questions can be roughly grouped in one of seven categories: curricular, cost, consortial, quality, human resources, implementation and assessment. The Task Force consistently interpreted its charge broadly. If there was a single overarching question that informed the Task Force's research and deliberations, it could be stated as: What are the current varieties of online learning, and what opportunities and threats do they pose for Muhlenberg College?

As a means of assuring the Muhlenberg community that the charge was not just a research project, the President added the following eye-catching sentence: "If the recommendations are accepted, I will approve a one-time allocation of up to \$1 million for their implementation." In the allocation world of small colleges, a million dollars is still what it used to be: a significant incentive and therefore an emphatic way of underscoring the importance of the work of the Task Force.

### **The Framing Contexts for the Task Force's Report and Recommendations**

Knowing that this report would be widely distributed throughout the Muhlenberg community, the Task Force addressed itself to the question of the cultural impact of its research, analysis and recommendations. The Task Force was keenly aware of its role as the College's very first Task Force to take on these complicated questions at a historical moment of rapidly evolving technological capacity. Interest in and disagreement about online learning had never been higher. In order to ground itself in the culture of the college, one of the first questions the Task Force asked of itself was: "What makes Muhlenberg, Muhlenberg?"

More importantly, the Task Force determined to ground its thinking and rationales within logic and parameters of three foundational documents: 1) the Mission of the College; 2) the [Goals of the College's strategic plan, Momentum](#) (especially goals #1 and #2) and 3) [Middle State's Nine "Hallmarks of Quality"](#) [5] (Appendix E)

Moreover, the Task Force understood from the outset that Muhlenberg was surrounded by a national conversation about the "worth of the liberal arts," "higher education's capacity to innovate" and "the amount of debt students and families were absorbing by graduation day." This national mood of discontent and hunger for innovation was captured in Bill Gates' challenging questions to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities: "How can we use technology as a tool to recreate the entire college experience? How can we provide a better education to more people for less money?" [6] Like other residential liberal arts colleges with a long history and deep pride in its face to face community, Muhlenberg was beginning to experience the uncertainties and disruptions brought on by online learning.

Current Muhlenberg students, for example, are transferring online courses into the College to fulfill graduation requirements. At its opening meeting on October 9, 2012, the Task Force participated in interviews of students who had taken online courses at other institutions. Questions of faculty feedback, student interaction, academic rigor, integrity and quality were raised multiple times throughout these interviews.

The question of whether the College's Mission should be altered to embrace the new era of electronic learning had been taken up by small groups at the Board of Trustees retreat in June of 2012. The Task Force did not offer an answer to this question, except to make the following observation:

The word "technology" cannot be found in the College's current mission statement. It seems an odd omission in the 21st century, perhaps an institutional blindspot. The Task Force notes that a phrase such as "technological savvy" or "digital knowledge and skills" could be added in one of several places. This addition would make the first sentence of the Mission Statement – already quite long – even longer, but such an addition would be consistent with the charge and the work of the Task Force.

The Task Force did formulate a "Digital Liberal Arts Vision Statement." The Task Force held in mind and discussed several times the counsel of several trustees. Trustees urged the Task Force to balance technical and pragmatic considerations with a "broader vision" which could be intelligently integrated into Muhlenberg's high-quality, residential liberal arts experience. Consequently, the Task Force embraced the importance of articulating guiding principles and limiting parameters, necessary for the College to move forward with clarity and confidence.

The Task Force formulated this vision statement after conferring with consultant Gary Miller, who played a significant role in the creation of Penn State World Campus. At meetings on April 8-9, 2013, Miller urged the Task Force to articulate a Vision Statement that situated itself within the mission, culture and strategic plan of Muhlenberg. He counseled against adopting another institution's vision and bending it to fit Muhlenberg.

The Task Force proposes that the following statement be adopted after it is subject to community discussion and refinement. A vision statement is less ambitious and at a lower level of abstraction than a Mission Statement. Vision statements attempt to answer the question: How will the College be different in three to five years than it is today? In the case of the technology of teaching and learning, the Task Force's vision statement aims to answer the question: How will Muhlenberg faculty and students use electronic resources and tools in three to five years, and how will the College prepare them to use these resources and tools at high levels of quality?

### **Muhlenberg College Digital Liberal Arts Vision Statement**

Consistent with Muhlenberg's Mission, Momentum's Goals #1 and #2, and the demands of a global, technologically-rich, information society:

- a. Through recurring faculty development workshops, Muhlenberg faculty will become increasingly expert at identifying, using and creating digital resources to enhance their teaching and scholarship.
- b. Muhlenberg graduates will become critically astute and technologically adept at locating and evaluating digital resources that advance their capacities to: (i) organize their learning; (ii) create new knowledge; and (iii) build confidence in their ability to achieve advanced levels of information and digital literacy.
- c. Muhlenberg will distinguish itself as a liberal arts college with the expertise, digital resources, technological tools and institutional collaborations to prepare its graduates to thrive as learners within rapidly evolving electronic environments.

The Task Force also presented this distilled version to the Board at its "Special Topics" session on Saturday, April 27, 2013:

Muhlenberg will distinguish itself as a liberal arts college with the faculty expertise, electronic content and resources, facilities and the institutional collaborations to prepare its graduates to identify, evaluate, create, and apply digital technologies to novel problems as they pursue lives of leadership and service. (See Recommendations #1 and #2) (Appendix D)

### **2U Affiliate Membership**

At a Task Force Meeting on December 18, 2012, the Vice President of University Relations for Semester Online, a unit of 2U, presented a proposal for Muhlenberg to become an Affiliate Member. The presentation focused on an Affiliate Membership as an opportunity for Muhlenberg to partner with top-tier universities in the delivery of undergraduate for-credit courses. The 2U Consortium includes the following schools: Boston College, Brandeis, Duke, Emory, Northwestern, UNC Chapel Hill, Notre Dame and Washington University in St. Louis.

The presentation provided a full overview of the 2U program and announced that the Consortium would be ready to launch courses in September, 2013. The Task Force took full advantage of this opportunity to question the underlying assumptions of 2U and the details of what Affiliate Membership would mean for Muhlenberg. The Task Force asked questions about: faculty workload and compensation, transcripts, billing, instructional design, course development and content. The key findings by the Task Force were the following:

- a. Semester Online affiliate membership would be especially useful for students off-campus who did not have access to Muhlenberg face-to-face courses. It would allow students to keep up with their studies while traveling, working an internship, or attending to a personal or family problem.
- b. Unlike Coursera's MOOCs, 2U would be a selective consortium that would bring together its students from top-tier universities and colleges. Classes would be capped at 20 students with some real-time student discussion and interaction.
- c. The 2U tuition charge would be \$1400 per credit hour or \$4200 per 3 credit course –about three times what a Muhlenberg student would pay for a summer course at Muhlenberg. If 2U courses were taken during the Fall or Spring semester of the academic year as part of a student's full-time load, the College would have extra costs without extra revenues.

On March 13, 2013, Muhlenberg received course descriptions and syllabi from 2U. The Task Force had requested

course materials for those 2U courses that would be part of the initial “catalog.” The descriptions included materials for a variety of courses: “Baseball and American Culture” (Emory), “Drugs and Behavior” (Emory), “Environmental and Energy Policies” (Washington University), “Financial Accounting and Report” (UNC, Chapel Hill), “How To Rule the World: Introduction to Political Theory” (Boston College). It was clear that many of the materials were for face-to-face courses that had not been converted to online courses.

Consistent with Vice President Dyer’s initial indication to the Board on April 27, 2013, the Task Force did not recommend that Muhlenberg pursue an affiliate membership with 2U. [7]

At the same time, the Task Force did recommend that the College devote the resources to develop a small group of new high-quality online courses for the benefit of current Muhlenberg students. Current students who had taken online courses from other institutions said that they would have preferred to take those courses from Muhlenberg faculty, continuing to work with professors that they knew and respected. The Task Force heard similar enthusiasm for Muhlenberg online courses when they reported on their work to Muhlenberg’s Student Government leaders on February 21, 2013.

ELCA administrator, Mark Wilhelm, also encouraged the Task Force to weigh the expectations that today’s “digital natives” bring with them to campus. He had heard John Gardner, president of the Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, argue that digital natives “simply expect that offerings will enable them to avoid sacrificing participation in hoped-for academic programs that have unavoidable scheduling conflicts. Today’s students will resent having to modify plans to participate in the many rich educational experiences offered by Muhlenberg because an obvious (to them) option for a web-based substitute for a discussion section of a class, etc. is not available. I found Gardner’s suggestion compelling.” [8]

Knowing the well-documented history of Muhlenberg students’ pursuit of second majors, minors, global education, internships, research opportunities, honors programs and other curricular elements, the Task Force agreed with Wilhelm’s point. The Task Force imagined a future in which “digital natives” would be less and less inclined to accept the message that their curricular goals and aspirations cannot be achieved because of scheduling conflicts. Asynchronous online courses render that institutional response unsatisfactory. Therefore, the Task Force recommended the development of a small group of new high-quality online courses for the benefit of current and future Muhlenberg students. (See Recommendation #9).

One of the more complex implications of a campus of digital natives is the evolving challenge facing current and future Muhlenberg students about how to understand and manage their digital identities. Parents and educators are frequently bewildered and agitated by online harassment, the implications of intergenerational “friending,” cyber bullying and stalking, the lack of cell phone etiquette, and the posting of “inappropriate” photos to the web. What used to be called “information overload” is now being called “present shock,” which Jenna Wortham describes as “the stupefaction that overtakes people as they try to keep up with the never-ending onslaught of status updates, photo feeds and looping videos constantly refreshing before their eyes.” [9] Consideration of the known and unknown impact of these trends led the Task Force to recommend that the College “create new opportunities for students to understand the larger cultural issues of digital identities, so that they can better manage their own digital identities as professionals and citizens.” (See Recommendation #8)

### **Pre-Enrollment Skill Work**

The Task Force was fortunate to have as resources “local experts” on online learning. They included a Muhlenberg biologist, a member of the Task Force, and a Ph.D. candidate in the “blended” public health program at Johns Hopkins; a Muhlenberg librarian enrolled in Cedar Crest’s “blended” Bachelor of Science in Nursing program; and an Muhlenberg alum and mathematics faculty member at Lehigh Carbon County Community College (LCCC) and her Math Department colleague, who also teaches at Muhlenberg’s Wescoe School.

All of these professionals were helpful in answering the Task Force’s questions about the limits and possibilities of online learning in the context of Muhlenberg. They were also helpful as we learned the acronyms and technical vocabulary of online learning, and in helping us understand what exactly happens “inside” an online course.

On October 26, 2012, the Task Force made its first presentation to the Board of Trustees. President Helm presented materials from an online course he was taking at the University of Pennsylvania. Dean Jane Hudak made a presentation of materials from New York’s Museum of Natural History. Faculty from LCCC presented materials from MyLabsPlus platform (a Pearson product) that the LCCC math department uses. Each presentation critically

assessed the pedagogical and curricular features of the course under consideration.

The mathematician focused on four features of MyLabsPlus courses that were of interest to the Task Force and the Board. They were: 1) "Help me solve this" link; 2) "Ask an instructor"; 3) automatic gradebook; 4) tutorials. Though the pedagogical assumptions of MyLabsPlus are significantly different from those of Muhlenberg faculty, the Task Force made note of the following important point. Underprepared students with math anxiety may benefit from the content, skill development, easy access, quick feedback and interactive features of certain high quality online materials. Our LCCC colleagues also informed the Task Force of a professional organization for online faculty called Quality Matters that hosts national conferences, provides faculty development and establishes standards for online courses.

On February 5, 2013, the Task Force discussed whether to include "Pre-enrollment Skill Work" as one of its five topics for further research. The Task Force was challenged by this question. What were the trade-offs involved in the development of expensive course materials of high quality? This was the lesson from Johns Hopkins and Museum of Natural History. Coursera materials and some features of the Pearson materials seemed "teacher-proof" and "dumbed down." Could Muhlenberg afford to develop its own catalog of high-quality courses? How would the College determine if certain "off the shelf" courses might actually benefit some Muhlenberg students with weaknesses in certain academic areas? The Task Force decided to retain "Pre-enrollment Skill Work" as an ongoing research question.

On February 19, 2013, the College's Instructional Designer (also a Task Force member) made a comprehensive presentation on ready-to-use academic resources currently available from academic publishers and early-adapting universities. The presentation included information about Pearson, Smarthinking, Connexions (Rice University), MIT OpenCourseWare, the Saylor Foundation, Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative, Bryn Mawr's Next Generation Learning Challenge, iTunesU, among others. [10]

At Muhlenberg, the Academic Resource Center and the Office of Disability Services are centers of excellence, which provide students with a variety of services, preparing them for success at Muhlenberg. At the same time, the word "remediation" is a taboo word that captures faculty fears about their time and energy being used to provide "catch-up" instruction to underprepared students. The question posed by this new and rapidly growing set of online materials is: Might some materials be useful for Muhlenberg students who need to "brush up" on skills, or fill in gaps in knowledge in order to succeed at the College? The Task Force imagined that there might be a time in the next decade when more of our incoming students might need additional skill work.

The Task Force surveyed first-year students and summarized information on "well-designed interactive materials that are available online for free." Twenty-eight percent (42 students of 150) reported that they felt underprepared for the challenge of the first year courses. Forty-two percent (63 students of 150) believed that they could have benefitted from supplemental online material as they prepared to enter Muhlenberg. [11]

Pre-enrollment skill work has challenging and controversial aspects to it. There are implications for Admissions, the sciences, mathematics and modern languages, as well as Academic Resource Center and the Office of Disability Services. The Task Force's recommendation is that "more research is needed." (See Recommendation #4).

### **Articulation Agreements with High-Quality Institutions**

Currently, Muhlenberg has several strong articulation agreements with higher education partner institutions. Those agreements include the University of Pennsylvania Dental, Drexel Medical, Columbia Engineering, Thomas Jefferson physical therapy, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. The purpose of articulation agreements is to formalize a working relationship with another institution of comparable quality, so as to ease matriculation and the acceptance of credits for Muhlenberg students.

On February 5, 2013, the Task Force discussed whether to retain this research project. The working assumption of this initiative was the following: "Identify institutions that would offer our students selected online courses, easing their transitions to graduate studies or strengthening our existing programs." The Task Force agreed to investigate this option.

On October 23, 2012, Chrys Cronin made a comprehensive presentation of online course materials from her own doctoral program at the Bloomberg School of Public Health of Johns Hopkins University. The Task Force had numerous questions for Chrys about academic integrity and rigor, the pace of the courses, grading, feedback, the

community of learning within courses, costs to students, and her overall satisfaction with the program.

Chrys reported high levels of satisfaction with her Bloomberg experience stating: “online learning is the perfect way for me to learn.” She cautioned the Task Force not to infer that marginally motivated undergraduates would also thrive in an online course. She noted that she uses a variety of learning tools designed to build community among students that are embedded in all Bloomberg online courses: text chat, Audio chat, and wikis, for example. At the same time, such courses require high degrees of maturity, motivation and self-discipline.

Chrys noted: “I don’t have that instructor standing there as my crutch. I am less apt to contact the professor with an online course. I will buckle down and figure it out for myself.” [12] Chrys made a strong recommendation that members of the Task Force make a field trip to the Bloomberg School to confer with Dr. Sukan Kanchanaraksa, Director of Center for Teaching and Learning with Technology.

On December 10, 2012, five Task Force members went on a fact-finding trip to the Bloomberg School of Public Health. At the Task Force’s meeting on December 18, 2012, this team reported on their findings at Bloomberg. Dr. Kanchanaraksa and his team had been very helpful, informative and collegial. They answered all of the visiting team’s questions about how they grew from a Center for Disease Control funded certification program to a thriving brand – a world-wide, online master’s degree of public health. Bloomberg was an early adaptor of online courses and has continually invested in the quality of their courses. The Center for Teaching and Learning with Technology now employs 22 to 23 full-time staff, and have created 105 courses thus far and are hoping to add 5 to 15 more each year. [13]

Given that the Bloomberg staff offered to be of assistance to Muhlenberg, the Task Force wondered: “Might it be possible to establish an articulation agreement between Hopkins and Muhlenberg?” The Public Health minor at Muhlenberg is currently the largest minor at the College. The Task Force explored this possibility of some kind of articulation agreement with officials at Bloomberg.

But Bloomberg officials reported that they did not have relationships of this kind with undergraduate institutions, in part because Hopkins offers its own undergraduate major in public health. The Task Force recommended that the College continue to assess articulation agreements on a case by case basis. The Task Force does not recommend the pursuit of articulation agreements for the sole purpose of collaborating with a provider of online courses. The Task Force does recognize the value of collaborations with institutions that may offer individual courses that would enrich our departmental offerings, such as pre-calculus, epidemiology, fairy tales, mythology, and forensic anthropology. (See Recommendation #5).

### **“Blended” Post-Baccalaureate and Master’s Degree Programs**

After a spirited discussion, the Task Force decided to take on the question of the feasibility of blended master’s degrees and post-baccalaureate certificates or badges at Muhlenberg. Skeptics recalled that a proposal for a traditional MBA program had been considered and rejected earlier in the decade. Enthusiasts pointed out that [the number of master’s degrees awarded to US residents had grown by 50% from 1999-00 to 2009-10](#). [14]

Task Force members recalled the “What Makes Muhlenberg, Muhlenberg?” discussion and voiced concerns about the loss of institutional focus on residential undergraduate education. With reluctance, the Task Force embraced this topic.

“Blended” means an integration of face-to-face on-campus instruction with asynchronous web-based learning. It is an especially attractive program pedagogy for working adults, who have the self-discipline to do the solitary online work, yet are eager to network in face-to face classrooms with other high-powered professionals. Still “blended” is more art than science at this point. In the words of Roger Martin, retiring dean of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management: “A big challenge is creating an optimal blend between real-time, in class experiences with a professor, and asynchronous, offline content delivery... We need class experiences which are very interactive, that create something generative out of the minds of the class...” [15]

An immediate concern was voiced about whether Muhlenberg would be an outlier within the Annapolis Group (a national liberal arts college organization), if we chose to offer master’s degrees. But investigation revealed that thirty-eight percent of the Annapolis Group colleges offer post-baccalaureate or master’s programs. Within Muhlenberg’s current Carnegie Classification, Baccalaureate Colleges Arts & Sciences, there are multiple peer schools that also have “coexisting” graduate programs: Oberlin, Smith, Skidmore, Goucher, Middlebury, Bryn

Mawr and Mount Holyoke, for example.

The possibility of revenue-generating “blended” master’s programs seemed more credible when research revealed that leading universities had implemented specialized “blended” programs. Brown offers a Master’s in Healthcare Leadership – a sixteen month blended program with online learning supplemented by four week-long residencies. Tufts offers a master’s in Nutrition Science and Policy, which combines week-long residencies each semester and online courses. NYU offers a master’s in Business Analytics in phases: research, module (on campus) and post-module (implementation).

It should be noted that Muhlenberg’s Wescoe School has long experience and expertise with adult learners in low-residency courses. Wescoe has a strong reputation for effectively initiating working adults into team-based projects. Some of the initial ideas about the kinds of programs that Wescoe might consider would be the following: a post-baccalaureate pre-med program that would combine online lectures, with on campus recitation and labs. A master’s of Information Science in an executive format could combine monthly in-class meetings, supplemented by online learning. Consideration might also be given to specialty MBAs or MPAs in Arts/Non-Profit Management, Accounting or Healthcare Management.

The rationale for pursuing this expansion of Muhlenberg’s academic program is built on the recognition of demographic and financial realities. There is a shrinking pool of 18 to 21 year olds, particularly in the Northeast, which will put increasing strain on the College’s discount rate. Muhlenberg has multiple strong undergraduate programs to build on. Small colleges, such as Adrian in Michigan, are attracting their own graduates to return for a fifth year master’s degree in academic areas that they have majored in. Programs at Adrian are generating revenue from these programs, since the College does not offer financial aid to graduate students. Finally, a blended learning model would allow Muhlenberg to attract highly qualified master’s students from within and outside of the Lehigh Valley.

Post-baccalaureate and “badge” programs were also discussed and evaluated by the Task Force. At the March 26, 2013 meeting, Lora Taub and Tony Dalton made an in-depth presentation of digital badges as an evolving pedagogy, skill-focused curriculum, assessment tool and form of educational credential. Lora and Tony noted that: “Carnegie-Mellon, Purdue, USC, University of California, the Smithsonian, Intel, and Disney-Pixar are among those developing and deploying the first badging systems in a variety of formal and informal learning environments.” Mozilla has a platform for institutions who are interested in developing “digital badge backpacks” so that learners “can store their badges and push them out (display them) to their social media sites, websites or blogs.” Badges promise to document learning and achievements that would otherwise go unrecognized, and to motivate learners in new ways by providing opportunities to plan their learning and map their accomplishments. [16] [17]

How would Muhlenberg determine which blended master’s post-baccalaureate or badge programs would have the greatest chance of success? The Task Force recommends this set of “next steps”: 1) market/competitive analysis; 2) recruit an Advisory Board of current faculty and representatives from local industries; 3) facilitate faculty understanding, support and approval; 4) establish necessary protocols for consideration and approval of proposed programs; 5) prepare and propose a budget model.

Discussion of the governance process for the consideration of blended master’s programs led the Task Force to think more broadly about the adequacy of the current charge of the College Committee on Information Technologies. The scope of CCIT’s current charge does not encompass many of the initiatives envisioned by the Task Force’s recommendations. The Task Force recommended that the College amend CCIT’s functions so that it plays the role of Digital Learning Committee. The responsibilities of this committee would include: a) assessing the implementation of the Task Force’s work and proposing new initiatives; (b) identifying and reporting relevant information from the online higher and secondary education sectors; (c) participating fully within the shared governance system of the College. (See Recommendation #4).

## **January 2014: The Updates**

In the past two months, there have been three “next steps” driven by the recommendations of the Task Force. First, we have developed a job description for an associate dean of digital learning and are doing an internal search to fill this position. This new dean will report directly to the provost. The position will be filled by a tenured faculty member on a part-time basis. It is important, we believe, that this colleague continue to stay abreast of new technologies and opportunities to innovate with his or her own courses.



Second, we have begun with conversation about how to charge a college committee with the evolving digital learning agenda. One model under discussion is to fold the Task's Force's interests and recommendations into the current work of the College Committee on Information Technologies (CCIT). An alternative model would be to develop a new committee, carefully drawing the boundaries between CCIT and this new committee. Arguments for and against each model have been voiced within CCIT. And knowledge about this discussion has been shared with the other major committees and the faculty at large.

Finally, the Wescoe School has begun to interview market research firms so that Muhlenberg can gather and analyze information about the prospects for blended post-baccalaureate programs. The market research report will be widely shared and discussed. For Muhlenberg to adopt post-baccalaureate programs would be a turning point moment in the history of the College, and we understand the value of transparency and wide discussion as we anticipate such a report.

## Conclusions

Readers hoping for a flow chart of necessary and sufficient activities for residential colleges wondering how to innovate through digital and online learning will likely be disappointed. The novelty of the Task Force's charge did not lend itself to a predictable set of steps that could be easily transferred to peer institutions. Foresight did not suggest an obvious method for how the Task Force should organize its work. But hindsight does suggest that the Task Force did test, practice and abide by several operating principles, except "Meet every two weeks over lunch." What were those principles?

- 1) **Consult local experts:** As it turned out, there were multiple faculty, staff, and students who had some experience with online courses. More often than not, we invited these local experts to our Task Force meetings, fed them lunch, and asked them to share their knowledge and experience with us. We were very fortunate that these members of the Muhlenberg community were so generous with their time and insights.
- 2) **Learn from the inside out:** All members of the Task Force enrolled in a Coursera course so that they would have their own direct experience with what turned out to be the most celebrated course delivery system of 2012-13: The MOOC. The overall conclusion of the Task Force was that MOOC's were in their infancy, and that reasonably-priced, high-quality undergraduate education was available anywhere at anytime for anyone with a laptop.
- 3) **Value each other's insights:** The Task Force worked together well primarily because members listened respectfully to each other. On this topic, there was no single expert, who others deferred to. We understood that each member of the Task Force had a unique angle of vision to contribute.
- 4) **Disagree in ways that will keep the questions open:** We disagreed frequently over a variety of issues. We learned to get comfortable with our disagreements. And we recognized the danger of issuing a report with "stalemate" conclusions. We did not want the College to be forever stymied by questions of digital and online learning. So we worked hard to resolve our differences, rather than holding out for the precise wording or the exact initiative that each of us as individuals might have preferred.
- 5) **Learn the technical vocabulary, and then re-state it in your own words:** Much of the language of our topic was new and evolving. We operated with no definitive dictionary of digital learning. We did spin our wheels on occasion because we assumed common meanings for key terms that really did not exist. We called for clarity when we heard jargon. We became better translators of ourselves for our colleagues.

Readers uncertain about how Muhlenberg's conceptual map of our shared governance system tracks on their own, are right to wonder. Governance protocols and cultures vary significantly even among similar small colleges. It may be the case that the work of our Task Force offers scant governance guidance for colleagues at other institutions.

More optimistically, it bears mentioning that Muhlenberg's Task Force was the beneficiary of certain "favorable circumstances," which allowed our work to proceed productively. The first favorable circumstance was that multiple members of the Task Force sat on important college-wide committees. For example, both Trustees on the Task Force were members of the Board's Educational Policies and Faculty Affairs Committee. One faculty member was the outgoing chair and another was the current chair the faculty's Academic Policy Committee. The Task Force was

a governance savvy group, and that circumstance proved to be valuable as we entertained questions such as: “If the College did want to offer even a single MOOC, how would such a course be approved?”

Another favorable circumstance was that each member of the Task Force was willing to pledge not to “speak on behalf of the Task Force.” Moreover, the multiple constituencies of our campus gave us “room to work.” This is to say that the Task Force was not subpoenaed to appear and give an account of its work by hostile stakeholders in the governance system. The Task Force did provide updates to the Trustees, the Student Government Association, and at Faculty Meetings. Sensing both the complexity and sensitivity of the Task Force’s assignment, each of these groups asked helpful questions and provided encouraging feedback.

The questions that colleagues at other institutions might usefully ask may have more to do with the undergirding culture of change at their own institution than our culture at Muhlenberg. Few would claim that Muhlenberg’s culture consistently exhibits a voracious appetite for institutional change. But it is a culture with a respect for transparent processes that pose good questions, systematically gather data, and aspire to clarify institutional choices while informing decision making about the future of the College. In other words, Muhlenberg’s culture of change is no different from the culture of many small colleges. It is a culture anchored in the College’s mission and governance protocols. It is skeptical of change, especially change that could jeopardize the high-quality face to face teaching and learning community that is the central marker of the College’s identity. But we believe that this case study demonstrates that the College’s skepticism about change is tempered by an intense commitment to the future of the liberal arts and a hunger for innovations that will advance the College.

In closing, it is clear that the Task Force created a planning document. Once the President accepted the report and began to discuss the implementation of specific recommendations, the Task Force knew that its work would have an impact on technology, teaching, and learning. Whether or not this plan will have strategic implications for the College remains to be seen. Much depends on what one means by “strategic.”

In the classic Michael E. Porter model, strategy is “...the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities.” Porter’s argument is that if you don’t have a strategy, you’re competing only on the basis of organizational effectiveness – and in the long run, competing on the basis of organization effectiveness is a weak position. Porter’s examples of organizations with a strategy are drawn exclusively from the corporate world. Ikea, Southwest Airlines, Carmike Cinemas all have winning strategies. [18]

One might imagine a liberal arts college aspiring to develop a digital learning “strategy” in Porter’s sense of the concept. Such a college would plan to design and implement a set of activities that created a unique and valuable market position in admissions. Suppose, for example, that this strategy aimed to raise the percentage of incoming students who had graduated in the top ten percent of their high school classes from 50% to 90% in five years. Now that would be “strategy” in the Porter sense of strategy. But think how improbable that supposition sounds. The Task Force does not believe it has crafted a strategy in this grand Porterian sense.

But if we employ Donald Sull’s less stringent sense of “strategy,” namely “strategy as active waiting,” then the work of the Task Force might be thought of as strategic. Sull starts from the premise that in periods of economic volatility and technological disruption, it is both difficult and dangerous to presume to “gaze far into the future and craft long-term strategies.” He suggests that those who engage in “active waiting” should think of themselves as doing “strategic” work. Active waiting entails the following: 1) probing the future for harbingers of opportunities and threats; 2) maintaining a “war chest” of funds; 3) discernment about correctly identifying opportunities and threats for what they truly are; 4) intelligently using the “war chest” in a timely way to seize opportunities and/or minimize a threat. It is in this modest, Sullian sense that this work has already demonstrated, and time may prove still further that the Task Force has done “strategic” work on behalf of Muhlenberg College. [19]

## Notes

[1] President Helm letter to Eugene Tobin, Program Officer for Higher Education at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, January 23, 2013 and letter from Don Randel of the Mellon Foundation to President Helm approving grant, February 19, 2013

[2] Ry Rivard, “Despite courtship Amherst decides to shy away from star MOOC provider,” Insider Higher Ed, April 19, 2013.

- [3] John Tagg “Why Does the Faculty Resist Change?”, *Change*, January/February 2012.
- [4] President Helm’s memo “Technology and Online Learning at Muhlenberg College,” September 12, 2012.
- [5] The Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education Programs (Online Learning), Middle States Commission on Higher Education, February 2011.
- [6] Marc Parry, Kelly Field, and Beckie Supiano, “The Gates Effect,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 19, 2013, A20
- [7] Laura Pappano of The New York Times interview with Andrew Ng, Coursera co-founder and Anawt Aganwal, edX President; <http://vimeo.com/61462355>.
- [8] Online Task Force Minutes of February 19, 2013.
- [9] Jenna Wortham, “Life as Instant Replay, Over and Over Again”, *The New York Times*, September 21, 2013.
- [10] Ali Herb Online Educational Resources Presentation, Online Task Force Minutes, February 19, 2013.
- [11] Tess Dul, Ali Herb, and Grant Scott, Pre-Enrollment Skill Work, presentation to Board of Trustees Special Topics Session, April 27, 2013.
- [12] Chrysan Cronin presentation of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Online Course Materials, Online Task Force Minutes, October 23, 2012.
- [13] Chrysan Cronin’s Report on fact-finding trip to Johns Hopkins Center for Teaching at Learning at Bloomberg School of Public Health, Online Task Force Minutes, December 18, 2012.
- [14] National Center for Education Statistics, “Number of degrees conferred to U.S. residents by degree-granting institutions,” (2012).
- [15] “Disruption on the line,” *The Economist*, April 9, 2013.
- [16] Online Task Force Minutes, March 26, 2013.
- [17] Michael Schrage, “Four Innovation Trends to Watch in 2013,” *HBR Blog Network*, December 28, 2012.
- [18] Michael E. Porter, “What is Strategy?”, *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1996.
- [19] Donald N. Sull, “Strategy as Active Waiting,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 2005.
- [20] Examples might include summer courses for students who wish to live at home during summer break; students who are on medical leave, but who could manage less than a full course load; students in a study-abroad program who need to take a particular Muhlenberg course; or students at other institutions who wish to take a course offered by Muhlenberg but not at their own college or university.

## **Appendix A**

The Task Force members and their responsibilities are listed below. Individually, and collectively, they proved to be extraordinary in their commitment to the College, vision for the future, and collegiality to each other. We are most grateful for their many contributions to the success of our work. Special gratitude and praise goes to Barbara Spangler, Assistant to the Provost, who was tireless and expert in her willingness to produce "one last draft" of our report – many, many times.

John Ramsay, Provost (Co-Chair)

Kent Dyer, Chief Business Officer (Co-Chair)

Lance Bruck, M.D., '89, Chairman of OBGYN Department, Stamford Hospital (Trustee Representative)

Chrysan Cronin, Lecturer in Biology and Director of the Public Health Minor (Faculty – Natural Sciences Representative)

Tess Dul (Student Representative)

Jonathan Flint (Student Representative)

Jane Hudak, Dean of the Wescoe School

Luba Iskold, Professor of Russian and Director of the Language Learning Center (Faculty – CCIT Representative)

Alexandra Latronica-Herb, Academic Instructional Designer (Staff Representative)

Harry Miller, Director of OIT

Holmes Miller, Professor of Business (Faculty – Social Sciences Representative)

Beatrice O'Donnell P'10, Partner at Duane Morris LLP (Trustee Representative)

Grant Scott, Professor of English (Faculty – Humanities Representative)

Deborah Tamte-Horan, Registrar (Staff Representative)

Lora Taub-Pervizpour, RJ Associate Professor of Media and Communication (Faculty – APC Representative)

Amy Benninger, Wescoe School Web and Marketing Assistant, Secretary to the Task Force

## Appendix B



Peyton R. Helm  
PRESIDENT

**TO:** Muhlenberg Faculty, Students, and Staff  
Muhlenberg Board of Trustees  
**FROM:** Randy Helm  
**CC:** President's Staff, Jane Hudak, Harry Miller  
**DATE:** September 12, 2012  
**RE:** Technology and Online Learning at Muhlenberg College

As you know, the subject of online learning has been much in the news recently. From The Chronicle of Higher Education, to the New York Times, to the Wall Street Journal observers of higher education have predicted a technology-driven revolution in how students gain access to high-quality instruction.

I am a skeptic when it comes to predicted “revolutions” and I believe quite strongly that our society will continue to depend on small, private, residential liberal arts colleges like Muhlenberg to provide young men and women with the potent combination of intellectual and personal development, values formation, and opportunities for leadership, and civic engagement that has served our graduates and our country so well for so many years. On the other hand,

numerous conversations over the last several months with members of our faculty, our board of trustees, and with presidents and provosts of many other liberal arts colleges have persuaded me that we need to think creatively and move deliberately in strengthening the role technology plays in instruction on traditional campuses like ours. While I have encountered a wide range of opinions, I have also sensed an emerging consensus that online learning will, inevitably, be a part of what we do, even at small, private, residential liberal arts colleges. This derives from the knowledge that:

- A significant number of students arrive on college campuses already having taken one or more online courses;
- A number of our students are already taking online college courses for transfer credit;
- A number of our alumni are telling us that they have taken advanced courses online after graduation, and found them to be valuable and of high quality;
- The proliferation of mobile devices and on-demand services is leading to increased expectations for more flexible scheduling access to lectures and other course assignments;
- Employers will increasingly expect our graduates to be familiar with online learning and related technologies; and
- There may be institutional advantages to providing selected courses online, including flexibility in offering courses to students who cannot physically be on campus for some reason. [20]

Personally, I do not believe that online education will provide significant cost-savings, that it will change our business model, or that it will supplant the kind of active learning (much of it already enhanced by technology) that characterizes most of the courses in our curriculum and that makes a Muhlenberg education such a high-impact, high-value experience. I certainly do not see Muhlenberg reinventing itself as an “online college” like the University of Phoenix or other institutions of that ilk. I do, however, believe that it would be irresponsible – and indeed perilous – for us to ignore the potential impact of online learning at Muhlenberg.

These beliefs were reinforced by the robust discussion at our June Board retreat. Trustees, faculty, parents, and others confirmed the fundamental importance of Muhlenberg’s brand: personal attention, active learning, excellent teaching, supportive community, and powerful outcomes. They also noted the creative use of technology already employed by many of our faculty to enrich active learning in their classrooms, and they encouraged continued innovation in our approach to undergraduate education. There are, of course, many kinds of online courses – some of dubious academic quality. Such courses have no place in Muhlenberg’s curriculum. We should consider only models capable of delivering rigorous, substantive, high-quality instruction.

Accordingly, I am appointing an ad hoc committee of faculty, staff, students, and trustees to develop recommendations for Muhlenberg’s future development of online course options. If the recommendations are accepted, I will approve a one-time allocation of up to \$1 million for their implementation.

Here are some of the questions I will charge the ad hoc committee with addressing:

1. What courses would be most appropriate for the development of online versions? Should we aim for a distribution of courses across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities? Should we concentrate on courses in majors? Entry-level courses? Courses that our students frequently take elsewhere for transfer credit? Courses that generate high summer-session enrollments?
2. What use can we make of high-quality online courses that are already available for free, through MITx, Coursera, Udacity or similar entities? Gettysburg, I am told, offers its students college credit for such courses as independent studies when a member of the Gettysburg faculty guides their work. Should we consider something along these lines?
3. What technology would be required for the development of our own online courses, including technology that assures academic integrity in the completion of assignments, tests, etc.? Could the same technology be useful to faculty in developing “flipped classes” and other forms of blended courses offered on campus? What faculty training and development would be required? How might we incentivize faculty to develop online courses?
4. What would the upfront costs be of developing and offering selected courses online? What would be the continuing costs? What management structure would be most appropriate for the development and ongoing management of such courses?

5. What opportunities might be created by encouraging or even requiring students to take certain introductory courses online, freeing up faculty to teach more higher level courses? Could such opportunities dovetail with our implementation of the new general education requirements?
6. How might we explore opportunities to collaborate in the development of online courses with other high-quality liberal arts colleges to leverage our investment? (My conversations with other presidents and provosts at other liberal arts colleges suggest that few institutions are currently developing online courses, but that most are interested in doing so).
7. How might our Wescoe School function as an incubator for the development and teaching of online courses?
8. How might our efforts to create online courses enhance our ability to develop blended courses and to extend the appropriate use of technology in the regular curriculum?
9. What might be the utility of offering certificates or “badges” for certain types of competencies and skills developed by students in online (or other) courses?
10. What is a realistic timeline for implementation of online learning options?
11. What is likely to be the ongoing financial impact on tuition, room, and board revenues for the College?
12. How might we assess the results of such an initiative?

## Appendix C

### Online Task Force Timeline Of Events and Work

<b>June 26-27, 2012</b>	Board of Trustees Retreat, “Muhlenberg Confronts a Changing World.”
<b>September 2012</b>	Lewis Duncan, “A New Paradigm for Learning,” University Business, page 92, September 2012.
<b>September 12, 2012</b>	President Helm appoints Task Force on Technology and Online Learning and sends charge to College community.
<b>October 9, 2012</b>	First meeting of the Task Force. Review of President Helm’s charge and “What Makes Muhlenberg, Muhlenberg?”
<b>October 23, 2012</b>	Chrys Cronin made presentation of online course materials from her own doctoral program at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University.
<b>October 26, 2012</b>	Task Force made its first presentation to the Board of Trustees.
<b>December 10, 2012</b>	Chrys Cronin led Task Force members Harry Miller, Jane Hudak, Kent Dyer and John Ramsay on a fact-finding trip to the Bloomberg School of Public Health.
<b>December 18, 2012</b>	Andrew Hermalyn, 2U, presented a proposal for Muhlenberg to become an Affiliate Member of the 2U Consortium.  Chrys Cronin, Harry Miller, Jane Hudak, Kent Dyer, and John Ramsay reported their findings at the Bloomberg School of Public Health.
<b>January 23, 2013</b>	Submission of Muhlenberg College grant to Mellon Foundation for new curriculum, digital tools and innovative pedagogy.
<b>February 5, 2013</b>	After discussion, the Task Force decided to retain “Pre-Enrollment Skill Work” as an ongoing research question with Ali Herb, Tess Dul and Grant Scott serving as the principal investigators.

Task Force also decided to investigate the option of articulation agreements with high-quality institutions with Chrys Cronin and Debbie Tamte-Horan as leaders of this team.

Ali Herb made a presentation to the Task Force on ready-to-use academic resources currently available from academic publishers and early adopting universities.

Date of receipt of letter from Mellon Foundation approving Muhlenberg's grant proposal for the new general education curriculum.

- February 21, 2013** Tess Dul and John Ramsay update the Student Government Association on the work of the Task Force.
- March 13, 2013** Muhlenberg received course descriptions and syllabi from 2U, as requested by the Task Force
- March 26, 2013** Lora Taub and Tony Dalton made a presentation to the Task Force on digital badges.
- April 8-9, 2013** Consultant Gary Miller, Penn State World Campus, urges Task Force to articulate a Vision Statement.
- April 9, 2013** "Disruption on the line", The Economist
- April 19, 2013** Amherst College rejects edX, "Despite courtship Amherst decides to shy away from star MOOC provider," Ry Rivard, Inside Higher Ed.
- April 27, 2013** Task Force presents Vision Statement to the Board of Trustees at its "Special Topics" session.
- September 18, 2013** Will Oremus, "Forget MOOCs," Slate
- September 25, 2013** Report sent to President Helm

## Appendix D

### Executive Summary of Muhlenberg College Online Task Force Recommendations

**September 25, 2013**

#### Mission and Vision

1. The Task Force recommends that deliberations about the future of digital teaching and learning at the College be integrated within three larger institutional frameworks: the College's Mission Statement, Muhlenberg's Strategic Plan, and Middle States' existing principles for accreditation.
2. Vision Statement: Muhlenberg will distinguish itself as a liberal arts college with the faculty expertise, digital content and resources, facilities and institutional collaborations to prepare its graduates to identify, evaluate, create, and apply digital technologies to novel problems as they pursue lives of leadership and service.

#### Capacity and Governance

3. The College will assess those facilities, staffing, and professional development programs that currently support digital initiatives. The Provost's Office will document, publish and maintain examples of digital teaching and learning for the purpose of promoting pedagogical and curricular innovations and for seeking grants to support continuing digital innovation.
4. The Task Force recommends that it work with the President to develop a standing Digital Learning Committee, whose responsibilities will include: (a) assessing the implementation of the Task Force's work and proposing new initiatives; (b) identifying and reporting relevant information from the online higher and secondary education

sectors; (c) exploring digital liberal arts curricular content for faculty and students regardless of whether the source of that content is a for-profit or open source provider; (d) participating fully within the shared governance system of the College.

5. Muhlenberg will explore consortial collaborations and articulation agreements, both with LVAIC and other colleges with similar commitments to quality liberal arts and pre-professional education.

#### Action Items

6. The College will create opportunities for all generations of faculty to integrate digital resources into appropriate parts of the new general education curriculum and the evolving academic program.

7. The College should pursue the market research necessary to assess the viability of a small number of high quality “blended” master’s degree, post-baccalaureate, and digital badge programs.

8. The College will create new opportunities for students to understand the larger cultural issues of digital identities, so that they can better manage their own digital identities as professionals and citizens.

9. The Task Force does not recommend that Muhlenberg pursue the development of a catalog of MOOCs. “Massive” and “Open” are outside the mission of the College. The Task Force does recommend the development of a small group of new high-quality online courses for the benefit of current Muhlenberg students.

## **Appendix E**

### **Muhlenberg College**

#### **Mission Statement**

Muhlenberg College aims to develop independent critical thinkers who are intellectually agile, characterized by a zest for reasoned and civil debate, committed to understanding the diversity of the human experience, able to express ideas with clarity and grace, committed to life-long learning, equipped with ethical and civic values, and prepared for lives of leadership and service. The College is committed to providing an intellectually rigorous undergraduate education within the context of a supportive, diverse residential community. Our curriculum integrates the traditional liberal arts with selected pre-professional studies. Our faculty are passionate about teaching, value close relationships with students, and are committed to the pedagogical and intellectual importance of research. All members of our community are committed to educating the whole person through experiences within and beyond the classroom. Honoring its historical heritage from the Lutheran Church and its continuing connection with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Muhlenberg encourages, welcomes, and celebrates a variety of faith traditions and spiritual perspectives.

*John Ramsay, jramsay@muhlenberg.edu, provost; Randy Helm, helm@muhlenberg.edu, president; Kent Dyer, dyer@muhlenberg.edu, treasurer; Jane Hudak, hudak@muhlenberg.edu, dean of the Wescoe School; and Harry Miller, hmiller@muhlenberg.edu, director of the Office of Information Technology; each serve at Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA.*



# Engaging Digital Opportunities in the Midst of the Perfect Storm

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**Autumm Caines and Wen-Li Feng**

Higher education in the United States today is facing a multitude of disruptions and potential threats. From skyrocketing tuition, shrinking demographics, changing culture, and disrupting new models, the problems can seem insurmountable when viewed en masse and a phrase like “perfect storm” arises to describe their convergence. The conversation surrounding this storm is taking place at a national level and includes voices from government and industry. On college campuses this conversation is often fractured – transpiring within the silos of departments and schools without much university-wide reflection. This storm is happening at the same time as (and, to a large degree because of) an exceptional surge in communication technology through various digital tools. At a consumer level these tools are often greeted by great excitement; discerning an effective pedagogical use for them can get confused with their wow factor. By creating structures for open conversations within our campuses, we encourage meaningful discussion of digital opportunities for growth and expansion.

University campuses are unique and vibrant places; no two are alike and each has its own particular culture. Engaging digital opportunities on our campuses will frighten some and inspire others, both of which are valid and valuable responses. The inspired will help us to dream about the possibilities and the fearful will alert us to potential problems. We can encourage this conversation by creating structures that will cultivate a convergence of people and ideas. If we were just talking about technology development and deployment that would be a huge discussion in itself, but technology bumps up against culture and challenges whole paradigms of thought, policy, procedure, and even how one perceives their world. Multifaceted conversations such as these will get easily sidetracked if not given a context and structure. At Capital University’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) we run a weekly learning series for faculty and academic staff. The learning series includes three tracks: Learn, Explore, and Share. Learn sessions are designed to help faculty and staff learn about the University’s existing instructional tools and resources. Explore sessions examine emerging models, technologies, and problems in the field of higher education. And Share sessions offer a venue to faculty and staff for sharing effective instructional strategies and useful approaches to administrative tasks with colleagues.

In this way we take a three-pronged approach to addressing many of the factors of the perfect storm. First, we provide support for the infrastructure that we currently have in place. Between technologies that are new to us, such as lecture capture, and upgrades to existing technologies, such as the learning management system, these Learn track topics consistently need to be addressed. However, for some issues, we may not have simple answers that can be delivered in a one hour workshop. For instance, the problem of shrinking demographics seems bigger than all of us, but through an Explore track reading group of Jeffery Slingo’s College (Un)Bound we have become more aware of that issue and collaboratively discussed ways to combat it. Finally, as stated earlier, there is a spectrum of responses regarding digital opportunities. Thinking about deploying new models, approaches, and applications of technology can be motivating for some but intimidating to others. It is easy to look at examples of new strategies or techniques found in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or at a national conference and point out differences in location, size, funding, scope, or mission. But to hear a compelling Share session highlighting how someone in your own department flipped the classroom or worked as an advisor in a MOOC makes these things seem more achievable. By creating this structure in our CELT learning series we are building a place to support what we know works well, while staying open to a free exploration of ideas, and learning from one another. This kind of exploration is not always smooth and stress-free, but as we develop critical analysis we will move forward in effective ways.

In our CELT office the services of instructional technology and design serves the university as a whole but the closest contact comes directly with the faculty members. Recently, in one of our Explore sessions, a faculty member opened up about feeling insecure about some of the disruptive influences that have been associated with this term perfect storm. He had spent all of his adult life working in higher education, envisioning himself in a certain environment and now felt that environment may not even exist in a few years. A statement like this has a tendency

to chill a room. Though seldom spoken, anxiety about the future and one's ability to successfully adapt is a fairly common concern. It is important that we do not shy away from these fears and anxieties but rather examine the assumptions on which they are based. Last year, our Board of Trustees began a campus wide discussion about the "perfect storm" and its possible effects. They engaged the campus by identifying six major issues facing higher education today and projected six possible scenarios that could arise given these issues. They then posted discussion topics on each to a University intranet site, and held sessions with University employees to discuss the threats and opportunities posed by potentially disruptive forces. While intranet participation was low, many employees participated in the face-to-face discussions and, in turn, a wider discourse began on campus about the future of teaching and learning. This framework inspired many critical conversations about the scenarios which got everyone talking and thinking. The use and influence of technology, as you might suspect, was central to many of these conversations.

Like many small schools, we are only now beginning to more strategically examine the potential of online and hybrid course offerings. To do this, once again, we are relying on a broad discourse to guide us. About the same time that the Board was engaging the campus in a discussion about the perfect storm, the authors of this paper were involved with a task group on eLearning. Representing CELT, Information Technology, and the Faculty Senate Technology committee, the task group was charged with examining and reporting on eLearning. Inspired by the work of the Board of Trustees and conversations with other faculty and administrators, the task force developed an eLearning white paper. The white paper defined and formed a language around eLearning, informed the campus about eLearning trends, established a model of eLearning, and provided an assessment of current needs and resources at Capital. Based on the findings of this report, the task force made recommendations in three areas: administration, technology, and faculty/student support. The white paper was then circulated to University stakeholders for further discussion and input. These stakeholders included faculty governance bodies, academic departments, University administrators and the Board of Trustees. This paper created a context for an ongoing dialogue and stimulated the development of action plans and outcomes. In regards to eLearning, white paper also provided crucial information for budgetary considerations relating to technology investments, assisted committees in setting goals, and stimulated discussion about policy change. In this way the paper served as a framework for discourse about eLearning and that discourse led to innovation through implementation.

Just as conversation helps generate a vision and a foundation, the implementation of digital opportunities brings about innovation and ingenuity. Implementation of course goes deeper than just purchasing digital tools; those tools need to be supported as the eLearning white paper recommended, in three defined areas: administrative, technological, and faculty/student. Providing administrative support, Capital recently created a listing in the student registration system to indicate that a course is an online offering. At about the same time we implemented a lecture capture solution – an example of technological support. And in terms of faculty and student support, we started to work with a quality assurance consortium for assuring quality design of online and hybrid courses. Armed with these support structures, CELT is offering support in online course design and instructional technology.

Several instructors have taken advantage of the opportunity to work with CELT for support of online and hybrid courses. To provide for critical reflection, CELT ran a Share installment of the learning series where we heard from these professors about their experiences in creating an online course. All of them were surprised by how much hard work went into creating the courses and stated that the process was much different than what they had expected. Going in, some thought that they were just going to put their materials up on the learning management system, but instead they found that they had to change their approach to teaching the course. One of them compared it to making a movie out of a book and stated that when the whole platform is different the content needs to be adapted to fit that platform. Overall they found the experience rewarding – they felt that their courses were better organized and their students were more engaged because of going through the online course design process. There are still a lot of questions regarding eLearning at Capital but by combining reflection on open discourse with examples of successful models, we are moving forward.

Digital opportunities should be considered as just that, opportunities. Using digital tools because they are cool or because everyone else is doing it makes little pedagogical sense. Lutheran institutions in particular have deep roots in the concept of using technology to achieve a larger purpose. Martin Luther used the printing press to disseminate criticism of indulgences and spread the ideas of Protestantism. He used technology to further these ideas – he did not create these ideas so as to find a use for the printing press. Lutheran institutions need to use the digital tools of our time to highlight the values of a Lutheran education and preserve Lutheran principles such as free inquiry, vocation, and teaching the whole person. Building structures that support broad discussions, reflecting upon those discussions to find connections to our missions, and innovatively deploying digital tools in a meaningful way will

help to assure that we are taking advantage of opportunities and not just technology. The perfect storm is headed directly for us, but we will get nowhere by trying to be something that we are not. We need to focus our efforts on connecting our missions with the digital tools that best support them.

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# Agents of Transformation: Insights from CIOs

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**Ann Hill Duin**

President Jolene Koester, in her article on Information Technology (IT) and tomorrow's institution, states: "IT professionals can and should be at the core of envisioning and shaping the future of our colleges and universities... IT professionals have the exciting potential to be agents of transformation." [\[1\]](#)

As part of Project DAVID, I have visited with the majority of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) at this set of colleges and universities. As a former associate president for information technology at the University of Minnesota, and as a scholar on the future of networked learning and higher education, I enjoyed this chance to visit with and thank those who support the infrastructure via which we all accomplish our work.

To summarize, these CIOs are extremely proud of their work and increasingly conscious of security needs. They are penultimate collaborators: sharing services and positions, collaborating with other colleges, and leveraging knowledge from every conceivable type of consortia. They are relying more on cloud services whenever possible, and some, while wearing nametags from their institutions, are actually part of outsourcing contracts.

CIOs at every institution thus far have talked about innovative curricula, flipped classrooms, online education, MOOCs (massive open online courses), and the need to leverage digital opportunities. They have led in the hire of new instructional technologists who are working together with faculty to construct online and hybrid courses. Most importantly, they know and understand their entire college or university landscape, as they work with everyone. In short, they make it work.

In discussing the DAVID themes with each CIO and his/her team, I welcomed their honesty:

Kurt Ashley at Thiel College shared that "CIOs are hired for innovation and fired for operations issues. Key is to find the right balance." His instructional technologist, Jennifer Behm, emphasized that reinventing is key: "The only way you can reinvent is to collaborate." And together they spoke of their strategic work to move from a "bunker" mentality and IT support as being a "stern parent," to IT support as making it work, as collaborating across the many higher education silos.

Leif Anderson at Augsburg College agreed that a critical question is "How can Digital opportunity make programs more distinctive?"

Jeff Guiler at Capital University, during a grand tour of his entire campus, talked of the need for students with well-rounded technical skills and the role of a liberal arts campus in meeting this need.

Mark Huber at Susquehanna University asked, "How can I learn what others are doing to create a change via use of IT - to transform the institution? As an IT leader - how do I transform how we deliver education? I see DAVID as about learning what others are doing, trying options out, creating a larger feedback loop to share, experiment, and see what happens. We can't survive without collaborating."

Rebecca Sandlin and her team at Roanoke College shared that "innovating is implementing." Through IT project management, they provide communication that previously was missing in other projects. They began an initiative known as Transparent Assessment of Projects (TAP) in which proposals can come from faculty, administration, staff, and students, and they are vetted through a transparent governance process.

Jerry Sanders at Macalester College shares (in this collection): "Twenty years ago, a good campus IT staff could cover all bases, including research and development. Now, nearly all staff resources are consumed by 'keeping the system going' and maintaining security. On any single campus, there is insufficient IT time and talent to adequately maintain legacy systems while giving sufficient attention to explore the new technologies... Fortunately, we in

Higher Education have an asset that has gone largely untapped – we can freely share resources among ourselves. There are many opportunities to resolve common IT challenges by sharing resources, especially in the pre-competitive aspects of information technologies. Every campus has individuals who have unique skills, who can contribute to collaboration. Development of a community of practice elevates the abilities of the participants and brings collective wisdom to bear on shared challenges.”

As I reflect on these visits, I find myself positioning each school on a table that illustrates the continued evolution in IT success indicators (Duin et al., 2011).<sup>[2]</sup> Every CIO has been asked to lower operating costs, but the strategies for doing so vary greatly. Every CIO understands the criticality of good data, but few indicated collaborative work with their college’s offices in charge of student outcomes, academic analytics and institutional research. Every CIO shared how he or she is working to link IT work to collegiate strategy, but in only a few cases is the CIO positioned to provide collaborative, shared leadership with administration.

### **How might these CIOs be agents of transformation?**

Bill Graves (2013), Senior Vice President, Academic Strategy at Ellucian, writes that any serious discussion of “the necessity and nature of transformation should start by conceding that educating is still practiced largely via the venerable 19th-century contact-hour/credit-hour service model; revenues are still being collected mostly from credit hours attempted; and data from educational processes are still chiefly controlled by educational institutions, not by the learners they serve.” And that “using IT to continue to improve incrementally upon only the flexibility of traditional educational practices...is not the same as using IT to transform educational practices in pursuit of future societal goals that appear to depend strongly on higher orders of learning.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Graves is not surprised that higher education remains systemically unchanged. Likewise, Associate Provost Ty Buckman (in this collection) writes: “Though we seem to be in the midst of an unprecedented period of disruptive technological change and accelerated innovation, the place of technology has not changed much at small colleges and universities in those years.” He continues, “The people who populate [our] classrooms, however, have changed. Ubiquitous technology and the expectation of instant access to the entertainment and information it provides, as well as an unbroken communication link to family and friends, have changed the way we interact, how we learn, and what we expect from our institutions. And this attitude is not limited to our students. Many junior faculty now arrive at liberal arts colleges and universities having taught online as graduate students or in previous positions, thus dispelling by their presence the claim that faculty at small private institutions ‘don’t teach like that.’”

Instructional technologists Caines and Feng (this collection) share how Capital University’s CELT initiative is essentially an agent of transformation: “If we were just talking about technology development and deployment that would be a huge discussion in itself, but technology bumps up against culture and challenges whole paradigms of thought, policy, procedure, and even how one perceives their world. Multifaceted conversations such as these will get easily sidetracked if not given a context and structure. At Capital University’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) we run a weekly learning series for faculty and academic staff. The learning series includes three tracks: Learn, Explore, and Share. Learn sessions are designed to help faculty and staff learn about the University’s existing instructional tools and resources. Explore sessions examine emerging models, technologies, and problems in the field of higher education. And Share sessions offer a venue to faculty and staff for sharing effective instructional strategies and useful approaches to administrative tasks with colleagues... to hear a compelling Share session highlighting how someone in your own department flipped the classroom or worked as an advisor in a MOOC makes these things seem more achievable.”

An explosion of IT innovation is indeed changing the learning ecosystem. The remainder of this decade will bring extensive change as teaching and learning are increasingly uncoupled from institutions and programs, resulting in even greater challenges to our traditional assumptions, models, and relationships. CIOs can and should be at the core of envisioning and shaping the future of our colleges. Their teams coupled with their willingness to collaborate and share leadership provide them with unique understanding for how to reshape a college’s learning ecosystem as well as its online presence.

IT professionals in these colleges and universities have the potential to be agents of transformation. Caines and Feng (in this collection) state it best: “Lutheran institutions need to use the digital tools of our time to highlight the values of a Lutheran education and preserve Lutheran principles such as free inquiry, vocation, and teaching the whole person...The perfect storm is headed directly for us, but we will get nowhere by trying to be something that

we are not. We need to focus our efforts on connecting our missions with the digital tools that best support them.”

## Notes

[1] Koester, J. 2011 [Information Technology and Tomorrow's University: A President's Confessions and Advice](#). *EDUCAUSE Review*, January/February.

[2] Duin, A.H., Cawley, S., Gulachek, B., O'Sullivan, D., & Wollner, D. (2011). [Shared leadership transforms higher education IT](#). *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 34(2), April-June.

[3] [http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/credentialing-economy-transformed-and-its-beneficiaries?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Email+marketing&utm\\_campaign=EDUCAUSE](http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/credentialing-economy-transformed-and-its-beneficiaries?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Email+marketing&utm_campaign=EDUCAUSE)

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## Moving Forward

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### Eric Childers and Ann Hill Duin

So what does this mean? Martin Luther asked this, the question echoing five hundred years later and calling us to reformation, catechesis, reflection, and enlightenment. We who lead, affirm, support, and care about Lutheran higher education and the values it embodies, must insist upon perpetually considering this question.

A central purpose of Project DAVID is a call for reinvention at Lutheran (and similar) colleges and universities. We have chosen to name this endeavor reinvention. For some, this word may be too bold, too unsettling, too risky. Maybe other schools would call it change or adaptation. Our eye fixed on Luther, we could perhaps call this process reformation. That sixteenth century watershed moment in the church was a reformation of teaching and learning as much as anything else. From his introduction of the 95 Theses, Luther called for reform, the ideal that “the church is always to be reformed.” *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*. Ours is an ever-reforming church; should not our schools also be perpetually reforming?

Of the fine essays and articles included in this Project DAVID anthology, we were particularly taken with President Paul Pribbenow’s homily on *semper reformanda*, a notion embedded deeply in Lutheran tradition and the Protestant Reformation. *Semper reformanda* sparks in us a call, as Pribbenow describes, “to be open to new and different ways of being in the world, watching for God’s activity in our midst and bringing our hearts and minds and hands to bear as co-creators of God’s plan for God’s people.” Reformation is a cousin of reinvention. In the intentional, institutionalized process of reinvention dwells the notion of *semper reformanda*.

Risk comes with reinvention. Sometime in the mid-1990s, Lenoir-Rhyne President Ryan LaHurd offered

congratulations to the sitting president of Elon University, J. Fred Young, at a business gathering. LaHurd praised Young for Elon's enrollment growth, expansion of the physical plant, and tremendous reinvention of the school's identity as a premier national university. Young accepted the congratulations but added, "As long as this gamble pays off, then people will congratulate me. But if these risks sour, then the picture won't be so pretty." For Elon University, Young's gamble, combined with current President Leo Lambert's decision to double down, has paid handsome rewards: Elon University has developed from a regional school to a national player, meanwhile serving as an enviable model of higher institution success. Elon's leaders reinvented the college, waging great risks in this reinvention process.

At the heart of much of this Project DAVID discussion is the notion of liberal learning. The very first step in defending and acclaiming the liberal arts is defining it to a skeptical public and weary, yes, consumer. The liberal arts experience that we embrace and enact at our colleges and universities is a study in paradox: it is not partisan at all, but rather traditional and liberating at once; it is not only musical and artistic, but also scientific and quantitative; it is not only philosophical and theoretical, but also purposeful and pragmatic; it is not only written in books, but abroad and unbound by classroom walls; it is not only residential, but also diverse and digital. The liberal arts pulses and beats at the core of our colleges and universities, and this learning tradition is worth preserving and affirming.

Why does any of this matter? Like so many other alumni, faculty, parents, donors, and leaders, the two of us have invested so much into this singular type of educational experience. Likewise, these colleges and universities of the Lutheran church, as well as many schools like them, have invested much into their graduates and professors. Affirmed in this educational experience is the exploration and pursuit of purpose.

Vocation will remain important and worthwhile as long as people seeking enlightenment and knowledge ponder the question of life's purpose, meaning, and work. For whom does my life speak? Why do I serve? What is my purpose? What purpose does my work serve? Who is the beneficiary of my life's work? These are important questions, particularly for all those interested in asking students to think critically about life's meaning, purpose, and mission.

Vocation is not only a theological and philosophical ideal but also a pragmatic application. The definition of reinvention is to bring back into existence or "to make as if for the first time something already invented." A primary purpose of Project DAVID is to inspire, encourage, and/or provoke leadership--college presidents, administrators, and trustees--to consider how the intentional application of the notion of vocation might lead to reinvention for liberal arts colleges in 2014 and beyond.

Strategic plans provide a roadmap; strategic reinvention provides a roadmap for the intentional application of vocation as a means to renew and rejuvenate our institutions for sustainability and relevance.

"'Failure isn't fatal, but failure to change might be.' Those are the words of John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach, who won 10 NCAA national championships in just 12 seasons because of his ability to constantly adapt--to new players, new rivals, and new styles of play" (White, 2013). Miles D. White, Chairman and CEO of Abbott Laboratories, stresses the importance of courage as part of reinvention. Reflecting on 15 years of continual reinvention, he writes: "What have we learned along the way? More than anything, how essential it is to get beyond pride in 'what we are really good at' -- which can blind people to changes in what the world needs and customers value most, and turn a one-time differentiator into the ball and chain of 'the way we've always done it'" (42).

We have used a set of themes--Distinction, Analytics, Value, Innovation, Digital opportunities (thus, DAVID)--and associated framing questions to identify how our colleges and universities are positioning themselves for future success. We have confidence that our collective leadership can and will strategically reinvent our institutions for continued sustainability and relevance. The chapters in this collection attest to such leadership. We look forward to the continuing conversation among these institutions about the keys to their future success and the degree to which those keys are shared between them.

In looking forward and moving ahead, we pose these questions about vocation and reinvention:

#### **Vocation Action Questions for College Leaders**

- What is my college or university called to be, whom does it serve, and who benefits from its work?



- How might the Lutheran understanding of vocation serve my college or university's strategic planning?
- Does my college or university intentionally and systematically raise the question of vocation, mission, and purpose in its core curriculum?

#### **Reinvention Action Questions for College Leaders**

- How is my college or university making a compelling case as to why and how our programs are distinctive and of value?
- What role do analytics play in creating and sustaining a future-oriented liberal arts institution?
- How is my college or university interpreting the challenges and working innovatively to reinvent itself?

Soli deo gloria!

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# Next Steps: Vocation, Reinvention and Collaboration

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**Ann Hill Duin and Eric Childers**

**with thanks to Presidents Kent Henning, Jay Lemons, Wayne Powell, Paul Pribbenow, and Tom Ries, Associate Professor John Hoffman, and Chaplain Andrew Weisner**

Foundational to Project DAVID are vocation and reinvention: who we are, and how we apply these identity truths to meet our schools' challenges. The Lutheran Educational Conference of North America held its 101st Annual Meeting of Lutheran College Presidents on February 8, 2014. As part of the program, we presented a workshop titled "Project DAVID: Showcasing Reinvention and Collaboration at Liberal Arts Colleges."

Response to the presentation and initial research was positive, and a number of presidents indicated their current or planned use of the Project DAVID ebook as a means to frame current or planned strategic work.

Following our presentation, presidents considered three questions: (1) What is your college or university called to become? (2) How can our liberal arts colleges reinvent themselves? and (3) What role does collaboration play in our future?

Three major themes emerged: affirmation of vocational identity; recognition of the need for greater collaboration; and criticism of the term "reinvention," arguing that the theologically-infused "reformation" more accurately describes the challenges and how we should move forward.

Presidents emphasized that Lutheran institutions live at the intersection of mission and market. As President Ries shared, "The continual challenge for Lutheran institutions is to pass on the core values of liberal arts education from one generation to the next in a way that is relevant to the marketplace demands of each new generation." And as President Henning shared, "Reinvent might suggest that the thing we are reinventing is no longer useful or relevant. On the contrary, our world today needs our version of higher education as much as any previous generation. Yes, we must remain in sync with today's technologies and economic/social context; nevertheless, we also are the ones called to hold on to the core values and purposes that come from your heritage."

Responses and questions included the following:

## **Vocation**

- Our mission and vocation are rooted in the whole self for the sake of the world.
- How do we express our Lutheran identity in an increasingly non-Christian world?
- We need stronger collective mission among institutions to motivate/drive shared action.
- We must reconnect with our tradition's historic mission to serve all students.

## **Reinvention**

- How do we best describe our value and identity to the public?
- We must develop practical programs for meeting the needs of students (redesign undergraduate programs, develop programs for a diverse market, and ensure that our mission is applied to contemporary needs and issues).
- We must embrace the centrality of student success (outcomes, graduation, employment).
- We must create a culture of innovation; innovation is an action word.

## **Collaboration**

- Leaders must value collaboration for it to work. Academic and administrative partnerships are key for efficiency, diversity, stewardship, inclusion, and productivity. If we collaborate regardless of theological differences, ethics and other differences, we can thrive.
- What might be rewards and incentives for collaboration? How will we maintain identity when in collaboration?
- What is the boldest expression of our collaboration -- in LCMS, in ELCA, in LECNA?

Together, how might we reform, innovate, articulate, collaborate, and fortify Lutheran higher education and liberal arts education--twenty-first century skills--for a changing world?

Next steps include broad dissemination of this eBook, webinars and online site(s) to foster broad discussion, securing of funding and visits to liberal arts institutions interested in fostering conversations about the keys to future success. We will continue to identify and showcase outstanding vocation, reinvention and collaboration and will publish the next set of stories in ways that promote access and impact.

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## Editors

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The Reverend Dr. **Eric Childers** earned a bachelor's degree in English and Business Administration at Lenoir-Rhyne University in 1995. After graduating with a master's of divinity degree from Wake Forest Divinity School in 2004, Eric earned a master's of sacred theology degree with a major in Lutheran Studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. After serving as vicar at St. John's Lutheran Church in Stamford, CT, he studied at the University of Virginia, graduating in 2010 with a Ph.D. in higher education. His dissertation, *College Identity Sagas*, published in 2012, investigates religious identity at Lutheran colleges and universities. Eric's academic interests include religiously-affiliated higher education, liberal arts colleges, board governance, and Lutheran theology and liturgics. He serves as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Cherryville, NC.