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Teaching Business at a Faith-Based Institution

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ABSTRACT

This panel presentation will focus upon best practices for teaching business in a way that works to fulfill organizational missions at faith-based institutions. The five panelists work in diverse capacities at their faith-based colleges and universities and will expound upon the challenges they face from varied social, cultural, political and institutional forces.

Keywords

Management education, business ethics, faith-based education

1 INTRODUCTION

In order to be successful from a business perspective, faith-based schools must highlight their heritages and missions in ways that are visible and profound. This often forms the main distinction between these schools and their competitors. Because there is so much need for ethical clarity by business leaders, it is an ideal time for educators at faith-based schools to provide the type of education that can develop managers in a way that is transformative.

There is much confusion about what the proper role of educators at faith-based colleges is and how the business departments can best fulfill their missions in the service of students while enhancing their schools' reputations. The presenters recognize that their institutions must be appreciative and accepting of students from all faith backgrounds and yet, remain true to the vision of their founders. All of the presenters are from schools that are Catholic, with varied traditions based upon their founding order or group. In the panel discussion these presenters will focus upon some of the best practices that business departments may employ so that they can continue to thrive in the competitive contemporary environment.

2 RELATIONSHIP OF BUSINESS INSTRUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

"Human beings, in Aristotle's opinion, initially learned virtues through education, that is, through instruction and command. The more they practiced these virtues, the more they would come to see them as the right things to do and so would become habitual." (Mannion, 2013; p.144)

Many faith-based institutions of higher education have the development of virtues as their key distinguishing element related to their missions and "the most successful institutions are aware of this and prosper because and not in spite of their attention to ethical implications of the curriculum, both at the micro level (e.g., the lecture and seminar rooms) and the macro level (i.e., institutional and higher education in general)." (Mannion, 2013, p.144). Despite these benefits, business departments have faced challenges in integrating their curriculum into that of the broader college and finding ways to integrate values formation with the technical training that they deliver.

A recent survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and University (AAUP) found that more than 9 in 10 business and community leaders stress the importance of college graduates demonstrating ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills, and the capacity for continued new learning. These skills are exactly those that the faith-based schools were established to develop and refine.

Rev. Thomas McKenna of St. John's University in New York, when discussing the goals of a business education at his Vincentian school, noted that it should be "value added." This, to him, meant that it would contain "a certain cluster of values added to the pedagogical mix, values that have to do with honest dealings, personal genuineness and sensitivity to the interests of those on society's underside. Particularly, there should be a strong inculcation of respect for the inherent worth of all people, especially those on the margins. He continued by adding that the mark of a Vincentian

education should be the “heightened sensitivity to the inalienable worth of humans.”

Clark (2001) described Catholic social thought or Catholic social teaching as “the application of Christian ethics to contemporary social issues.” The goal of this type of education to prepare students for making decisions in the business world that reflect a concern for humanity and that use Catholic teachings to guide. In a later work, Clark (2004) argued that “although most business schools in the United States have mission statements that commit them to the promotion of ‘values’ or a ‘value-centered education,’ the grounding of such values is left up in the air.” Faith and reason, according to Clark, should never be separated, especially in schools of business.

3 NEEDS OF BUSINESS EMPLOYERS

Faith-based business schools can be invaluable to employers. Tolan, in 2007, discussed the trend of businesses to seek out ethical hires when she wrote that “recent ethical breaches in prominent American corporations have increased the scrutiny of corporate practices in our society, putting even greater pressure on human resource managers to hire those individuals who practice sound business ethics.”

The linkage between having a moral value system and applying it in your business decisions is clear. Nichols (2010) discovered in his research that Christian business owners whose religious faith was of high importance to them employed their faith when making decisions that stand to have significant impact on their business. Moreover, his study found that for the Christian business owner whose faith is of high importance, the practices that are laid out in scripture and representative of that faith translate over to his business life. The study’s results indicate that there was not a compartmentalization between religious beliefs and day-to-day work life.

Catholic universities can differentiate themselves from other schools by establishing a values-based, interdisciplinary ethical framework that will enable its students to better analyze and challenge the world in which they live (O’Connell, 1998). This makes them a valuable resource to corporate employers.

4 DIFFICULTIES

Faculty members and administrators in a business department at the faith-based institutions are often unfamiliar with the teachings of the founding order of the college or university and may be hesitant to interpret these tenets to the students in their charge.

Kidwell & Kidwell (2006) concluded that a majority of faculty at Catholic institutions are unfamiliar with Catholic social teaching (CST). Their study found that faculty with a connection to Roman Catholicism, however, are more likely to be familiar with and to use recent business-related interpretations of CST. This would indicate that faculty who do not participate in the religious traditions of the institution

that they work for need a greater exposure to the teachings of the founders.

5 STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT TRAINING IN THIS PARADIGM

In an effort to have students of business management practice virtues and develop holistically so that they may be moved “from self-distrust to self-esteem, from anxiety to peace, from emptiness and alienation to joyful hope, from the slavery of value-less judgments to the assimilation of fearless value-filled judgments (McCormick in O’Connell, 1998), there are several effective strategies that an institution might employ.

Selection

Hiring practices should be examined so that prospective instructors possess not only the technical skills necessary to teach their academic subject matter but an inclination to fortify the college’s religious goals and objectives. Advertisements for prospective employees should emphasize the skills and abilities needed for the position along with information about upholding the college’s mission.

A notation such as the following on the solicitation for candidates would make it clear to prospects that the institution is serious about their faith-based goals.

“The ideal candidate would be familiar with and willing to actively support the mission of XXXXXX, which provides a liberal arts education in the XXXXX and XXXXXX intellectual tradition.”

Orientation

Business departments should reinforce college-wide efforts to educate about the heritage and mission of the school’s founders or the school’s founding religious group. All students, faculty members (part-time and full-time), clerical staff and office administrators from business departments should be required to learn about the college founders and their goals. These orienting sessions might include heritage tours, panel presentations, and speaker series.

In addition to orienting new faculty and departmental employees to the mission of the institution, continual reorientation can help to refresh all employees of the institutional heritage and goals.

Reinforcement of the College Mission

Efforts should be made by the business departments to continually reinforce the missions of their institutions. Each syllabus, for example, might be required to document the mission statement as a standard procedure. Instructors should be encouraged to incorporate visible elements of the school’s heritage into their coursework.

Business departments may develop their own mission statements within the framework of the overall college mission. These can serve to distinguish their schools from other private and public institutions that may be perceived as having very similar activities (Epstein, 1998).

Edwin Epstein, a Jewish Dean at a Roman Catholic, Lasallian/Christian Brothers college, discussed the process that he has gone through in learning or Catholic Social Teaching (CST) so that his department's curricula could be informed by such. He notes that his "foundational premise or first order principle-my Grundnorm- is that at a Catholic institution, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) should be an inextricable element of the education of our students, functioning as an ethical and social policy leit motif which is incorporated in appropriate contexts throughout this curriculum."

Epstein (1998) describes the mission statement adopted by his faculty as committing them to:

- "Engage our students and faculty in the examination of issues which reflect our Catholic heritage, such as individual, organization, and societal ethics and a concern for human welfare, and
- Provide, in the spirit of our Lasallian tradition, teaching excellence in a student-centered learning environment." (Epstein, 1998)

Classroom Activities and Guest Speakers

Students should be engaged during their studies with business leaders who exemplify the ideals of their religious communities by engaging in planning projects with organizations that are committed to social justice or social advancement.

Interaction with Community

Most religious-based institutions will have service and social justice as foundational principles. Instructors should be encouraged and rewarded for arranging for service-learning activities in their business classes. Tolan (2007) reported that these types of learning activities have been proven to be effective in developing skills related to citizenship (Godfrey, 1999), leadership and conflict resolution (Thomas & Landau, 2002), teamwork, interaction, time management and networking (Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier & Lenk, 1998), cultural awareness and diversity (Vernon & Foster, 2002), and written and verbal communication (Tucker, et al., 1998).

Integration with Other Areas of the College

Business departments should form alliances with other areas of the college that are likely to be disseminators of the religious ideals expressed in the mission. These would include the areas of Philosophy and Religious Studies as well as institutes and associations that have been established to promote the values of the founding orders or associations. This linkage of the business departments to other, most often, liberal arts areas of the college, will come at a time when business leaders have recognized that technical skills become obsolete quickly but that communication and critical thinking skills, mental dexterity and creativity in solving problems are abilities that are vitally important for college graduates (The Independent Sector, 2016).

6 CONCLUSION

As Mannion (2013) so eloquently notes, "Let us immediately dispel any fears that attention to the moral dimension of education might lead to a prescriptive syllabus which actually stifles human freedom and development. On the contrary, the moral dimension of education actually leads toward true freedom and enhances personal and communitarian development. And nowhere is this more the case than in relation to education in morality itself. Moral education is carried out not by telling people what to think or instructing them that x is right, whereas y is wrong, but rather to enable them to think and, eventually, to think ethically (i.e., to be able to assess, in a rational and informed way, moral dilemmas) and to reach a morally worthy conclusion. Mannion (2013) calls on Maritain (1965) who spoke of the education of the will or character building and this ties in with what we have said concerning the virtues and about the role of education in the development and well-being of the individual and society in general.

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