

Principles and Strategies for Reforming the Core Curriculum at a Catholic College or University

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Abstract

The core curriculum is essential for the flourishing of a Catholic college or university, as it is one of the most visible ways in which a distinctive vision becomes incarnate. Catholic colleges tend to offer some mission-centered majors and minors, but the core is what is present for all students. The core is not only significant, but also complex, for the process of developing, revising, implementing, and overseeing the core brings together what is not always in harmony: the college's vision, administrative structures, departmental interests and priorities, faculty capacities, and student needs and preferences. Most colleges revisit their core on a regular basis. What principles and strategies might guide those discussions? What might the vision look like, and what might be realizable? This paper examines those questions and, above all, explores the meta-issues of reforming and fostering a curriculum, beginning with the question of leadership and ending with practical questions of faculty development. I give less attention to the question of which courses Catholic liberal arts colleges should require, though I do explore options, including a modification of the widespread tendency to delegate all mission courses to philosophy and theology.

The power of an academic leader lies above all in three areas: vision, personnel, and budget. The most significant tool any college has to motivate faculty members toward its goals is to craft, in concert with the faculty members, an appealing vision. When we act because we identify with an ideal, we are intrinsically motivated. Any curriculum reform should flow from a vision that is widely shared and crisply articulated; without that vision, any reform will be haphazard. The second realm involves personnel, that is, hiring faculty, making tenure decisions, and appointing academic leaders to their positions; these decisions determine the personnel who will carry out a vision or fail to do so.

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Finally, budget expresses vision through differential allocations and priorities.

What is the appropriate vision of a Catholic college or university? What makes it distinctive? The question was hardly raised a few decades back, for the answer was obvious. The presence of the animating religious order made the Catholic presence manifest, but dwindling numbers no longer allow the founding religious orders to be the driving force of distinctive identity. Another obvious answer to the puzzle was Thomism, which, however, lacked the capacity to integrate new developments in the sciences and the subtlety for contemporary questions; it was abandoned as too dry and technical, too remote from the present, mere memory work.¹

At least three other models have since been proposed, but they, too, have been insufficient. A vibrant residential life, with liturgies in the dorms and retreats, enhances formation and collective religious experience; however, they are not by themselves academic enough and not necessarily holistic. Similar was the assignment of Catholic identity to community service. Outreach programs to the disadvantaged are important, but these are not uniquely Catholic and not always linked to academic concerns. In addition, service is only one aspect of Catholicism. Finally, some universities invested in their theology departments or in Catholic studies programs, but these foci can also redirect the Catholic mission to a single unit and take other departments off the hook, when the ultimate task of theology is to integrate advances in the individual disciplines and encourage those disciplines to ask deeper, even ultimate questions.

The common problem with all of these efforts is that they are not holistic and so run contrary to a central principle of Catholicism, unity. However, the hidden advantage of this insufficiency is that an opportunity has opened for administrative and faculty leaders on various campuses to develop their own animating visions, appropriate to the age and the distinctive elements of their own traditions and campuses.

I turn now to presuppositions of reform and obstacles or challenges. I then consider some of the puzzles, especially concerning requirements, with which any reform needs to contend. I end with pragmatic issues, focused primarily on personnel and budget in support of vision.

¹ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 297-304.

Premises and Challenges to Reform

My presuppositions involve the primacy of vision and the need for wholeness and consistency.

First, any curricular discussion should be driven not by the status quo, existing requirements and a negotiation from them as a starting point, but by vision, in this case a vision of what we expect that an educated graduate of a Catholic college should know and be able to do in the early twenty-first century and what courses would lead to that outcome. Of course there may be a good rationale behind the status quo and its history, which should be ferreted out and weighed, but the status quo *qua* status quo is not a strong argument.

Second, the Catholic stamp should be infused throughout the curriculum and not turned over to departments that may or may not be up to the task. The effort must involve all faculty, although the extent of the contributions will obviously vary. Holism further demands that any curricular review, even if it focuses on the core, take into account the entire undergraduate educational experience, from the structure of the major to advising, advanced placement, classrooms, study abroad, grading practices, service learning, residential life, extracurricular activities, internships, support for teaching and learning, student evaluations of teaching, and administrative structures.²

Third, the conversation should not be opened unless the college is willing to obtain the necessary funds and make the tough political decisions necessary to realize the new curriculum. Vision and budget must always work in tandem, and so every deliberation must be guided by the extent of existing resources, including their potential reallocation, and a realistic assessment of possibilities for new funds. In addition, a bold vision that could not possibly gain support or be implemented because of insurmountable political struggles is useless. Ideally, one wins over faculty with the vision; if not, one must either restrain the level of reform or be resolute in the face of daunting struggles.

One also needs to recognize obstacles or challenges to reform. I see at least four: public relations, departmental autonomy, faculty time, and accountability.

²See, for example, Stanford's 2012 core curricular review, *The Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford University*, available at sues.stanford.edu.

First, it is good public relations with alumni, parents, and others to be able to say, “We still require philosophy and theology,” or whatever other requirements sound appealing to constituents. Certain continuing requirements make for a good story, especially as alumni like continuity. But public relations should not drive vision. Vision should drive public relations. Of course if one moves away from the previous narrative, one needs to be able to articulate an alternative, but equally compelling story.

The second obstacle involves departmental faculty positions, including departments’ desire to keep what they already have. The best ways to deal with this are to start from the vision and ensure that the relevant committees are full of persons whose interests transcend departments. A further option is to emphasize knowledge and capacities, which may or may not overlap with disciplinary structures. One learning goal might be that one can speak articulately about a number of essential elements of one’s faith, including answering diverse kinds of challenges. Another might be that students gain familiarity with some of the rich works that animate the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and be able to interpret them with refined hermeneutic skills. I am doubtful that only theology and philosophy can succeed at helping students develop those particular learning outcomes.

At Notre Dame we solved an impasse on one course requirement by focusing on three questions. First, what characteristics define an educated person today, especially a liberal arts graduate of a Catholic college? Second, what are our students’ greatest gaps? Finally, what courses will help students approximate our educational ideal and overcome their existing weaknesses? By focusing on an educational ideal and on our students’ current gaps, we were able to gain support for a new course, the College Seminar, which has four essential components: student engagement with great questions and topics; an introduction to diverse ways of approaching issues by including material from the arts, humanities, and social sciences; an introduction to a selection of major works, including at least some works from earlier eras; and an emphasis on student-centered discussions and other activities that help students develop their capacities for oral expression and intellectual agility.

In a version of the class that I teach, “Faith, Doubt, and Reason,” students read works in philosophy and theology and literature, they attend theater performances, they discuss films by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Woody Allen, they visit the campus art museum and the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, and they read sociological studies of

the beliefs of America's youth and analyses of politics and faith today. The students write approximately sixty pages and take two one-on-one oral exams, totaling more than an hour. For most students it is a wonderful learning opportunity at the core of what they expect from a Catholic university.

Note that in addressing the puzzle that led to the College Seminar, we explored three interwoven topics: the distinctive vision; the gap between that normative vision and our current situation; and the strategy to help bridge that gap. Although in these reflections I focus mainly on vision, I want to underscore the value of gaining empirical data on our students, what they know and don't know, what their current courses mean and don't mean to them, and what they are learning or at least think they are learning, as well as of course what they are not learning. Do our students, after taking current core courses, view them as interesting, important, and relevant to their lives? Why or why not? Besides collecting campus-specific information, one can learn from broader sociological studies. Christian Smith's books on the incapacity of young Americans, including Catholics, to articulate the most basic elements of their faith is an eye-opening resource.³

Third, faculty want above all to teach and do their research. Substantial changes are a rupture in the routine, and routine, not rupture, tends to be good for research and teaching. For that reason, any curricular review must be more than an idle exercise, or few will invest time and effort in the deliberations; and any suggested reforms must be truly compelling as well as capable of gaining widespread faculty support.

Fourth, any new curriculum will require imagination to gain implementation and ensure accountability. Even with some level of faculty support, almost no reform will be without dissenters, including supporters of the status quo. Adjustments in the status quo are never easy. That means a new curriculum will require an investment in leadership and staff support as well as some substantial level of continual buy-in. One obvious lever in the face of modest resistance or pockets of resistance after approval is for a dean to give or take away lines to departments that are or are not able to contribute to the core curriculum. That creates an incentive to contribute to the core. Related, there must be support structures and accountability to ensure that the new courses are truly meeting

³ See esp. Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Christian Smith et al., *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the articulated learning goals. It is a puzzle that we encountered with the College Seminar. Some faculty did not know how to teach oral skills and needed to hear more about best practices. Others felt uneasy about integrating the social sciences and so needed both support and accountability. Without forceful oversight from a dedicated director or associate provost, effective change in a core curriculum is unlikely to be realized.

Requirements—and Questions—on the Way to Reform

I have myself been deeply engaged in working on the question of vision,⁴ but here I focus not on my particular vision for Catholic education or for the liberal arts, even if I will bring forward some isolated moments of that vision; instead, I want to suggest that different visions can be housed within different Catholic colleges and universities, each of which has its own charism.

If we begin with a vision for a Catholic college and for a well-educated Catholic in the twenty-first century and combine those with a number of generic liberal arts expectations, then one can imagine a set of qualities and courses designed to help students reach that ideal. Because the number of capacities will be large, considerably larger than secular colleges, and because some capacities will demand more than one course, the number of courses will be very high. One strategy to deal with this is to have some courses serve more than one goal, for example, both hermeneutic capacities and writing skills. The College Seminar mentioned above has been successful in that regard, serving essentially four purposes, and Notre Dame's University Seminar for first-year students satisfies both a writing and a disciplinary requirement. Even with some courses serving more than one capacity, colleges will still need to prioritize capacities, since not all can be easily filled. That again offers an opportunity for distinction across Catholic colleges. Each institution will set its own priorities, given its vision of itself and its personnel and budgetary resources.

What kinds of courses have been or should be required?

Certainly a case can be made in the abstract for a requirement in philosophy, which is widespread still on Catholic campuses. The case,

⁴ See *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); "Notre Dame's Triadic Identity: Inaugural Address"; and "Dean's Report 2008: An Overview from 1997 to 2008." The latter two documents are available at <http://mroche.nd.edu/service>.

I would say, should not revolve primarily around developing analytic precision, which is an admirable skill and a central aspect of philosophy but hardly unique to that discipline. If one is to make a distinctive case for philosophy, as I think one should, one is more likely to turn to the great tradition of philosophy that has influenced the Church; the great questions that animate that tradition; and the ancient as well as Christian idea of the unity of being and knowledge. Whether these important areas are best addressed by contemporary American philosophy or by courses in neighboring departments is a complex puzzle.

In principle the case for theology is not difficult to make. Being able to think theologically helps students understand matters of faith, engage persons from various religious points of view, and gives them resources so that their critically informed faith is not easily shaken at moments of crisis but can in principle be deepened in the wake of such crises. Still, at least three concerns or puzzles arise. First, what will comprise the core of the courses, and why? Second, is every student being placed in the same set of courses, independently of previous knowledge? What about students with premier backgrounds who are slotted into some version of basic theology, which can trigger the great sin of boring otherwise engaged students? It would be better to group students and content based on an entry examination and previous courses (with recognition of the quality of the schools). Third, given that theology takes as a fundamental presupposition God's revelation, is theology the best course for students who are already encountering crises of faith?

The elevation of tradition and the prominent role of art and literature in the history of Catholicism might speak for requirements in art and literature; so, too, the sacramental and mediating visions of Catholicism, which recognize that human activity can help in making the transcendent visible to us. But here as well one would need to look at the learning goals for each proposed course. The problem I noted above with philosophy is not unique to that discipline. One could certainly make a case for a course in artistic traditions, but an art history course that focuses mainly on production and reception aesthetics would hardly suffice.

The internationalism of the Catholic college would seem to argue for a language requirement, yet such classes must invariably be small and are thus expensive; moreover, the three-semester language requirement that exists at some colleges hardly suffices, given that a level of meaningful competency tends to emerge only after four semesters, and in the most difficult languages even later. It would make eminent sense to require of every student a semester abroad or at least a summer, but that, too, raises budgetary questions.

The Catholic social tradition might argue for a requirement in social justice, presumably with a strong social science dimension. And it is through science that we understand the world God has created. Still other requirements could be imagined that might involve meta-courses, courses about the value of a Catholic liberal arts education, for example. We know that one strategy to aid in learning is to be aware of how and why one learns. Such a course could help along that path, and it could be early, to help with college learning, or late, as central elements of a Catholic liberal arts education involve fostering integration and setting the stage for future learning. Also, not every requirement needs to be one and the same with a course. One could require by the fall of senior year a brief essay on the value of a Catholic liberal arts education or on the ways in which knowledge and virtue have fostered one another in one's studies. Still, there is the further puzzle that a single course will not suffice to satisfy the deeper learning goals we expect in certain areas, including the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Indeed, in some cases one might need as many as three or four courses, including, for example, in the case of writing, courses embedded in each major.

Some requirements might be the kinds that apply to any college-educated person today, for example, requirements dealing with statistics and data analysis, ethical and moral reasoning, economic literacy, historical knowledge, aesthetic and interpretive capacities, creative expression, writing skills, oral skills, or other capacities central to the twenty-first century. Some expectations we have of students, such as critical thinking, will be met not in dedicated courses but throughout the curriculum.

Some requirements will presumably be timeless in nature, whereas others will emerge from the challenges of our age. Bringing Catholicism to bear on the most pressing issues of the age, one could imagine meaningful and distinctive requirements relating to knowledge of the ecological crisis, which will be the topic of Pope Francis's next encyclical; the continuing challenges of developing countries, which could be linked with the Catholic concept of integral human development; and contemporary issues in ethics, which Pope John Paul II elevated in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (paragraphs 32-34). Some campuses might seek out unusually creative core courses exploring such topics as central debates in the history of Catholicism, Church documents of the past century, Catholicism and American culture, or the meaning of vocation.

Other questions, often neglected, include, who will teach the courses and how will they be taught. Will they be taught by faculty or by others, including graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, or adjuncts? And

which learning principles will be integrated? We know students learn more when they are actively engaged, existentially connected, receive extensive feedback, develop a connection to their professors, learn also from their peers, and so forth. Not all courses realize these goals, but these would seem to be essential in many of the core courses. Smaller classes, with active learning, are an obvious option, though such classes have a substantial impact on budget. Still, even in larger classes, active learning can be introduced, and the research shows that students in larger classes that include active learning—with students engaged in asking questions, giving immediate indications of knowledge levels by using clickers, instructor feedback, solving problems, discussing the material with their peers, and various kinds of group work—succeed at a much higher rate than students in traditional lecture classes.⁵ Moving faculty to such research-based formats requires of course support structures, such as workshops and incentives.

We know that learning is aided when instructors structure courses not primarily around what material they will cover (course content) but around what they want students to learn (learning goals). My preference, therefore, in orchestrating requirements would be to stress learning goals, some of which would be common to Catholic colleges and other colleges (for example, quantitative reasoning, historical thinking, oral competency, and ethical and moral reasoning), and many that would be distinctive. If one were to move away from disciplinary requirements, one could weigh areas such as the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, faith and engagement, or the unity of knowledge. But here, too, I would define these as capacities: knowledge of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition; the capacity to articulate one's faith within diverse contexts; and familiarity with the ways in which the independent disciplines serve one overarching truth.

Learning goals such as those above need not be met only in philosophy or theology but could also be addressed with topics such as Dante, the history of the Catholic Church, religious drama, crises of faith, Catholicism and the social world, the idea of a Catholic university, or objective idealism, Christianity, and Catholicism. Such courses would need to be more than simply disciplinary; in order to serve overarching learning goals, they would need to cultivate and attend to the students'

⁵ See, for example, Scott Freeman, et al. "Active Learning Increases Student Performance in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 111.23 (10 June 2014): 8410-8415. The same principles would presumably apply to other fields with larger lecture classes.

theological or philosophical interests as well. Beyond exploring broadly Christian or specifically Catholic content, they would need to give students ample opportunities to engage thoughtfully about faith questions or normative questions as the students process the material. That raises the bar for faculty.

Learning goals are not a new invention, but in a sense predate the disciplines, some of which are relatively young. Central to Plato's early dialogues was the capacity to give a rational account of individual virtues; to apply them in diverse contexts; to grasp the relation of the different virtues to one another; and to let this understanding change who we are and how we think and act. Those are learning goals.

We should avoid the mistaken view that learning goals are all instrumental. Many learning goals are ends in themselves: for example, gaining a sense of the value of knowledge for its own sake or developing a sense of wonder about the topics being explored. Ideally, course syllabi begin with the great questions students will engage and the learning goals toward which we want them to stretch. Everything else should follow from those. Part of the need to focus on learning goals as opposed to simply disciplines is that the disciplines have wandered across time. Both philosophy and theology have traditionally understood themselves as offering a vision of the whole. Both disciplines were integrative. But both have—in faculty research and course offerings—moved away from integration. In Germany philosophers used to offer a course called “Encyclopedia.” It dealt with the various spheres of knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey, who held Hegel's chair in Berlin from 1882 to 1911, still taught a version of such a course.⁶ How do the disciplines fit together? How do they support one another? What commonalities and differences exist in subject matter and method? What can they learn from one another? It's not by chance that philosophy and theology no longer teach such courses. The disciplines have transformed themselves.

One must find new strategies to foster integration. Besides truly broad-ranging and interdisciplinary faculty, who may or may not be in philosophy or theology, one might think of team teaching; courses in which a single faculty member teaches the course, but in which one or two guest lectures are arranged to ensure firsthand inclusion of other disciplines; great lecture series, in which a faculty member of record coordinates a lecture series, which includes individual lectures by local

⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Logik und System der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. Vol. 20 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990).

and international faculty members who address the same general topic from a variety of perspectives; and learning communities or course clusters, in which during the same semester, the same set of students takes two (or more) related courses in different departments, for example, creation in theology and evolution in biology.

The capacity to explore a complex topic that transcends a single paradigm or discipline and to do so from a distinctively Catholic framework would certainly be a worthy learning goal. Students want integration. They want to know, how does what I learned in philosophy and theology relate to other disciplines, including my major? And, how does what I learned there relate to the world I will be entering upon graduation and what I am going to do there? It would be advantageous to integrate the Catholic worldview with various disciplines. For example, a course that explores science and religion, including how one can give an intelligent interpretation of Darwinism in the light of Catholicism, would be hugely valuable for students who will be asked to address such puzzles after graduation. A course on the relationship between economics and Catholic Social Teaching that brought papal encyclicals into conversation with economic concepts and data, would be an attractive mission course. A course on Catholicism and politics that explored not only the descriptive realm, how Catholics tend to vote and relate to the political order, but also the normative realm, that is, how Catholics ought to relate to the political realm and to specific political issues, would also allow for greater integration.

A bit of healthy competition would create incentives for departments of philosophy and theology to put their best teachers into the core courses so as to encourage students to continue, to offer students not simply one rudimentary course but compelling options, and to include as a prominent learning goal inspiring students to see the value of the discipline. Including faculty from other disciplines in the mission-related core would mean on some campuses more faculty-taught core courses as opposed to courses taught by graduate students and adjuncts. It would give Catholic intellectuals outside the two departments opportunities to contribute more fully to mission and give them incentives to create new courses: political science courses on just war theory, music courses on the Christian tradition, literature courses on faith journeys and crises, and so forth. It would bring forward a more ambitious, more holistic concept of a Catholic university, not one that delegates mission from the faculty as a whole to the curricula of two departments alone.

Any solution along the lines I am proposing must also take account of the challenge of embodiment. If goals are realized by faculty across

departments, how do we know that they will be embedded in such a way as to avoid mission drift over time? Not every course should count. There must be accountability to ensure that the new courses are truly meeting the articulated learning goals.

What mechanism of approval might work? One option might be a three-person committee, the chair of philosophy or his or her designate, the chair of theology or his or her designate, and a third person from another discipline who is recognized as fully on board with and knowledgeable about mission. To avoid any voting based on protecting one's turf, decisions could be appealed to the dean. To ensure communication and avoid arbitrariness, a meeting of the committee with the dean could be required in advance of any decanal decision to overturn the majority.

It has to be understood that not every course that deals with themes loosely related to mission would work. For example, courses that treat themes prominent in Christianity, but without Christian elements, such as "The Greeks and Their Gods" or a course on "Confronting Homelessness," in which Christian materials are not central, would presumably not satisfy expectations. Courses that offer only critiques of Christianity would also be difficult to accept; a course on Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud that addresses Christianity only critically would hardly seem to support mission, but a course that engages their critiques and Christian responses would be ideal for students at a Catholic college or university. Courses in which the Catholic dimension is merely descriptive and not related to faith perspectives or the normative realm would also fail to offer students a deeper mission-relevant experience. Setting a high bar like this might encourage some faculty to adjust existing courses to bring them even closer to mission.

Student choice has advantages, as we know that students learn more when they are actively engaged, not passive, and when they have an existential interest in the subject matter.⁷ Students might be required to choose three courses from a menu of courses in mathematical,

⁷ Some contributions to core learning can be voluntary and, being voluntary, may be more effective for those who choose them. Notre Dame's Department of Theology sensed that our overwhelmingly Catholic students were not fully versed in the specifics of their faith, but they did not want their curricular offerings to be reduced to catechesis, so they offered supplementary one-credit courses called "Know Your Catholic Faith" to encourage students to learn about their faith more fully. The courses focused on developing a renewed college-level pedagogy in such basic topics as Mary, original sin, prayer, and the sacraments. In addition to being very popular with students, the courses bridge academic and residential life, as they are often taught in the evenings and in nontraditional settings, such as the residence halls or retreat-like environments.

scientific, and technological literacy or in addition to a course in philosophy and a course in theology, two courses from among the two disciplines or a set of courses that engage issues central to mission, such as some of the examples above. (Although there are advantages to common discussions around core courses or great works, some of those can be accomplished in other ways, such as having all students read a great book in the summer before classes start or expecting in some courses certain works to be read and allowing others to be chosen with basic principles in mind.) Some level of choice is likely also to aid the overarching goal of awakening further learning in the area and not simply having students check boxes; assignments should also be designed to cultivate the goal of awakening interest in further learning.

Some choice for faculty is also advantageous, as faculty are more likely to see a potential, even if distant, link to research, and they are more likely to be existentially engaged. Notre Dame offers a year-long Honors Humanities Seminar each year to more than 100 first-year students. I have enjoyed teaching this course, and know that the director has no difficulties finding faculty, often endowed chairs and prize-winning teachers, who are thrilled to take the same group of 16 students in the fall from Homer to Dante and in the spring from Machiavelli to Benedict XVI. Many authors are common across sections—Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, and so forth—but faculty still have considerable flexibility. A year-long course of this kind can, by the way, easily contribute to, if not fully satisfy, multiple requirements, including knowledge of Catholic traditions, analysis of literature, and the development of skills in hermeneutics, writing, and oral expression.

Pragmatic Issues

A further challenge and opportunity in any curricular reform, indeed in any attempt to realize a vision, is personnel. One reason for occasional discontent with requirements in philosophy and theology is that both disciplines, conceived as being attentive to the whole, have become specialized. There is thus in many cases a mismatch between vision and personnel.

How can one find and develop the right personnel?

Any Catholic college that, when hiring, fails to explore not only teaching and research but also mission fit can basically forget about

retaining any semblance of core identity. Probably the first important step is to ensure that the job ad identifies the institution as Catholic. That is more likely to result in applicants addressing mission in their cover letters. In addition, one should not simply sift, even at the junior level, but also search, making an effort to identify persons, be they Catholic or of other faiths or none, who are excellent and have the capacity to contribute to mission. Wider searches versus specialized searches ensure a larger pool for potential fit. The conventional interview should have a required question on mission, which can be inviting and can with thoughtful candidates help us think even more deeply about mission. How might you contribute to our Catholic mission, broadly understood? What about our distinctive identity attracts you? The question should be open-ended, but an inability to engage the question in any meaningful way should be taken as a sobering sign.

When we interviewed candidates at Notre Dame, we discovered again and again that they knew too little about the idea of a Catholic university or about Notre Dame's distinction. A best practice is to raise the stakes slightly and, in advance of the campus interview, send the finalists a text of some kind on distinctive mission, so that they engage the question substantively and don't simply plead ignorance.

The potential contribution of faculty candidates to teaching and formation should become part of the interview process. "What attracts you about teaching in a liberal arts environment?" "How will your research help you as a teacher?" "What is the ultimate value of studying history?" Answers to such questions can help committees and administrators sift a potential faculty member's contribution to the college's vision of undergraduate learning.

If departments are not forwarding candidates who satisfy the expectations the college has of its faculty, including their potential contribution to the core and so their teaching beyond their own specialty, administrators should stop releasing lines to those departments. It is absolutely essential that when faculty depart the college for any reason with the exception of negative tenure recommendations (so as not to inflate positive recommendations), the lines go back to the dean. You do not want to hire faculty who score poorly on mission or teaching, nor do you as an administrator want to veto departmental recommendations, which quickly uses up political capital. However, as soon as curricular requirements are controlled by departments, then your hands are basically tied, so there is a pragmatic as well as a visionary argument for focusing college requirements on broader areas and capacities.

One strategy we found advantageous at Notre Dame was to introduce competitive searches. Invite more departments to search than you have lines available, telling them that you will hire only the very best candidates in the competition. That quickly motivates departments to satisfy an institution's vision for itself and an administrator's expectations. Depending on where lines land, you can raise or lower a department's expected contribution to the general curriculum, and you can continue to challenge departments to compete more effectively for hires.

Also very strategic were interdepartmental and mission searches, for example, a search in religion and literature, where the search committee, which consisted of faculty from multiple departments, reported not to a department but to the dean, even if the receiving department needed to approve the candidate. Mission chairs (endowed chairs designed for faculty members who work in fields central to mission) are a wonderful strategy not only to bring in resources from alumni, who tend to be very supportive of distinctive identity, but also to ensure that some lines are devoted to the kinds of work done in the core curriculum. Further, they help guarantee that the intellectual leadership necessary to sustain the college's mission is not only maintained, but also strengthened.

Once faculty arrive, it is important to socialize them effectively, thereby interweaving vision and personnel. New faculty members are eager to learn about a college's vision, history, and customs. The first year on the faculty and the year after tenure, when faculty are never more curious about their newly permanent home, offer wonderful opportunities for a college to articulate its vision and priorities, to cultivate solidarity with that higher purpose, and to benefit from the ideas of newer faculty members. One needs to have not simply a weekend orientation in the fall but a year-long orientation with multiple engaging events and selected common readings, which help form a cohort and give faculty insight into the higher purpose of a college. Similar events can be planned for those who are embarking on administrative roles at the level of chairperson or above.

Such socialization and development efforts are essential, for most faculty hired at Catholic colleges and universities, including Catholics, will have received their doctoral education at secular universities. Their default compass is generic academic excellence, and one needs to open their eyes to the intrinsic and competitive advantages of a distinctive vision and ethos. Departmental faculty are of course drawn above all to their disciplines, so it behooves those whose task is primarily oriented to the college as a whole to ensure a full and sustaining orientation.

Once faculty are fully awakened to the idea of distinction, they may welcome it and want to learn more about it.

Appropriate support structures and incentives are no less essential. Support is a kind of communication, a test of the legitimacy of a vision, if you will; it ensures continuity between aspirations and what is necessary to meet those aspirations. Whereas vision exerts power and influence through ideas, incentives serve the same purpose through a reward system, often, though not exclusively, via funding.

Released time from teaching or summer grants might help ensure the full realization of a new curriculum, as certain model courses are developed. Colleges also might wish to offer faculty seminars on a regular basis. Notre Dame sponsored for some years an annual year-long seminar on a topic involving Catholicism, such as the Catholic social tradition and the Catholic idea of liberal learning. Recognizing that many faculty members could not give so much time to such a demanding initiative, we also sponsored occasional single-afternoon workshops on aspects of Catholicism. Each offered an introduction to Catholicism, explored a classic work in the Catholic tradition, or engaged a topic involving Catholicism and contemporary society. We also awarded on a competitive basis up to two awards per year, which allowed faculty to be released from one course of teaching and instead to take a graduate course in philosophy or theology or another mission-related area that would enhance their teaching and research.⁸

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Little speaks more to the distinctive identity of a Catholic college or university than the core curriculum. To advance a compelling core, an institution must have a vision of itself and be prepared to address various challenges. The traditional practice of simply delegating all the mission-specific courses to theology and philosophy may not be ideal. Today's faculty rarely satisfy the broad-ranging expectations colleges had when such requirements were introduced. Further, one wants to see a fuller, more holistic, truly integrative concept of a Catholic university, in which faculty from multiple departments participate. Any

⁸ Helpful suggestions for faculty development at Catholic colleges are also available in Kenneth Garcia, *Academic Freedom and the Telos of the Catholic University* (New York: Palgrave, 2012); and Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, SJ, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

curricular innovation beyond the status quo does not come easily. It requires vision and leadership, courage and finesse as well as an array of creative incentives. Moreover, one must find appropriate structures of accountability as well as support mechanisms, which help faculty stretch toward the learning goals our students most need.

