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Facilitating Integrating Mission into the Classroom: Reaching Senior Faculty Members

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Abstract

Given the increasing challenges faced by institutions of higher education, Catholic colleges and universities are facing an increasing need to present clear, unique missions to their stakeholders. The development of a unique mission, however, is only the first step—truly integrating a mission into the institution’s activities is often easier said than done. This paper explores the activities by one Catholic university to integrate its mission into its classroom activities, with primary attention placed on a program (Xavier Mission Academy) targeted to senior faculty.

Introduction

Large academic institutions are comprised of multitudes of heterogeneous individuals—individuals who may often possess very different ideas as to the appropriate purpose of the institution. The needed focus of individuals in leadership, then, is to bring all members of the institution together to pursue a single agenda. One tool at their disposal is the development and implementation of an organizational mission.

Given the semi-independent nature of many positions in higher education, the necessity to establish a clear vision may be particularly important in these institutions. Faculty members, for instance, are well-known for their independent streak. Indeed, faculty members often view allegiance to their disciplines as more important than allegiance to their home institutions. Faculty members, however, are on the front line of the implementation of a college’s or university’s mission by the nature of their direct involvement in providing the institution’s primary service—education. It is critical, therefore, for institutions of higher education to spend the time and effort necessary to ensure that faculty members understand and embrace their institutions’ missions.

The focus of this paper is to examine the efforts undertaken by one institution to communicate its Catholic mission to its faculty members and to gain their buy-in. First, the role and importance of an organization’s mission is detailed. Second, the programs pursued by one university to gain the buy-in of faculty members will be examined with particular attention placed on a new program focusing on senior faculty members (Xavier Mission Academy). Finally, the applicability of similar programs at other Catholic colleges and universities will be briefly explored.

Mission

An organization’s mission articulates the reason for its existence and its ultimate purpose. As such, it provides a way for an organization to differentiate itself from other similar organizations by providing a delineation of the organization’s distinctiveness. An organization’s mission does not only provide for an identification of the “big picture,” but it also provides a means to support a
consistent sense of direction and provides a basis to guide decision making. Indeed, all of the decisions made within an organization should be consistent with the organization’s mission. A mission, therefore, fulfills several objectives. First, a mission sets the direction to be pursued by an organization. Second, a mission provides guidelines to facilitate mission-directed activity. Finally, a mission provides an anchor during times of change, such as is characteristic of higher education at the present time. Indeed, as they are experiencing increasing pressures (e.g., growing competition, decreasing funding, greater demands for accountability, growing consumer mentality in students), colleges and universities are facing intensifying demands to respond in ways that may not be consistent with their missions. A clear mission that is communicated and supported across an organization has the potential to maintain an organization’s focus during times of rapid change.

A college’s or university’s mission is a statement of how the institution wishes to be perceived in the minds of stakeholders relative to competitors. Furthermore, it defines the institution’s purpose and the reason for its existence. Moreover, a mission defines what the college or university stands for and its uniqueness in the market by providing a clear vision of what the institution desires to be and identifying who it will serve.

A college’s or university’s mission provides guidance regarding the use of resources by providing a single focus around which their resource investments are to be focused. The role of focusing activities is a particularly important property of missions in higher education. The multiplicity of activities and functions undertaken by many colleges and universities makes it increasingly difficult for their leaders to determine the activities that are truly important to the long-term health of their institutions and which activities may represent wasteful use of resources. When alternative strategies are considered, an organization’s mission provides the basis for making an appropriate choice.

The importance of mission to the successful operation of colleges and universities can be seen in the accreditation standards of each of the regional academic accreditation agencies. Indeed, for each accreditation agency, mission is included in the first accreditation standard. Of all of the important issues in higher education, the supremacy of mission is clear. This is not surprising since, without a mission, there would be little upon which to base an institutional evaluation.

Although a primary purpose of a mission is to establish a unique identity, the development of an appropriate mission is only the first step. While the function of a college or university’s mission is to establish a sense of purpose and provide guidance in all areas, truly integrating an institution’s mission into its decision making is often easier said than done. Even colleges and universities that possess clear and distinct missions often encounter difficulty remaining faithful to their missions in today’s challenge-filled environment. Without a clear focus on mission, decisions become ad-hoc.

When attempting to fulfill their missions, colleges and universities face unique challenges. First, due to the large number of stakeholders, collegiate missions tend to be more complex than those at most other organizations. Second, the nature of colleges and universities are such that they may possess particular difficulties when attempting to implement a mission. By their very nature, colleges and universities are comprised of areas and divisions that often are not well integrated and have weak relations with each other. Such an environment provides a fertile environment for identity fracture, or the situation where the mission is understood differently and/or implemented differently in different areas of a college or university. In this environment, different areas of a college or university can develop identities that diverge from those of envisioned by the college’s or university’s mission. Such “structural looseness,” therefore, can translate into identity or mission-related tension. Moreover, faculty members often identify more with their discipline or profession than with the college or university with which they are associated. As a result, it becomes difficult for some faculty members to understand the mission of their institution and how it applies to them and how it affects their activities.

While mission statements are usually in a concrete
form, missions are often implemented in a rather tacit fashion. Faculty members, administrators, and students often carry out their activities without considering how they relate to their institution’s particular mission. As a consequence, often colleges and universities encounter difficulty implementing and integrating their missions to the extent necessary to establish a unique position in the market. What colleges and universities require, therefore, is a means by which their missions can be carried out in a more consistent fashion across the institutions. Indeed, a mission can act as a “cultural glue” and provide a means by which the disparate parts of a college or university can be brought together. Furthermore, missions encourage members of an organization to accept company goals as their own and provide a platform for a psychological contract between the organization and its members.

When the missions of institutions of higher education are examined, it quickly becomes apparent that nearly all institutions of higher education report a mission including teaching, research, and service. How do Catholic universities differ from the thousands of other institutions of higher education? This is a very important question. As private institutions, students attending Catholic universities and their families pay tuitions significantly higher than those charged by most state institutions. Catholic universities, therefore, must provide clear and enticing reasons to warrant the additional expenditure.

Many agree that Catholic universities provide an education that differs from that offered by their state-supported competitors. Buckley, for instance, suggests that Catholic universities offer a much broader education than state universities by adding “a full-faith experience moving towards intelligence and of finite intelligence moving towards its satisfaction in transcendent completion.” Furthermore, the Synod of Bishops state:

> Education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestations. It will also inculcate a truly and entirely human way of life in justice, love and simplicity. It will likewise awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values; it will make people ready to renounce these values when they cease to promote justice for all people.

The missions of Catholic institutions of higher education, therefore, appear to be much broader than those of their public counterparts. The same is true for the missions of Jesuit Catholic institutions. Mitchell identifies five traits of a Jesuit education, including a passion for quality, a study of humanities and social sciences regardless of majors pursued, a preoccupation on ethics and values, importance given to religious experience, and a person-centeredness. Kolvenbach suggests that the key difference involves a focus on justice with the key mission of Jesuit education consisting of educating “the whole person” intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally, and spiritually. Similarly, Xavier University summarizes its distinctiveness by identifying five gifts of their Ignatian heritage (mission (the centrality of academic excellence), reflection, discernment, solidarity and kinship, and service rooted in justice and love).

Although the function of a college or university’s mission is to establish a sense of purpose and provide guidance in all areas, truly integrating an institution’s mission into its decision making is often easier said than done. Even colleges and universities that possess clear and distinct missions often have difficult times remaining faithful to their missions in today’s challenge-filled environment. A key to the successful implementation of a mission is the extent to which it is communicated and acted upon by members of the organization.

The additional complexity of the missions of Catholic universities complicates the process of communicating the mission in such a way that the members of their university communities, particularly faculty members, understand and act upon it. Consequently, there is often a need for Catholic universities to focus additional time and effort in educating faculty members in their missions. The focus of this paper is to explore a program implemented at a Jesuit university to build an understanding of the mission of the institution among senior members and to build
tools to enable them to better integrate mission into their activities. First, existing programs at the university will be reviewed.

**Background**

In 2004-5, after receiving a Lilly Fellows Program Mentoring Grant, Xavier’s Ignatian Programs inaugurated its Ignatian Mentoring Program (IMP). The IMP was developed to acclimate and educate new faculty members (in their second-year at Xavier) to the mission of Xavier University and to provide the resources and the encouragement to carry out their teaching and scholarly work in a mission-focused manner. Given the success of the program, the program has been maintained through the support of the Xavier Jesuit community.

In addition to becoming knowledgeable about the mission of the University, IMP participants are required to explicitly demonstrate the changes that they have made to one of their courses to integrate the mission into their pedagogy/content as a consequence of the program. So far, 62 faculty pairs have been shaped by this mentoring relationship in lasting ways. The IMP has proven to be successful in building enthusiasm for Xavier’s mission and has produced a lasting effect on faculty members’ teaching and research. Consequently, the IMP has been recognized nationally as a model mission-integration program for faculty and spotlighted at regional and national conferences and periodicals. The book, *Teaching to the Mission*, was produced to highlight and disseminate the work of IMP participants. (The contents of *Teaching to the Mission* are also available online at Xavier’s Mission and Identity site at [http://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/](http://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/).

In 2009-2010, after receiving another Lilly Fellows Program Mentoring Grant, Xavier’s Ignatian Programs inaugurated its Time to Think (TTT) program. The TTT provides a peer-mentoring program for faculty in their fifth through eighth year at Xavier University. The program was developed to address the fragmentation inherent in an early academic career that may keep faculty members from more deliberate and systematic reflection and conversation about their emerging professional identities and how they relate to the University’s mission and identity. The TTT program provides the framework for faculty members to form one-on-one peer relationships to reflect on Ignatian principles that can feed faculty as teachers, scholars and whole persons.

Although the above mission activities focus on relatively new faculty members, they have had a profound effect on the mission-oriented culture at Xavier University. However, a group of faculty members who have not received the same level of attention has been senior faculty members (defined as faculty members who have been at the University for more than a decade). These individuals are a matter of concern since mission played a negligible role in the life of most faculty members at Xavier University at the time that most senior members were originally hired. At that time, minimal attempts were made to provide faculty members with education on the mission or to encourage them to actively integrate mission into their classrooms. Issues relating to the mission of the institution were assumed to be addressed by the Jesuits on campus. Since that time, however, the number of Jesuits teaching on campus has declined significantly so that there are only two Jesuits teaching full-time at the present time. The integration of the mission into university undertakings has since been left primarily in the hands of non-Jesuit (and often non-Catholic) faculty members. Given their lack of past development opportunities, many senior faculty members do not possess the knowledge or skills to optimally integrate mission into their activities. Consequently, many senior faculty members are not as knowledgeable of the mission as are junior faculty members. The focus of the Xavier Mission Academy (XMA) program is to address this weakness.

**Xavier Mission Academy**

The Xavier Mission Academy was funded in part by a Lilly Fellows small grant and was developed as a year-long activity to build the knowledge of middle and latter career faculty members in the Jesuit mission and to encourage them to integrate the university’s mission into their academic activities. The structure of the XMA is similar to other existing “academies” on campus (diversity, information fluency, and engaged learning). The
focus of the XMA is to provide participants with a realization of the importance of the mission, a working knowledge of the mission, and the tools needed to best integrate mission into their classes. Given that senior faculty members possess significant teaching experience and are very knowledgeable about their disciplines, the academy focused on building upon this knowledge and providing participants with the tools to integrate mission into their classes in a positive way. The program was voluntary. After one member dropped out due to excessive time commitments, eight faculty members (and the group director) completed the academy. Three of the participants were faculty members from the college of business as was the director. The rest of the participants were roughly equally distributed between the traditional arts and sciences areas and other professional programs.

The XMA was a year-long process comprised of six meetings. The meetings were scheduled monthly during the school year. Each meeting, with the exception of the final meeting, consisted of lecture, discussing readings, and completing/discussing exercises developed to address the issues discussed. The agenda is included in Appendix A.

Outcomes and Assessment

The primary goal of the XMA is to increase the mission consciousness of senior faculty members. The XMA was assessed by the quality of the mission-centric focus implemented by participants into their courses – to what degree did the pedagogical/content change directly affect the education received by students? Participants were required to develop and implement a mission-centric focus in at least one of their courses and to aid and encourage other XMA participants in the redevelopment of their courses. As a consequence of participating in the academy, each participant prepared and presented a poster at Xavier’s Celebration of Excellence detailing how participation in the academy has affected their teaching activities. (The posters are being retained for future use). Selected examples are included in Appendix B. Participants were also required to submit a written component to be included in Teaching to the Mission, a Xavier University publication that enables dissemination of participants’ work across the Xavier campus and to other private institutions of higher learning for use by the entire Xavier community and beyond. The written components will also be posted on the Xavier Mission and Identity website: (http://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/).

The experience of participating in the XMA appeared to be beneficial to those participating. Some quotes from XMA participants include:

“Faculty enter the Academy thinking that there will be long relaxing afternoons of serious discussions of important issues with colleagues. The reality is that between class preparation, grading, research projects, and committee obligations, time for such deliberations rarely exists. One great aspect of the Mission Academy is that it carves out of one’s busy schedule the opportunity to sit down with colleagues from across the institution for serious discussion of some the Big Issues facing Xavier. It is great time that is well spent!”

“The Mission Academy provided me with an intellectually conducive venue for collectively deliberating on creative and workable ways of integrating the university mission into the content and format of Xavier classrooms.”

“Throughout my participation in the Mission Academy, I was able to identify and address not only a range of conceptual aspects relevant to mission integration, but also a great spectrum of practical ways in which mission integration can be made possible. The Mission Academy debunked a range of myths and misconceptions with regard to mission integration. The Mission Academy unveiled ways of integrating the university mission into the classrooms without having to compromise on the format and scope of curricula.”

“Having an opportunity to understand the Ignatian mission at a deeper level has motivated me to reevaluate the courses I teach. In business, quite often we consider meeting the mission as including the teaching of ethical behavior, but the academy has
helped me focus on other areas of the mission such as critical thinking and men and women for others. As a result of a recent meeting I have designed a new module in my MIS course which involves a discussion of the Digital Divide and how we might reduce this division. I have also included regular Reflection Exercises in all my courses since I have realized that through reflection an experience can have lasting meaning.”

“As a professor in the physical sciences I could not – on my own – find a way to integrate Ignatian principles into my classroom in an explicit way. Fortunately, the Mission Academy has provided me a forum to engage in deep, rich conversations with colleagues from all three colleges at Xavier. Through these conversation I have been challenged, encouraged, and – most importantly – equipped to accomplish the goal of mission integration.”

“There is a difference between morals and ethics. Ethics are values agreed upon by a group (framework unspecified). Morals are a set of values derived from the stories/fables/etc. that come out of a spiritual tradition. Jewish morals are, by definition, different from Islamic morals (though there is a lot of overlap) which are different from Christian (dare I lump all varieties into one bucket?) morals. I think this is something that differentiates a Xavier from a state school. At Xavier, one is free (encouraged) to examine issues not only from various ethical (and legal) frameworks, but from moral frameworks as well. I think that if one incorporates some aspect of any moral framework into a course (outside of a theology or philosophy course) then to my (current) thinking one is doing Mission. As a Jesuit school, we are not blind to moral frameworks (as a state schools ostensibly are), nor should we be limited to a single moral framework.”

**Applicability to Other Catholic Colleges and Universities**

Although the XMA is specifically directed toward faculty members at a Jesuit university, most Catholic colleges and universities are facing conditions very similar to those faced by Xavier University. First, as previously discussed, virtually all Catholic institutions can be expected to possess missions that are more complex than their state-supported counterparts. Second, many Catholic colleges and universities have traditionally relied upon numbers of religious orders with which they are associated to provide a significant portion of the full-time faculty teaching. Similar to the situation at Xavier University, however, most Catholic institutions of higher education have been forced to rely more and more on non-religious and non-Catholic individuals as faculty members. Most Catholic colleges and universities face a situation very similar to that of Xavier University, resulting in a comparable need to communicate mission and to build buy-in from faculty members.

Given the Jesuit nature of Xavier University, the XMA was developed to impart the Jesuit mission of the institution as is reflected in the readings that formed a basis for the program. The program, however, can be easily adapted to Catholic colleges and universities sponsored by differing orders. Although each order possesses its own primary emphasis, each can easily be adapted to the framework of an “academy.” A key is to provide opportunities for participants to discuss and wrestle with the nuances of the institution’s particular mission. Faculty members cannot only be informed of the mission of the institution, but they must be given the opportunity to become personally involved with the mission.

**Conclusion**

The importance of the role of mission in the success of Catholic colleges and universities will likely continue to grow. Higher education is in a state of flux. With new educational institutions, new modes of instruction, and changing student demands, higher education is facing an environment characterized by rapidly intensifying competition. Consequently, the establishment and maintenance of a distinct mission has become imperative. Similarly, growing demands for accountability from higher education has also placed more attention on institutional missions as a way to account for the level of expenditures. The establishment and maintenance of appropriate missions can be instrumental to
Catholic colleges and universities to navigate this reality. Through distinct missions, colleges and universities can differentiate themselves from their competition. Furthermore, they can maintain the diversity that is characteristic of the higher education market. 

Notes


Bibliography


Appendix A

Xavier Mission Academy Agenda (Abridged)

Meeting 1 (September 21, 2012) What is the need for mission integration? (Without a Vision, the People Perish (Prov 29:18 NIV)

Preparatory Reading:

Other resources:
1) http://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/

Abbreviated Agenda:
1) Introduction.
2) The role of mission in organizations.
3) What is Xavier’s mission?
4) Xavier mission and religious pluralism.

Meeting 2 (October 19, 2012) – Recognizing and overcoming the barriers to mission integration.

Preparatory reading:

Abbreviated Agenda:
1) Reflection on Day 1
2) What is integration?
3) Integration concerns.

Meeting 3 (November 16, 2012) – What do we want to achieve: How does mission relate to our disciplines?

Preparatory reading:

Other resources:

Abbreviated Agenda:
1) Reflection on Day 2
2) Contrast “discovering and applying truth” with simple conveyance of information.


Preparatory reading:


Other resources:

Abbreviated Agenda:
1) Reflection on Day 3
2) Different perspective on mission integration.
3) A definition of mission integration.
4) Mission integration principles.

**Meeting 5** (February 22, 2012) – Available approaches to mission integration.
Preparatory reading:


Other resources:

Abbreviated Agenda:
1) Reflection on Day 4
2) Stages of Integration.
3) Globalization strategies identified by Aldolfo Nicolas.

**Meeting 6** (March 21, 2012) – Participant presentations of proposed personal mission integration.

**Celebration of Excellence** (April 3, 2012) – Poster Presentation