
Faith Integration in the Classroom: A Plural View

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ABSTRACT: The topic of faith integration has been of interest to the higher education community for almost two centuries. Ten professors from ten different business schools collaborated during a Best Practices in College Teaching course to discuss faith integration, its importance in Christian universities, and ideas on implementation. Their writings on the topic were combined to form a guide to operationalizing faith integration. The resulting article seeks to demonstrate the imperative nature of integration within religious universities, focusing on schools of business. Practical ways of incorporating faith are also discussed, including three dimensions of integration. Assessment ideas and project proposals are included as well to aid professors in implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Merriam Webster defines faith foremost as a strong belief in someone or something. Often, one's faith has a direct impact on his worldview, the way he thinks about the world. In its formative years, higher education in the United States was shaped by a worldview which directly correlated to the prominent Christian faith. As the 20th century unfolded, however, the educational landscape saw a shift in worldviews. In his 1994 book detailing the transition from early, religious education principles to those held in modern

institutions, established author George Marsden (1994) claims a new focus on science and human creation began to take root in academic institutions and the Christian worldview was largely replaced by a secular — and largely scientific — worldview. The impact of this shift on the Christian educational institution is still felt today.

With the new empirical focus driving higher education, Christian institutions were left reeling. Education within the context of a Christian worldview — once broadly accepted — suddenly demanded justification. As a result, the topic of faith integration has become one of great interest to profes-

sionals in the field. Combining the wisdom and experiences of ten professors from ten different Christian universities, this article aims to establish the importance of continued faith integration in the classroom, while also providing practical ways to accomplish this incorporation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION

Left to adjust to the new paradigm shift, experts have been debating the importance of faith integration into the classroom for decades. Incorporation of faith came sharply into question but ultimately emerged as the major distinguishing factor between secular and religious universities. Consider the core content of general classes such as accounting, computer programming, English, or anatomy. The material taught at religious institutions will not — and should not — differ greatly from that of secular institutions. Accounting does not have different rules in a Christian environment nor is the muscular structure altered when viewed by a non-believer. However, weaving faith into the subjects creates a different classroom environment from secular institutions and positions this integration as a crucial part of a Christian university's purpose.

Experts in the field present various other reasons for faith integration. Dr. Monty Lynn (2006), writer and management professor for Abilene Christian University details a few of these reasons in his article for *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*. Lynn claims that students attending religious higher education institutions typically already have an expectation for integration in their classrooms. In fact, for some students, faith integration is a major determining factor when choosing a university. Touting fulfillment of student expectations is crucial for universities in the recruitment process as well as retention of current students.

Lynn (2006) also points out that spiritual integration can often deepen students learning in other areas. His idea that “new insight and discipline from one influence enables development in another,” (p. 180) provides a context for Lynn to further claim that integration prepares students to better affect the world around them. He finds that, “biblical and theological teaching informs spiritual disciplines... equipping [students] for co-creation and service,” (p. 180). Shaping students to be well-rounded individuals ready to positively impact their surroundings is a noble cause — one which is of utmost importance to religious higher education institutions.

Renowned Christian author and experienced professor, Dallas Willard (2006), offers another idea in his novel *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*: that faith integration really aims to trans-

form students' hearts. He claims that classroom integration should intend to strengthen the students' ability and desire to function in obedience to Christ. Being itself a disciple of Christ, a Christian university should strive to incorporate faith in all subjects, striving to bring students closer to fulfilling God's plan.

There are broader implications of faith integration evident even within the secular community. Clinical psychologist Meg Jay (2012) uses her decade of experience working with clients in their twenties to make the case that the ages of traditional college students are indeed the most formative. Her book, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter and How to Make the Most of Them Now*, cites research done with students in their twenties which demonstrates how the brain changes more during this decade than any other decade in adulthood. As they emerge into adulthood, students who had relied on their parent's belief system in adolescence begin adopting their own worldview and developing their own ideas about faith. Therefore, the integration of the Christian faith into course material during this formative time can prove to be significant in the religious development of students (Jay, 2012).

While secular institutions have moved on to follow the new empirical emphasis in education, religious universities have found that faith integration has emerged as a key way to create distinction from secular education. According to experts, integration is also important in that it aids in meeting students' expectations of the Christian university and shapes learners into more well-rounded, service-ready individuals. Visible faith in the classroom urges students to follow God's plan, especially if familiarized during the college years. With such important reasons, it is clear that religious universities have an important role in ensuring faith integration within the classroom.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

While it is evident that faith integration is crucial, implementation can prove difficult. Effective implementation requires an understanding of the three distinct dimensions of integration. Attention must also be paid to the way incorporation is assessed. Finally, projects which include faith integration can be used as a great way to urge students to incorporate faith. Understanding the three dimensions lays the foundation for implementation.

Dimensions of Integration

There are three distinct dimensions to effective integration. In her article, “The Integration of Faith, Learning and Life,” Cedarville University faculty member and author

Brenda MacKay (2012) described faith integration as “wholeness” as opposed to fragmenting the learning of content from the spiritual truth of Christianity. Harnessing the value of each of the three dimensions creates this “wholeness,” making for a seamlessly integrated course.

Dimension 1: Inside Integration

Dimension one involves what can be called “inside.” It revolves around the professor intentionally bringing faith into the discussion of the academic at hand. As the facilitator of the class, the professor can create a curriculum capitalizing on opportunities to relate course material to faith. The professor also serves to model integration of faith into daily life. The professor is a crucial aspect of incorporation.

Curriculum developed with faith is possibly the most difficult form of integration; a tight combination between business curriculum and faith can take time and effort. In an article for the *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, well-published education authors L. Burton and C.C. Nwosu (2003) offer a few foundational principles for crafting curriculums based on integration. In their research, the authors found that integration of faith inside the classroom begins with value judgments and an analysis of facts. Burton and Nwosu (2003) continue, finding that this critical thinking ultimately leads to an investigation of God’s purpose in the subject at hand. These basic strategies can help professors incorporate faith regardless of the subject matter.

One of the biggest difficulties in structuring a class around integration is that very few business textbooks are written from a Christian perspective. However, there are several articles which offer detailed suggestions on integration within certain subject areas. One such article was published in the *Christian Business Academy Review* in 2012. Written by Newell and Newell (2012), the authors create their own model of biblical stewardship for teaching a personal finance class. Their model focuses on the stewardship of earning and the stewardship of spending, which includes giving, paying taxes, planning for the future, and living joyfully, in that order. Newell and Newell emphasize the importance of performing each of these actions in such a way that it gives glory to God. They close the article by providing contrasting statements from an earthly and biblical perspective on each part of their model. This example demonstrates how to incorporate biblical principles into daily decisions and long-term planning.

Another article provides a content-oriented approach to teaching economics. Cornerstone University Economics professor, Brad Stamm (2001), suggests that the Bible is full of examples of economic principles that can be productively incorporated into class. His article in the *Journal of Biblical*

Integration in Business provides a selection of specific ideas and stories along with their application (Stamm, 2001). Concepts covered include opportunity cost, price elasticity, monopolistic power, and money as a medium of exchange. His outline provides an excellent jumping point for those in economics.

Certain approaches may not work in all cases. Margaret Edgell (2010) conducted empirical research regarding how faith integration impacts student development, focusing specifically on business students. Edgell found that faculty members tend to teach using their own models of faith formation, which they have derived from extended experiences with a specific population group of students (2010). She goes on to suggest that these models may be more reliable for understanding the students since they are customized to a distinct group of students. Paying attention to student surroundings and personalities can help a professor know which areas can more easily mold to an integration-focused curriculum.

The professor is the ultimate model of integrated faith. Christian business professors model the behavior, and students are always watching for an authentic example of integration. As discussed by Matthias (2008) in an article for the *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, a study was undertaken at Wheaton College to identify and report on common themes among professors who truly exemplify faith integration. A passion for excellence, genuine faith, desire for integrity and wholeness, humility, and openness for change were observed as being the most prominent shared traits amongst the individuals, with humility being the strongest (Matthias, 2008). Modeling these behaviors and the biblical Fruit of the Spirit will display the professor’s personal integration, urging students to follow his or her lead.

A professor’s testimony can also be invaluable to students at a religious institution. In an article for the Christian Business Faculty Association, Andrews et al. (2000) discuss a study done with John Brown University alumni indicating that faculty testimonies do indeed have an impact on students. In fact, some of the alumni stated that it was a disappointment when certain faculty members did not share their Christianity (Andrews, Bovee, Roller, & Walenciak, 2010). However, Andrews found that in one particular case, it was counterproductive when a particular faculty member shared his Christianity in the classroom but did not seem to follow the same Christian principles in his life outside the classroom (2000). When used properly, testimonies can be a huge aid in integration.

As noted in the study with John Brown University, care must be taken to avoid the pitfalls of sharing a testimony. By

offering to share one's faith, a certain responsibility is placed on the professor to uphold their faith in all aspects of life. A testimony can be quickly destroyed by a careless conversation in the office or the treatment of a family member at church. Faith exemplified in the classroom should also be evident in public by service, lifestyle, church involvement, and the like.

Dimension 2: Outside Integration

Dimension two involves supplementing dimension one with outside integration. Taking students into the community through an experiential learning field trip is one way to expose students to the outside applications of faith integration. Visiting organizations where professionals can speak to their own faith journey and how they integrate their Christian worldview in practical ways is an excellent complement to what students learn inside the classroom.

Inviting guest speakers and urging students to attend campus lectures where professionals outside of the university communicate the value of a Christian worldview is another way students can see the value of integrating their faith. Professor at Spring Arbor University, Richard Wallace (2010) outlines the benefits of inviting speakers both to special events and to regular classroom sessions in an article for the *Christian Business Academy Review*. Among the benefits he lists are the inspiration and wisdom the students gain, alliances for the institution and contacts for student internships and jobs (Wallace, 2010). Wallace goes on to provide specific suggestions on how to make the visits more valuable as well as present a strong case that by being innovative in the invitation, schools will be able to successfully attract speakers who will make a difference in students' perspectives. He emphasizes the importance of inviting good role models and provides ideas to aid speakers who might be unsure what to talk about (Wallace, 2010). Guest speakers, whether in the classroom or at an event provide an excellent method of integrating faith and learning outside of dimension one.

Dimension 3: Mentoring

Dimension three involves a fusion of dimensions one and two. Dimension three revolves around developing and enabling one-on-one mentoring relationships with students. Whether it is through office hours or a university-sponsored mentoring program, professor involvement in mentoring is crucial in aiding students with faith integration. Class speakers and other connections of the professor also make excellent mentors. Setting students up with these professionals gives them another example of integration to study and follow. Using the Faith at Work Scale to survey Christian

workers in the United States, professors Naughton, Lynn, & VanderVeen (2010) wrote an article for the University of St. Thomas's Ethics and Business Law Faculty Publications finding that work-faith integration was positively associated with workplace mentors. Those reaching out to college students are therefore playing a role in mentoring future mentors. Using the three dimensions to aid students in integration at the university level provides a foundation for students to enter the workplace equipped to incorporate faith into their lives on a daily basis.

Assessment

Within the education system, there must be some standard to which students are held. Quantifying faith does not exactly make for simple measurement, though. It is possible, after all, for a student to demonstrate knowledge and practice of faith without actually experiencing growth or being a believer. The question of how to assess integration is a key aspect of implementation. Setting clear goals, utilizing case studies, creating intentional projects, and encouraging prayer are the best methods of assessing integration.

Establishing clear goals is the first step in any assessment. The measuring and weight of faith integration should be obvious within the course description, with clear statements of how faith integration will occur. The rubrics utilized for assignments should strive to promote and award learners as they reach the cognitive levels of analyzing, evaluating, and creating in regards to faith integration, not just knowing and applying. Such assessment should measure both the reflecting learning skills and extending learning levels, with emphasis in the interpersonal and cognitive learning domains as described in Bloom's Taxonomy.

Case studies are a common method of teaching in business classes and they can also be used as a method of integrating faith into the classroom. In his article "Cases as Stories, Laboratories, and Parables," Sharon Johnson (2005) outlines some of the general benefits of using case studies. Written for *The Journal of Integrated Business*, Johnson's article also discusses the effectiveness of using case studies to demonstrate a Christian worldview. The article proposes the idea of students playing "what-if" with the stories, bringing a biblical perspective to decision-making, and makes the point that case studies really are essentially parables which can be used, following Christ's example, for great good (Johnson, 2005). Case studies are versatile, lending themselves to suit any business course and great facilitators of faith integration. The fall 2005 issue of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* provides some excellent examples of cases in different areas of business that have a distinctive Christian perspective.

While his field is in mathematics instead of business, N.J. Willis (2011) provides an excellent project proposal to encourage students to think about the intersection of professional life and Christianity. Prepared for the Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences, the article, “Two Faith Integration Projects for Freshman Majors,” could easily transition into the business classroom. In the first part of the assignment, Willis requires small teams of students to research a mathematician and then present their findings to the class. A part of the presentation must focus on the mathematician’s connection between his or her professional and religious life. Giving students the opportunity to connect faith with a well-known individual in the business field turns faith integration into realization.

The second part of Willis’s (2011) assignment has students write a paper outlining their goals, including the role that personal values will play. In fact, the second aspect of Willis’s project was similarly discussed for use in business courses at the CBFA 2012 Vancouver Conference. In their presentation, “Innovation and Faith Integration in the Undergraduate Capstone Course,” K.W. Mays and D. Daake (2012) provide an excellent platform for faith integration in asking each student to create a personal strategic plan. This plan follows the general structure of business planning and is also a tool to assist students with intentionally thinking about everything from their personal mission in life to stakeholders, their competitive advantage and specific goals to accomplish. Mays and Daake (2012) assert that student feedback on the exercise has been very positive on both a personal and professional level. In Willis’ (2011) class, once the papers have been submitted, he takes the opportunity to discuss his own professional and spiritual choices to show how they have been integrated in his own experience. Urging students to consider a personal business plan, particularly after studying a successful business person, will get them thinking about the importance of applying their faith.

Another option for integration is asking students to keep a brief prayer journal. In an article for *Christian Business Academy Review*, University of La Verne professor Yvonne Smith (2008) outlines an exercise she calls “Soul Project,” in which students who are working on a team project are required to spend 30 minutes in prayer for their team. The two specific items to pray for are the assignment itself and the students’ attitudes toward their assigned team members (Smith, 2008). Smith (2008) has students then turn in a one- to two-page reaction paper outlining what they gained from the experience. Spending time in prayer about one’s attitude toward a project and those involved is a practical integration tool for any course.

Clear goals set forth at the onset of the course lay the foundation for professors to use case studies and intentionally chosen projects to assess students as they grow their faith within the classroom. Prayer is also a universal way to encourage students to actively integrate faith into their personal lives. To aid in the understanding and ease of implementation, a few examples of projects designed for specific courses follow.

Project Proposals

With an understanding of the importance of integration and a few ideas of how to accomplish it, here are a few project proposals to further aid in implementation. The three project ideas that follow are intended for use in social media, marketing, and management. However, each of these projects can be adapted to suit other courses.

Social Media

Social media has become one of the most prevalent methods of communication, and many universities are now offering courses on the subject. Most students already have their own social media accounts and are familiar with personal use. Some likely already integrate their faith with ease into their social media lives. Integrating faith into a business’ social media can be trickier than doing so on a personal level, though. One way to capitalize on this challenge is by using a project which asks students to create a social media presence for a local church or other faith-based organization.

After an initial meeting with a representative regarding what is expected from the organization, students should be placed in teams and asked to create a portfolio. Students should decide whether they think it best to focus on one area of social media or dabble in a few different ones. The project will carry several deliverables including a project plan, initial design, and completed media presence. Students should compile their work into a portfolio, which will be presented at the end of the project. The representative would come back to view the presentations and act as a guest judge, selecting one to implement for the organization.

The project meets each of the three dimensions of implementation. First, by providing a project that intentionally incorporates faith and service, the professor is facilitating integration. Second, bringing in a representative from a local organization to offer knowledge, be a guest judge, and utilize a final product demonstrates the importance of integration outside the classroom. Finally, the project also affords students the opportunity to make an important connection with the representative — one which may lead to mentoring. In addition, the students will gain confidence

in their ability to create and implement a web presence and they will see first-hand how they can use their newly acquired technology skills to benefit others.

Marketing

Marketing seems to be viewed as the sleek, stylish side of business. Students in this course can use a comparison project to question the role of faith in marketing. Taking a twist on mathematician N.J. Willis' (2011) research project, students would be asked to research the marketing strategies of two companies — one with Christian beliefs and values and one of its secular competitors. Table 1 lists some examples of companies that would be excellent for students to research.

Table 1: Businesses with Christian Beliefs

Chick-fil-A	Tom's of Maine
Hobby Lobby	George Foreman Cooking
Mardel	Compassion International
Forever 21	Big Idea Entertainment
In-N-Out Burgers	Zondervan
Interstate Batteries	Covenant Transportation
Tyson Foods	Herschend Family Entertainment
Mary Kay	(includes companies such
Timberland	as Silver Dollar City,
Alaskan Air	Dixie Stampede, Ride the
ServiceMaster	Ducks, and Classic Cable
(includes Merry Maids,	Car)
Terminix, and American	Auntie Anne's
Home Shield)	
Curves	

Students should be grouped to work towards developing a presentation which would include an evaluation of the companies' SWOT analyses, target markets, implementation of the four P's, and other pertinent marketing information. Using the research they have collected and analyzed, students should determine whether faith integration makes an effective marketing campaign. Alternatively, students can compare the before and after strategies of a company that started with Christian values but may not be operating in the same manner today. Wal-Mart, J.C. Penney, and Aflac are good examples of such.

Additionally, instructors could choose to add an individual aspect to the project. Following the example of G. P. Lantos (2012), professor with Stonehill College, each individual would be asked to write an assignment including personal thoughts regarding the companies. As Lantos discusses in "Using Theories of Consumer Behavior in the Search for the Meaning of Life" for the *Christian Business Academy Review*, students would explain which company

they would prefer to work for and consider the characteristics of a company they may want work from in the future. Students should expand, discussing how they intend to keep their faith in a Christian or non-Christian work environment (Lantos, 2012). This final aspect of the project, would aid students in better understanding their own values while building on their marketing knowledge.

There is much flexibility in the timing of this project. It could be initiated within the first few weeks of the semester, or it could be blended into their current semester project. If used as a semester project rather than only focusing on the marketing plan, students could dig into other areas, investigating such areas as branding, supply chain management, growth strategies, market research, and integrated market communications. Regardless of timing, the project would allow for further development of marketing concepts, personal reflection, and faith integration.

The three dimensions of integration are present in this project as well. Dimension one is addressed through the professor providing a learning environment where students feel comfortable questioning faith integration. Dimension two is achieved as students research outside companies and are asked to make determinations about businesses' marketing strategies. Dimension three is best accomplished if the instructor adds the personal component, mentoring students to think critically about their views, but students are mentored by the professor throughout the project.

Management

Management is an essential element in business. From Fortune 500 companies all the way to single-employee small businesses, managers are part of every business. Students studying this subject are the potential leaders of the future and stressing faith integration's importance to them is pertinent.

Throughout the course, students will learn and discuss the various styles of management. Successful managers could be brought in as guest speakers or students could be asked to conduct an interview with a manager they admire. At the end of the course, students should develop their own ideal style for a final paper. A student's personal management style should indicate knowledge of the course material and relevant information from the speakers or interviews. The paper should include the ideal situations for use of the student's particular style as well as address the impact faith will have on a student's management style. Students should analyze how to integrate their faith in both Christian and non-Christian environments.

Instructors should take careful provisions to offer those students in the class without a Christian worldview the

same opportunity. These students could share the impact their personal values, rather than their faith, will have on their management style. The rest of the project would be completed the same.

The dimensions of integration are prevalent within this project. The professor directly asks the student to apply faith to their business management style, addressing dimension one. Dimension two is accomplished through guest speakers and student conducted interviews. As the future leaders in the industry, management instructors are mentoring future mentors to achieve the third dimension.

CONCLUSION

The question of faith integration's importance has been debated since the educational shift toward empiricism. It has now been determined that this integration is the most distinguishing feature between religious and secular universities. Christian universities must be able to clearly communicate their value proposition by bringing faith into the classroom, or they may not be able to survive in this ever-changing, globalized, online-driven learning environment.

Using the three dimensions of faith integration, students will experience an immersion of faith in their business classrooms. Case studies and intentionally chosen projects are practical ways of assessing students' progress within integration and encouraging them to continue their infusion once they enter the workforce. While any school of business seeks to equip its students to be good business people, Christian schools can operationalize faith integration to create moral business people.

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