

Team Teaching a Class on Integration of Faith and Business: *Observations and Lessons Learned From the Experience*

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ABSTRACT: *A newly developed elective undergraduate business course titled “Integration of Faith and Business” is offered for review. This paper explains the rationale for the structure and content of the course. The paper also shares highlights from the experience, lessons learned, and student responses.*

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The purpose of the paper is to encourage readers to consider creating their own course work for teaching integration of faith and business. Though not perfect by any means, we believe the course described here effectively achieved its goals. We learned many things in the process, and we would like to help others learn from our mistakes and successes. For those interested in developing such a course, this paper would keep them from having to reinvent the wheel. For others seeking ideas on faith integration in particular subjects, the paper may provide insights to consider.

We decided to offer this course as an attempt to correct a perceived deficiency in our business education model. Up to this point, faith integration into the university's business curriculum has been an after-thought, not an intentional endeavor. Yet, fulfillment of our university's motto “For God and Humanity” seems to require a higher standard. Furthermore, conversations with business students revealed that many were hungry for a dedicated time and place for wrestling with important, relevant questions such as: “If I’m a Christian, does that have any significant

bearing on how I do business?” And finally, several of us as faculty members were personally thinking and growing in this integration area, and we wanted to serve as resources for our students. We often joked, “I wish there had been a course like this when I was a student.”

Literature Review

The whole concept of the integration of faith and business continues to grow and morph from its early roots. Works such as Chewning, Eby, and Roels (1990) and Sherman (1987) were instrumental in establishing a modern framework for theoretical and biblical concepts of business-faith integration, while Burkett (1990) offered a more practical approach to faith integration on the job. In the past two decades, the voices of faith integration have been a mixture of pastoral (e.g., Boa and Burnette [2000] and Hybels [1986]), practitioner (e.g., Beckett [1998] and Addington and Graves [2003]), and academic (e.g., Nash [1994] and Hill [1997]).

A survey of Christian business faculty by Karns, Gustafson, and Surdyk (2001) indicated that most business-faith integration in the classroom is done through class discussion, modeling-Christlikeness, and prayer. Many surveyed professors, however, expressed a lack of sat-

isfaction concerning business-faith integration in the classroom. The course described in this paper provides a more comprehensive tool for those seeking deeper business-faith integration in the academic setting. While Surdyk (1995) and other academicians have intentionally integrated faith into individual business disciplines, this course attempts a model for faith integration across all of the major business disciplines. This type of course also nicely complements the frequently offered business ethics course found in most business programs, some of which have explicit faith-based frames of reference.

There are numerous studies citing the benefits and challenges of the team-teaching approach. Davis (1995) notes that benefits for the teachers may include hearing fresh ideas from colleagues and learning new collaborative techniques. Collaborative teaching also gives instructors the opportunity to model shared leadership for their students. Studies indicate that students benefit in many ways from the team-taught structure. Wilson and Martin (1998) note that students who participated in team-taught classes reported better teacher-student relationships. Benjamin (2000) found improved student learning outcomes. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2000) reported higher achievement levels and greater retention levels. In the team environment, Davis (1995) suggests that students can better develop critical thinking skills by synthesizing multiple perspectives and relating information to a larger framework. The added challenges that come with team teaching include loss of instructor autonomy, potential conflicts, loss of flexibility, and increased time demands for planning and coordination (Letterman and Dugan [2004]).

COURSE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Team Approach

Our rationale for team teaching a faith and business integration class came from several factors. In a formal sense we wanted to teach from our strengths, particularly as we moved from the theoretical dimensions to the practical applications of faith integration. We desired to share with students from a personal history of experience, exploration, and deep reflection of the pertinent issues. For example, a finance professor could dialogue in an intelligent manner about the mechanics of the capital markets and may even be able to unpack any relevant faith issues; that same finance professor probably lacks a deep understanding of the nuances of marketing, much less ways to integrate faith into that discipline. Since no single business professor has expertise in all business disciplines, a team approach became desirable, if not critical, for meeting our

goals. We felt that *both* business discipline expertise and a significant faith journey¹ were critical prerequisites for teaching an *integration* course with excellence. In an informal sense we also employed a team approach because this level of faith integration was new territory for all of us, and five heads are better than one in figuring out how to pursue the objective.

One professor from the School of Business served as lead professor² — designing most of the course format, arranging for guest lecturers, collecting and returning class assignments, etc. Before the course was initially offered, the lead professor spent about a year doing developmental work (e.g., back-ground reading, material selection, etc.) and obtained permission for the new course from the university's curriculum committee. Each day's topic was taught individually, so in some ways this is actually a "shared teaching" approach. Each professor assigned and graded his respective topic-related paper, while all other assignments, as well as the final grade, were handled by the lead professor.

Materials

Many types of resources were considered for use in the class. No materials we found exactly correspond to the format and content we desired to teach³ — a blend of theory and practice that is business discipline specific. Therefore we took a "buffet" approach, utilizing the materials that best reflected our learning goals for the course. Often we selected materials based on how well they dealt with the over-arching question: "If I'm a Christian, does that have any significant bearing on how I do business?" Two of the texts, *Perspectives in Business Ethics* (Hartman) and *On Moral Business* (Stackhouse, et. al.), are more theoretical in nature; the other two texts, *God is My CEO* (Julian) and *Behind the Bottom Line* (Addington and Graves), are more practical in nature. In addition to these primary texts, we pulled from countless other resources at various times in the course:

- interviews of local Christian business executives,
- cases from Hartwick Humanities in Management Institute (www.hartwickinstitute.org),
- Web sites such as www.Leadershiplifestyle.com, and www.ethix.org,
- videos such as the *60 Minutes* interviews with Malden Mills CEO Aaron Feuerstein,
- book excerpts from Hill's *Just Business*, Stapleford's *Bulls, Bears, and Golden Calves*, Rae and Wong's *Beyond Integrity*, Nash's *Believers in Business*, etc.,

- the movie *Wall Street*, starring Michael Douglas (shown at a professor's home, which the students really enjoyed),
- articles such as *Business Week's* "The Good CEO" (September 22, 2002), and various issues of *Life@Work* magazine, and
- audio tapes on discipleship in the marketplace from the Navigators.

One of the advantages of team teaching this course was that each professor brought a unique collection of materials and ideas to the classroom that the others did not know about. This created unplanned synergies throughout the semester.⁴

Format and Topics

The course was divided into three segments. (See Appendix for further detail.) The first segment we called *Frames of Reference*. We felt that it was important for students to have a historical and philosophical sense of perspective on which to build the practical applications of faith integration later in the course. This section surveyed various ethical and moral models that students would encounter in the corporate environment and society at large. A brief overview was also given of some of the best historical writings and thinking on morality, ethics, and faith. The purpose of this was to give students a philosophical framework and historical perspective to broaden their awareness and challenge their own assumptions. We also briefly looked at how other major world religions deal with business issues. And finally, we broadly examined the relevance of the Bible to everyday work issues.⁵

The second segment, *Applications in Business Disciplines*, was the main content component of the course. Here we spent three or four class sessions exploring faith integration at a deeper level within each of the major business disciplines: leadership, management, strategy, marketing, human resources, accounting, finance, and economics.

The third segment, *Personal Integration Issues*, dealt most directly with the individual student. Here students were personally challenged to embrace faith integration for themselves. We also explored a lot of the common areas where faith integration is most difficult in the workplace: ambition, expectations, balance, accountability, vocational calling, etc.

Assignments

We used a variety of evaluation measures to determine how well students were interacting with the material.

Course assignments included the following:

- A mid-term take home exam covering the key topics of the first segment of the course, *Frames of Reference*,
- A final take home exam covering the key topics of the third segment of the course, *Personal Integration Issues*,
- Five topic-related papers or projects relating to the five business discipline areas of the middle segment *Applications in Business Disciplines* (leadership, strategy, HR/OB, marketing, and accounting/finance/economics),
- Extensive readings from the four primary course texts plus numerous handouts, and
- A paper and oral presentation of each student's interview with a Christian business person who is actively attempting to integrate faith in the workplace.

Guest Speakers

We brought in three guest speakers during the course of the semester: the manager of a mutual fund, a human resources manager, and a small business owner. This was one of the highlights of the semester, helping students become aware of the dynamics of faith integration through real life testimonies.

Curriculum Issues

At our university this course was offered as an elective in the undergraduate program, primarily due to its experiential nature. The experience was positive enough that it was later decided to offer the course on a bi-annual basis as an elective. For some schools with a specifically Christian mission and scope, it may readily fit as a regular, required course, and it could easily be added to an MBA curriculum. Other schools may choose to offer such a course as an occasional elective, depending on school mission, faculty resources, and student interest.

We felt that students need a certain amount of business knowledge and experience before this course can have significant relevance. Students first need to be aware of the issues of the workplace so that they can have context for integrating their faith. Given this, we required that students be business majors or minors and have at least two years of business coursework or experience. We allowed students not meeting these requirements to audit the course, several of whom did. For this course, 13 students took it for credit and three chose to audit.

LESSONS LEARNED

Team teaching was wonderful but challenging. We naively assumed “You teach that, I’ll teach this, and it will all work out.” It was a challenge to get a seamless flow between the various topics and instructors in the course. That was due in part to differences in emphasis and teaching styles. However, many synergies did occur, and we are convinced, for this course, that team teaching is the way to go, both for the sake of the students and the faculty involved. Also we learned that having a lead instructor is critical to give the course a sense of structural continuity if you use a team teaching approach.

The lead professor format worked well for us because it is always nice to have the buck stop somewhere. The lead professor also served the necessary role of transitioner and integrator between the various topics throughout the course. However, it did mean a disproportionate workload for that lead professor.

It was (and always is) a challenge to move beyond business ethics to true integration of faith and business. Business ethics materials often just consider doing the right thing, whereas faith integration requires a deeper exploration of one’s motivation behind doing the right thing. Many of the resources we used for the course do not make the distinction that faith integration is much more than doing the right thing or being a good witness at work. As the semester advanced it seemed as though we slowly progressed beyond business ethics to vocational discipleship. We noticed this most clearly by the change in the types of questions that students asked and the nature of the after-class conversations. Such an important, wonderful transition requires a certain degree of spiritual depth and commitment from the students and instructors because it deals with deep heart issues such as motivation, priorities, commitment, etc. Our students were mixed in their level of spiritual depth, and so their abilities to “go to the next level” varied somewhat, but nearly all seemed to make progress in this area.

Having students interview Christian business people was a great idea and generally had excellent outcomes. But it was more complicated than we thought. We obtained our list of volunteer interviewees through a local affiliate of Fellowship of Companies for Christ International (FCCI). Several students did not have phone calls and e-mails returned when they tried contacting the business person for an interview. We now know to have about 30% more interviewees than students in order to ensure that all students are able to interview a business person. Also the interview process needs to take place early in the semester

to provide sufficient time to complete the process, particularly when busy executives are involved.

EVALUATION

Quantitative Measures

Near the end of the semester we passed out an extensive evaluation form to the students of the class. The evaluation asked the students to qualitatively rate the different aspects of the course on a five-point Likert scale and to write a qualitative evaluation of what they liked, did not like, and what they would change to improve the course. The quantitative measures of the students revealed that they were quite pleased with the course, with a course average of 4.4 out of 5.0 (5 = excellent, 1 = awful).

Qualitative Measures

Most comments were extremely positive, yet there were critiques that will be helpful as the course is repeated. For one, the students found the amount of reading to be excessive. This particularly centered on the four texts — especially in light of each instructor adding readings pertinent to their discipline. Likewise, several of the assignments appeared to be more extensive than what the students experienced in other classes. This was attributed by some as a by-product of the tag-team approach — with the instructors not coordinating assignments between them.

Our two favorite quotes from students during the semester included: “*It’s like drinking from a fire hydrant*” and “*My head hurts.*” We think students got their money’s worth.

Strategies For Further Development

Based on our reflections and observations during the semester, and considering student feedback, we have developed some ideas for continued improvement:

- More strategically integrate the flow between the different professors and their respective topics. “*E pluribus unum*” is our goal. This means better communication and planning on our parts as professors. We also need to carefully coordinate the timing of assignments so that due dates do not converge.
- We think we can do a better job by focusing more on faith integration and less on business ethics. Business ethics takes care of itself when faith is truly integrated.
- Reassess the quantity of assigned readings. Keep searching for the best course materials, including primary texts, to use in the class. We were generally pleased with what we used but constantly want to improve where possible.

- Better articulate the need for *Frames of Reference*. Students do not know what they do not know.
- Given the right constituency, this course could work very well at the graduate level. We are considering that option. This is true particularly in light of the fact that MBA students have more experience in wrestling with integration issues and are less likely to be satisfied with easy, band-aid solutions to very complex issues.

For the most part, however, we do not plan to change a lot about the structure or content of the course in future, unless we get different feedback from students.

SUMMARY

Though many Christian business faculty sprinkle faith integration into their typical business courses during a given semester, there is still a need for a period of extended, focused exploration with students on this important topic. A semester long intensive course such as “Integration of Faith and Business” allows students to dig deep and be transformed. As professors we loved the personal challenge of teaching such an important topic, and we look forward to building on this experience in the future. Through this paper, we hope readers gain pedagogical ideas for their own application in the classroom.

ENDNOTES

¹ It should be noted that the five professors have very different faith journeys and theological views. However, we all feel there is enough common ground (what C.S. Lewis called “mere Christianity”) to provide a consistent yet diverse framework for the task at hand.

² As for compensation, we were budgeted one faculty course load, so the lead professor was paid accordingly and then passed on prorata compensation to the others.

³ This lack of suitable material indicates a great need for further research and writing in the whole area of faith and business integration.

⁴ Though we did not experience it, team teaching also runs the risk of unplanned contradictions between the instructors. In such a case, humility, gracious dialogue, and thorough scholarship should be employed.

⁵ This section encouraged students to avoid some of the common errors associated with applying the biblical text to business life. We personally feel that errors occur when people (i) see the Bible as either an explicit business manual, which it is not, or (ii) see the Bible as great for one’s private spiritual life but generally not relevant for business spheres of life. Either extreme can be dangerous to business and a poor use of scriptures. We also discussed the distinction between applying general biblical principles and applying specific biblical principles to business (e.g., “love your neighbor” [Matthew 19] versus “don’t take a fellow believer to court for civil matters” [I Corinthians 6]).

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APPENDIX — SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Course Number
Integration of Faith and Business
 Semester, Date

Course Information

Credit Hours: 3

Prerequisites: Junior or senior majoring/minoring in business

Course Description

This elective course will explore the interplay between faith and business. Various models of integration at the personal and corporate levels will be explored. You will be challenged to develop your own philosophy of how faith makes a difference in your approach to business. In addition to traditional business ethics topics, this course will explore personal morality, the unique implications of the Christian faith to various business disciplines, and business as service and vocation.

Materials

- *Perspectives in Business Ethics* (2nd edition), by Hartman, ISBN # 0-07-231405-2
- *On Moral Business*, by Stackhouse, McCann, Roels, and Williams, ISBN # 0-8028-0626-0
- *God is my CEO*, by Julian, ISBN # 1-58062-746-1
- *Behind the Bottom Line: Powering Business Life with Spiritual Wisdom*, by Graves and Addington, ISBN # 0-7879-6467-0

Evaluation

The evaluation of performance in the course is based upon the following scheme:

- 35%: 5 topic-related papers or projects (Leadership, Strategic Management, HR/OB, Marketing, Fin/Acct/Econ)
- 10%: Integration profile paper and presentation
- 20%: Mid-term exam (covering *Section I: Frames of Reference*)
- 20%: Final exam (covering *Section III: Personal Integration Issues*)
- 15%: Readings

Grades are assigned on the following basis:

100.0-90.0 = A 89.9 -80.0 = B 79.9 -70.0 = C
 69.9 -60.0 = D 59.9 -00.0 = F

Topic-related papers or projects will be assigned by each professor when that topic is being covered

(Leadership, Strategic Management, HR/OB, Marketing, Fin/Acct/Econ). Due dates and requirements will be announced at the appropriate times by each professor.

After spring break, a selected student will begin each class with a 5-minute presentation profiling a business person who is successfully learning to integrate faith in his/her marketplace setting. A 3-5 page paper should accompany the oral presentation. Presentation dates and contacting suitable profiles will be discussed later in the semester.

Exams will be take-home. Most questions will be short-answer or essay in nature, related to the key topics in each section. Assignment of exams and due dates will be announced as appropriate.

Assigned readings are given in the Course Schedule below. Supplemental readings will be given periodically throughout the semester. These are assigned for your benefit to allow you to engage with the best thinkers and practitioners in these topic areas. Consequently it is a critical requirement of the course that you engage in the reading assignments in a *thorough* and *timely* manner. Some reading assignments are substantial, so please pace yourself and consult the syllabus for due dates. On the final exam you will be asked to state what percentage of all assigned and supplemental readings you actually read in a comprehending way (skimming doesn't count). This portion will be graded on an honor basis.

Miscellaneous

- This course assumes a high level of participation from you the student. Your interaction is expected. What you get out of this course will directly depend on what you put in it.
- Please leave any ego and close-mindedness at the door. This will allow all of us to engage in serious but fun discussions and debates.
- It will be expected of you to read the assignments before coming to class.
- The Academic Honor Code will be enforced. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Dishonest work through cheating or plagiarism may result in failure of the exam, project, or class.
- As professionals, punctual and consistent attendance is expected of you. Per university policy, students must attend at least 75% of classes to pass the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE			
Date	Topic	Instructor	Assignment
Section I: Frames of Reference			
1/9/0X	Course overview: Law, Ethics, Morality, and Faith in the business context	S	Purchase supplemental texts
1/14/0X	Broad ethical and moral frameworks: Democracy, Utilitarianism, Power, Natural law, Relativism, Religion	S	Ch. 1 (Hartman)
1/16/0X	Specific ethical and moral frameworks: Social contract theory, Stakeholder theory, Maximizing shareholder wealth	S	Ch. 2 (Hartman)
1/21/0X	Traditional wisdom: Kant, Locke, A. Smith, Aristotle, Marx, Rawls, Friedman	S	Ch. 3, 6 (SMRW)
1/23/0X	Part 1: Business through the eyes of other faiths (Muslim, Hinduism, and Buddhism) Part 2: The relevance of the Bible: myth and reality	B S	Ch. 1, 2, 9 (SMRW)
Section II: Applications in the Business Disciplines			
1/28/0X	Management/Leadership	M	Ch. 7 (Hartman)
1/30/0X	Management/Leadership	M	
2/4/0X	Strategic Management	P	Ch. 6 (Hartman)
2/6/0X	Strategic Management	P	
2/11/0X	Strategic Management	P	
2/13/0X	Marketing	K	Ch. 9 (Hartman)
2/18/0X	Marketing	K	
2/20/0X	Marketing	K	Ch. 12-1 (SMRW)
2/25/0X	Marketing	K	
2/27/0X	Guest Speaker	TBA	
3/4/0X	Spring Break	-----	
3/6/0X	Spring Break	-----	
3/11/0X	HR/OB	H	Ch. 8 (Hartman)
3/13/0X	HR/OB	H	Ch 12-4 (SMRW)
3/18/0X	HR/OB	H	
3/20/0X	HR/OB	H	
3/25/0X	Management/Leadership	M	Julian
3/27/0X	Management/Leadership	M	
4/1/0X	Finance/Accounting/Econ	S	Ch. 10 (Hartman)
4/3/0X	Finance/Accounting/Econ	S	Ch. 12-2,12-3 (SMRW)
4/8/0X	Finance/Accounting/Econ	S	
Section III: Personal Integration Issues			
4/10/0X	Leadership, Followership, Control, Relationships	S	Graves, Addington
4/15/0X	Goals, Ambition, Balance, Patience	S	Ch. 3 (Hartman)
4/17/0X	Integrity, Character, Choices,	S	Ch. 13 (SMRW)
4/22/0X	Mentors, Accountability, Finishing well, Vocation	S	
4/24/0X	Guest Speaker	TBA	
4/29/0X	TBA	TBA	
<i>Final Exam</i>			

Note: This is a tentative schedule. All dates are subject to change, particularly in relation to guest speakers.