

Special Millenium Section

Christian Business Education in the Third Millennium: When Hope and Fear Collide

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Arthur Levine and Jeanette Cureton title their latest book *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998). Their book is an analysis of the contrasts in the results of a late 1970s vs. an early mid-1990s Carnegie Council survey of college student attitudes. Their conclusions are sobering:

The inescapable conclusion is that today's college students grew up in a time in which everything around them appeared to be changing—and often not for the better ... [They are] a generation that is indeed wearied by the enormous pressures they face economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. At the same time, they are energized by a desire to enjoy the good life and make their corner of the world a better place. This is a generation in which hope and fear are colliding (Levine, 16-17).

Christian business education has grown up with today's generation of students—the period from 1970 to 1999 has witnessed the development and accelerated growth of business education on Christian college campuses. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities was created during this time, and the Christian Business Faculty Association was founded. Enrollment in business programs on both secular and Christian campuses rose significantly in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Christian business education community may be experiencing its own collision of hope and fear. As an encouragement to increase the dialogue among educators about the past, present, and future of Christian business education, this issue of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* includes a special section exploring issues

about the challenges and concerns facing Christian faculty in the third millennium.

Futures Survey

As a contribution to this section, we conducted a survey of CBFA members. We asked these faculty to reflect on the opportunities and threats facing Christian business education programs and the strengths and weaknesses that might enable such programs to thrive in the third millennium.

The survey consisted of two parts: (1) A series of eight demographic questions (e.g., rank, gender) and a set of twelve “trend” questions related to students, faculty, and programs. CBFA members were asked to evaluate each trend on a five point scale from “1” (Noticeably less than today) to “5” (Noticeably more than today). (2) Each CBFA member received a “SWOT Analysis of the Future” form which asked them to discuss for Christian business education as a whole the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats being faced in the future.

The surveys were placed in the front of the Fall 1998 issue of the *JBIB* and sent to all of those on the CBFA mailing list for the journal. That list was

approximately 300, and we received completed surveys from 60 people. This 20 percent return rate is acceptable for interpretive purposes, but certainly does not represent a “census” of CBFA opinions. The relatively low percentage of response especially affected the survey's ability to examine responses along several demographic variables (for example, only nine responses were received from females, and some areas of primary teaching responsibility had only one respondent). However, we do believe that the data and ideas presented will serve the purpose of describing the range of perspectives among those on the front lines of developing and delivering Christian business education in the future.

Trends: Overall

The table on the following page provides a list of the means for the twelve trend questions in the survey (ranked in each trend area from most noticeable trend pattern to least). The survey results clearly indicated a concern about the commitment levels of students and their preparation for college work. In light of the reported challenges of assessment of faculty productivity and recruiting new faculty, we have

Trend	Mean
Student-related trends	
• Christian commitment from students	2.839
• Student preparation for college	2.587
• Student motivation for academic achievement	2.571
Faculty-related trends	
• Continuous assessment of faculty productivity	4.172
• Challenge in recruiting qualified faculty	3.778
• Emphasis on research and publishing	3.524
• Christian commitment from incoming faculty	3.406
Program-related trends	
• Impact of distance education	4.333
• Partnerships with industry (e.g., internships)	4.082
• National accreditation for the business program	3.905
• Emphasis on graduate programs	3.823
• Significant resource limitations	3.355
1 = Noticeably less than today 3 = About the same as today 5 = Noticeably more than today	

the indications of a challenge: faculty are being asked to achieve more significant outputs (both academically and spiritually) from less qualified student inputs. A question arises: to what degree has the “success” of Christian business education generated a growth in numbers of students without a corresponding growth

in the commitment and ability of those students?

Trends: Differences by Demographic Variables

When we examine some trends by demographic differences among faculty, we spot some interesting dynamics.

Rank

Those with higher ranks (more so than those with lower faculty rank) were more concerned about the challenge of recruiting new faculty in the future, more pessimistic about the level of Christian commitment of those that are hired, and perceived a greater emphasis on research and publication, graduate programs, national accreditation of business programs, and the impact of distance education in the future.

Highest Degree Earned

Those with doctorate degrees were more pessimistic than those with master’s degrees about the Christian commitment of students, had greater concerns about the challenge of recruiting new faculty, and were more emphatic about the probable impact of graduate programs in the future.

Enrollment in Business Department

The size of the business program produced only two statistically significant trend assessments. Those teaching in larger programs indicated a greater concern about the Christian commitment of incoming faculty. Those in

smaller and larger business programs (50 or less and 400 or larger) perceived a greater impact of graduate programs in the future than those from programs in sizes in between.

Professional Development Interest

This variable asked respondents to select from five areas of future professional development: classroom teaching effectiveness, learning support (e.g., course software), research and publishing, college service, and industry involvement. Two areas of statistically significant differences developed. First, those whose professional development interests were more “internally oriented” (e.g., classroom teaching effectiveness, learning support) indicated a greater concern about the Christian commitment of students in the future. Those who were oriented to research and publication indicated a greater concern about the college preparedness of students in the future.

Years in College Teaching

This variable produced more complex results than the other variables. The table on the following page presents the

Issue	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.	11-15 yrs.	16 + yrs.
Student-related concerns				
• Student preparation for college	2.417	3.182	2.533	2.417
• Christian commitment from students	2.833	2.909	2.733	2.826
• Student motivation for academic achievement	2.750	2.800	2.533	2.417
Faculty-related concerns				
• Emphasis on research and publishing	3.727	3.364	3.733	3.375
• Challenge in recruiting qualified faculty	3.750	3.727	3.857	3.792
• Christian commitment from incoming faculty	3.500	3.636	3.133	3.458
• Continuous assessment of faculty productivity	4.167	4.182	4.000	4.333
Program-related concerns				
• Impact of distance education	4.250	4.500	4.333	4.292
• National accreditation for the business program	4.250	3.900	3.733	3.917
• Partnerships with industry (e.g., internships)	4.300	4.300	4.067	3.958
• Emphasis on graduate programs	3.818	4.400	3.667	3.708
• Significant resource limitations	3.455	3.300	3.267	3.375

means from the four groups from which we received responses (trends with statistically significant differences are in bold print).

Teachers with fewer years of teaching experience were more pessimistic about student motivation for academic achievement in the future, perceived a greater emphasis on research and publishing in the future, and sensed more the possible impact of resource limitations in the future.

Teachers with more years of teaching were more pessimistic about the Christian commitment of students in the future and were more concerned about the challenge of recruiting qualified faculty.

Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The table on the following page highlights the most common themes among the written responses we received on the survey.

Challenges: Relative to Students

It is clear that Christian business faculty are pessimistic about the trend in student preparation for college and the commitment they bring for growth both academically and

spiritually. CBFA members expressed this concern in a variety of ways (A note: the following statements in all three challenge areas are sometimes edited from those received on the actual SWOT forms, and sometimes I have combined several comments; however, all the statements accurately reflect the thrust of the open-ended comments we received):

I foresee a greater inability to help students gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of Jesus Christ to the needs and problems of humanity.

I see integration of faith and learning as too often shallow or weak.

I am concerned about college cultures that seem to have a growing acceptance of mediocrity.

I fear we may be losing some of our best and brightest students to larger, more prestigious schools.

Lower academic standards are often used for entry and for grading—often in the name of being Christlike.

I am concerned that we may continue along a path of teaching

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on integrity and ethics in business • Offering of a Christian world and life perspective rooted in the Bible • Offering a values-centered education • Focus on teaching effectiveness • Classes offered predominantly by full-time professors • Departments powered by God's purposes and plans • Smaller classes allow for greater personalization and interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations on various resources • Perception by some employers of a lower-quality business education offered by Christian schools • Shallow or weak faith and learning connections • Small faculty sizes lead to burdensome teaching loads • Lack of student motivation to gain conceptual and business skills • Less emphasis on and/or reward for "scholarly" activity • Some level of complacency among Christian educators satisfied with the status quo • Less qualified faculty than at many non-Christian schools as measured by degree earned, scholarly activity, and teaching "in field" • Less effective marketing of our distinctives • Limited pool of qualified faculty in the future

business students simply what business does as opposed to providing students with the intellectual and spiritual perspective they need to determine what business should do. I feel we are on an educational trend toward skill-

based learning for career preparation that has its roots in self-interest and not in service to God and others.

What shall we do about this rising gap between faculty expectations and student

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making an impact on the scholarly community or academy • Focusing attention on values and ethics in education • Building alliances with business on the basis of character and competence emphasis • Technology-enhanced outreach including distance education mediated through the Internet • International outreach through the natural "missionary" vision on most Christian campuses • Increased use of CBFA publishing capability, especially through increasing the breadth and depth of the current CBFA newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding sources for new, qualified faculty • Resistance of current faculty to new paradigms of on- and off-campus education • Potential to succumb to the pressures of "political correctness" • Lessening/loss of Christian distinctives • Changing values of parents and students: will a Christian perspective continue to "sell" • Failing to keep pace with changing technology • Possible loss of students through new options for obtaining a degree • Loss of dependence on and dedication to God because of worldly success

motivation? In what ways are we being challenged to change our pedagogy to help elevate the skills and vision of incoming students? Will classroom technology help us bridge the gap between students and teachers in the future? How will teachers

maintain high standards of student performance as students offer increased resistance to the hard work that these standards necessitate? How will teachers resist the urge toward grade inflation?

Challenges: Relative to Faculty

It is clear that there are significant differences in expectations and aspirations among faculty. These differences sometimes follow the lines of rank or seniority. CBFA members expressed their concerns and differences in several ways:

Many faculty have little or no training in how to go about faith and learning integration.

The overworking of faculty (high teaching and administrative loads) provides little time for faculty to cultivate research skills.

I am concerned about the weakness of faith among individual faculty.

*As the CBFA and the **JBIB** continue to grow, mature, and gain respect, there is the possible threat of self-puffery. We must stay grounded in humility, making a conscientious effort to remain a body of believers, remembering that no member is more important or significant. Though our opinions often differ on various topics (and we should celebrate our diversity), our central belief in Christ must be our focus and keep us united.*

I am concerned that we treat our business departments as “job shops” rather than as academic entities. Thus faculty are pushed to be “productive” (that is, teach a lot of classes and students) and have limited time and energy to pursue scholarship.

Will faculty in the future be willing to deal with the tough issues—homosexuality, wealth, and gender issues, for instance? Or will we increasingly gravitate toward paths of less resistance and shun sensitive issues to avoid confrontation?

As older faculty retire, how will we attract and integrate new faculty? How well will our business departments handle the diversity of interests among new and existing faculty? How will we handle the tension between the efficiency view of education (focus on teaching many and/or larger classes) and the scholarly view which is by its very nature “inefficient?” Do we understand the process of faith and learning integration enough to be able to instruct and encourage new faculty on how it is done? How will those involved primarily with teaching and those involved primarily in research be able to work together with

Christian love and without the professional hostility this combination has brought to so many academic settings?

Challenges: Relative to our Programs

Concerns about the impact of graduate programs, distance education, accreditation, industry-college relations, and resource limitations are shared by many faculty. These concerns cut across most demographic differences. CBFA members expressed their concerns in many ways:

*There seems to be a real poverty of academic writing and research on Christian principles and business practice. I think the **JBIB** has begun to serve as an outlet for this type of work, but our joint efforts have been weak. I think we need to have some serious discussions among ourselves on how a “Christian” organization may act and why.*

Many of us face poor funding, poor physical plant, and technology that runs behind that available to faculty at larger public colleges and universities.

On the whole, faculty salaries are very low, most especially regarding business faculty.

While some faculty in the humanities may have salaries comparable to mainstream institutions, in the business area salaries run far behind those available at larger and public institutions. What effect will this have on our ability to attract and retain qualified faculty?

I believe that tuition charges at many of our colleges are placing our education out of reach of many in our target audience.

Distance education may be a great threat or a great opportunity, depending on our response. Christian-based distance education through the Internet can allow us to increase our reach and impact through networking and enable many to pursue a Christian business education who otherwise could not because of living in remote locations (especially international locations).

How will we shape and direct Christian business education programs in the future? How will we respond to new paradigms of education, such as distance education? Can our Christian classroom distinctives be transmitted adequately over the

Internet? What impact will accreditation have on Christian education programs—will those who make national accreditation decisions allow our programs to retain their distinctives and grant accreditation to Christ-centered models of undergraduate and graduate education? How will Christian business programs deal with the economics of competitive salaries and advanced technology?

Opportunities

Throughout the surveys we received, there were strong indications of more than just a “fear” of the threats and weaknesses faced by many Christian business education programs.

- Christian business educators should stress to all stakeholders the centrality of ethics, values, and character development in our curriculum. Even secular stakeholders (for example, most of the firms that hire our graduates) can appreciate the character-based outcomes of our programs even if they never understand the roots of our program’s energy and effectiveness in Christ and Scripture.

- Christian business educators should stress to their students the primacy of developing a coherent worldview. A Christ-centered, Bible-based worldview provides a consistent framework for addressing personal and professional issues and priorities. In a world of fragmented perspectives and fractured philosophies, Christian colleges can rightly stress the wholeness and unity of their purposes and pursuits. Encouraging students to develop a coherent worldview can be a dramatic counterpoint to much of secular business education.

- The smaller size of Christian colleges, coupled with the nature of private governance *should* allow Christian business programs to be more flexible and stakeholder-responsive than public, bureaucratically-controlled institutions. The shared values and perspectives of smaller Christian faculty teams should allow for greater speed in both decisions about and implementations of responses to stakeholder concerns.

- Christian business educators stress the importance of teaching, of making an impact on students. This contrasts with the emphasis on many research-focused public institutions where teaching is

often left to untrained teaching assistants. Christian business educators should continue to stress their primary commitment to student development.

- Christian business educators should continue to stress the “imbedding” of professional business training within the larger context of a liberal arts emphasis and a Christian character development focus. Preparing students for “success” in a rapidly changing and spiritually impoverished work environment will accentuate the broad analytical and synthetic foundations of a liberal arts education coupled with a stress on growing spiritual maturity.

Conclusion

There is much talk of Y2K problems. I would like to stress the Y2K opportunities. Those of us in Christian business education have great opportunities to influence our students, to grow as faculty teams, and to continue to fashion business programs that remain committed to enduring Christian values even as we innovate in how we approach the teaching and transmission of those values.

In the end I believe that the fate of Christian business education lies in the future we

can make (through wise planning and a dependence on God’s purposes, power, and provision) rather than the future we have to take. Strategic success comes as institutions focus their strengths on their opportunities (even as they also seek to deal with their weaknesses in light of threats).

The third millennium is a time when hope and fear will collide. The prophet Jeremiah took this comfort in God’s provision during his time of uncertainty:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

For Christian business educators, the third millennium can be a time not when hope and fear collide, but rather when hope and faith combine to produce an unlimited and exciting future.

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