The Unique Value of Christian Higher Education

The History of Religious Freedom in Education
Conversations of Hope in a Culture of Crisis
Strategic Planning That’s Truly Strategic

The Leading National Voice of Christian Higher Education
IN SEPTEMBER, THE CCCU filed two amicus briefs — one with the New York Supreme Court Appellate Division, the other at the U.S. Supreme Court — in support of Yeshiva University’s efforts to uphold its longstanding religious mission and values. We did so because of our shared interest in protecting the ability to carry out our religious mission, but I wanted to reflect on it here because this case highlights some of the challenges and opportunities for Christian higher education.

Some backstory: Yeshiva, in keeping with its religious values, declined to officially recognize an LGBTQ student group because of the university’s understanding of the Torah. The student group sued to compel Yeshiva for recognition. The Supreme Court of New York County sided with the students in June, ruling that Yeshiva is not a religious corporation under city law and that it must immediately grant the group full privileges given to all student groups. In August, the New York Supreme Court Appellate Division denied Yeshiva’s request to block enforcement of the order while it appeals the decision.

Yeshiva turned to the Supreme Court to request a stay, but the Court denied it by a 5-4 vote on Sept. 14, stating that Yeshiva hasn’t yet exhausted its options in the state court system and that it could bring its case back to the Court once it has done so. Writing for the dissent, Justice Samuel Alito said, “A State’s imposition of its own mandatory interpretation of scripture is a shocking development that calls out for review. The Free Exercise Clause protects the ability of religious schools to educate in accordance with their faith.” He then concluded by saying, “Yeshiva would likely win if its case came before us.”

In this decision, the majority of the court gave a technical answer hoping that it could be resolved at the state court level. The minority of the court went to the heart of a First Amendment argument and was willing to rule in favor of Yeshiva, even if the outcome would have been unpopular. When did the principles of religious education become “unpopular”? In his essay on religious higher education (page 32), Peter Wehner writes, “Religion was central to the core identity of the world’s earliest universities. And, in colonial America, a student enrolling at Yale, Princeton, or Columbia wasn’t there to do scientific research or get credentialed for professional school. He was there to shape his soul.”

This is why the CCCU engages so extensively in speaking to the U.S. courts: We believe it is imperative to remind both government and culture that religious education has the best opportunity to form human beings who bless the world. There is no longer an overwhelming consensus that religion is a positive force in culture. Yet, that does not mean that those who believe in and promote religious education recede from the public square. The CCCU engages the courts because they are an amphitheater of dialogue between conflicting worldviews. The respect for the rule of law must be part of the educational content of Christian higher education. As the World Justice Project describes it, “No matter who we are or where we live, the rule of law affects us all. It is the foundation for communities of justice, opportunity, and peace — underpinning development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights. Research shows that rules of law correlates to higher economic growth, greater peace, less inequality, improved health outcomes, and more education.”

This issue of Advance outlines the history of religious freedom jurisprudence (page 20) and how to create conversations that generate hope, refine and deepen our convictions, and promote mutual understanding, even if they do not necessarily generate agreement (page 38). I believe that we must always be pairing the “tools” of persuasion (for instance, through briefs filed in courts) with the “how” of persuasion — our words and posture as we engage with people with whom we disagree. In our classrooms, we must practice this art of winsome persuasion because of our convictions of God’s sovereignty over all creation and in the fact that it is not our work to complete; rather, it is God who completes the good work he has begun.

Wehner, an outsider to Christian higher education, sums up our mission well (page 36): “At their best, Christian higher education institutions appreciate the fundamental purpose of education, which is to shape the human soul; to pursue the moral good, to love the right things. It is a deeply integrative view. Christian colleges are almost alone today in intentionally developing students who, in the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah, ‘act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with [their] God.’

Like Yeshiva University, Christian colleges and universities seek to shape the souls of their students in accordance with their stated religious beliefs. It is a cause worth fighting for.
Conversations of Hope in a Culture of Crisis

With controversies on the rise both on campus and off, Christian colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to help their communities learn how to disagree — without becoming divided.

By Richard Langer

Strategic Planning That’s Truly Strategic

Leadership lessons from a study of 108 strategic plans.

By Aimee Hosemann and Rob Zinkan, with Connor LaGrange

Navigating the Hard Work of Faith Integration

Three considerations for developing faith integration on campus for a new generation of students.

By Reginald Finger
Cultivating Communities of Curiosity

When it comes to the value of Christian higher education, there are a lot of things that we can do (and at the CCCU, we often do) promote. Robust academic engagement in the classroom. Deep dialogue on the role of faith in vocation throughout a student’s time on campus. The campus community’s wholehearted commitment to raising the next generation of leaders dedicated to serving Jesus Christ, wherever they are called.

For my own experience — having completed both bachelor’s and master’s degrees at CCCU institutions — perhaps the greatest benefit of Christian higher education is the opportunity to experience what it is to live in a faith-rooted community of curiosity. I recently heard a discussion about the value of communities of curiosity on an episode of The Holy Post podcast (specifically the Sept. 30 episode), where journalist and cultural commentator David French described what a community of inquisitive people looks like:

The goal is to create a value orientation toward curiosity … When you have a community that’s value proposition is toward curiosity and inquisitiveness, what are you? You’re welcoming. … Because there is no bubble, people are always having their ideas tested by someone of goodwill on the other side.

Over and over again, this has been my experience with Christian higher education, both as a student and as an employee at the CCCU. I have had countless conversations — with fellow students, with faculty, with administrators, even with lunchroom staff — and have been able to express, test, revise, and refine my ideas through these talks with people who sharply disagree with me but who also care deeply about me, are interested in what I have to say about the topic, and generally want to see me succeed.

As an undergraduate, that was especially transformational, and God used that to set me on my current career path in ways I could never have imagined at the time.

But it wasn’t until after I finished undergrad and moved to Washington, D.C. that I realized how rare and valuable such an environment really is. This was in part because my move to D.C. came just a few years before the 2016 election and, more specifically, the marked turn our public discourse took in the latter half of the 2010s — a turn away from the inquisitiveness toward the isolation of the political echo chamber. A turn away from the belief that engaging people who disagree with us is valuable not only in attempting to persuade people our view is the right one, but also in helping us better understand their views — and, more often than not, recognizing that maybe our own views aren’t as infallible as we first thought.

But that has only further reinforced for me just how valuable Christian colleges and universities are for our public discourse. And, frankly, it’s one of the reasons I have so enjoyed putting together Advance over these years. Not only do we strive to provide content that is of use to you, no matter your role in advancing the cause of Christian higher education, but we also hope to provide reminders of how unique and significant Christian campus communities of curiosity are for the world.

To be clear, no Christian campus models this perfectly; like everything else in life, our own human fallenness prevents us from reaching the full God-given potential we’ve been created with. But time and again, I’m reminded that the spirit of inquisitiveness and welcoming is alive and well on CCCU campuses. That’s the spirit — the work of the Spirit — that we need in the world.

From the Editor

Morgan Feddes Satre

COMMENTS
Do you have comments about stories in this issue or ideas for stories in a future issue? Email us at editor@cccu.org.

Around the Council

Presidential Changes

The following institutions have experienced presidential transitions since September 2021. Campuses that currently have interim presidents are not included.

Azuza Pacific University (Azuza, CA)
Adam J. Morris, July 2022

Bethel University (Mishawaka, IN)
Barbara K. Bellefresseille, March 2022

Booth University College (Winnipeg, MB, Canada)
Susan van Duinen, October 2021

Calvin University (Grand Rapids, MI)
Wiebe Boer, August 2022

Campbellsville University (Campbellsville, KY)
Joseph Hopkins, February 2022

College of the Ozarks (Point Lookout, MO)
Brad Johnson, June 2022

Christ’s College Taipei (New Taipei City, Taiwan)
Homer C. Wu, February 2022

Erskine Theological Seminary (Due West, SC)
Steven C. Adamson, November 2021

Faulkner University (Montgomery, AL)
Dennis Mitchell Henry, May 2022

Fresno Pacific University (Fresno, CA)
André Stephens, July 2022

Grace College & Seminary (Winona Lake, IN)
Drew Flam, July 2022

Harding University (Searcy, AR)
Michael D. Williams, June 2022

Indiana Wesleyan University (Marion, IN)
Jonathan Kulaga, August 2022

Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (Budapest, Hungary)
László Trócsányi, February 2022

Malone University (Canton, OH)
Gregory J. Miller, July 2022

Multnomah University (Portland, OR)
Eric Anthony Joseph, March 2022

Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (Seoul, South Korea)
Ungong Kim, October 2021

Redeemer University (Hamilton, ON, Canada)
David Zietzma, March 2022

San Diego Christian College (Spring Valley, CA)
Bill Crawford, July 2022

Southern Wesleyan University (Central, SC)
William Barker, July 2022

Swanton Wesleyan University

Southwest Baptist University (Bolivar, MO)
Richard J. Nelson, September 2021

Tenku University (Taichung City, Taiwan)
Kuo-En Chang, January 2022

University of Northwestern - St. Paul (St. Paul, MN)
Corbin Hoonbeek, August 2022

Whitworth University (Spokane, WA)
Scott Quinlin, February 2022

Institutional Name Changes

Houghton College in Houghton, New York, is now Houghton University.

Houston Baptist University (Houston, TX) is now Houston Christian University.

Nyack College in New York, New York, is now Alliance University.

Roberts Wesleyan College (Rochester, NY) is now Roberts Wesleyan University.
AROUND THE COUNCIL

THE LATEST UPDATES FROM CAPITOL HILL

THE CCCU’S ADVOCACY WORK promotes and protects CCCU members’ unique position as Christ-centered, nonprofit institutions of higher education that are often in the crosshairs of a variety of issues affecting higher education and faith-based organizations, as well as challenges to religious character and convictions. In the last fiscal year, the CCCU signed onto 55 letters and 11 amicus briefs supporting our major advocacy issues. Other highlights of our recent advocacy work include:

Borrower Defense to Repayment Regulations (BDTR) | In July, the Department of Education published a notice of proposed rulemaking with proposed revisions to its regulations governing student loan discharge standards and processes under Title IV, including BDTR. The CCCU submitted a comment letter offering suggestions for changes or clarifications on several topics, including potential liability to institutions and the effect such liabilities have on persons exercising substantial control of an institution, delineating what constitutes “aggressive and deceptive recruiting,” and addressing issues connected to an institution’s closing. Additionally, the CCCU joined the American Council on Education and other higher education organizations on a comment letter noting that we are broadly supportive of the Department’s goals for the proposed changes — to enhance protections available to borrowers — and that clarity is needed to ensure the changes work as intended. The letter also noted our preference for legislative action to comprehensively address the holistic changes needed to the federal student loan repayments system and minimize the chances of major policy reversals between each change of administration.

Yeshiva University v. YU Pride Alliance | In early September, the CCCU filed two amicus briefs — one in the New York Supreme Court Appellate Division and one at the U.S. Supreme Court — on behalf of Yeshiva University. In keeping with Yeshiva’s longstanding religious values, the school declined to recognize an LGBTQ student group, and YU Pride Alliance sued to compel Yeshiva to recognize the group. The Supreme Court of New York County ruled that Yeshiva University is not a religious corporation under city law. (In August, the New York Supreme Court Appellate Division denied Yeshiva’s request to block enforcement of the lower court’s order). In our amicus briefs, we urged the courts to protect the rights of the country’s oldest Jewish university to operate according to its sincerely held beliefs. The U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the state court’s decision for now by a 5-4 vote on Sept. 14, stating that Yeshiva has not yet exhausted its options in the state court system. “If applicants seek and receive neither expeditious nor interim relief from the New York courts, they may return to this Court,” the ruling stated. We look forward to continuing to support Yeshiva in this process.

Title IX | In September, the CCCU submitted a detailed comment letter and another joint letter regarding the newly proposed Title IX regulations. Notably, the CCCU recommended the Department of Education add a statement to the proposed definition of Federal Financial Assistance to clarify that tax-exempt status does not constitute Federal Financial Assistance. We acknowledged that the Department continues to uphold the religious exemption in accordance with previous regulations and shared our appreciation for the Department’s confirmation of the establishment of method for applying the statutory religious exemption to religious institutions. We also urged the Department to continue this established approach.

THE CCCU NAMES NEW SENIOR FELLOWS

The CCCU has a number of individuals who serve as Senior Fellows, appointed volunteers who assist the CCCU on special issues and projects. They work directly with CCCU President Shirley V. Hoogstra. Two recently appointed fellows include:

DR. TODD C. REAM
Senior Fellow for Public Engagement

Ream will assist on projects related to faith and scholarship in the public sphere. He serves on the higher education and honors guild faculties at Taylor University, as the publisher for Christian Scholars Review, and as a senior fellow with Lumen Research Institute.

REV. DR. LENA CROUSO
Senior Advisor and Fellow for Diversity

Crouso will consult on a wide variety of diversity, equity, and inclusion projects. She serves at Southern Nazarene University as vice president for intercultural learning and engagement, chief diversity officer, and professor.

LEARN MORE
A full list of the CCCU’s senior fellows is available on the CCCU website.

AROUND THE COUNCIL

CCCU EXPANDS LEADERSHIP TEAM

The CCCU has added new members to its leadership team in recent months, including:

DR. AMANDA STAGGENBORG as Chief Communications Officer. She previously served at George Fox University (Newberg, OR) and Missouri Baptist University (St. Louis, MO) and is known as a strategic and established public relations professional.

DR. DOUG KOOPMAN as Director in Residence of the American Studies Program. He previously served at Calvin University (Grand Rapids, MI) and in national politics on Capitol Hill, and he brings a unique combination of teaching, writing, and working in politics and government.

REV. DR. LENA CROUSO
Senior Advisor and Fellow for Diversity

Crouso will consult on a wide variety of diversity, equity, and inclusion projects. She serves at Southern Nazarene University as vice president for intercultural learning and engagement, chief diversity officer, and professor.

LEARN MORE
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FIRST-RATE EDUCATION WITH A SECOND CHANCE PELL
By Amanda Staggenborg

“AIF I HAD LEARNED to love learning before, I would be on the other side of this tour today,” stated a 17-year inmate at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. He held out a compilation of essays — with his name displayed proudly on the front — that other inmates used for studying.

“When I figured out how to love learning, I figured out how to love life.”

Another inmate serving a life sentence quoted Aristotle. Through tears, he described a love for education and the value it brings to his family. His dedication inspired his daughters to commit to higher education, and they now envision their own futures as college graduates.

These two stories are a glimpse of all the powerful stories the students and graduates of the Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) share with members of the Department of Education, including Under Secretary James Kvaal, during their visit to the program on August 30. They made the visit because they were interested in the impact of the Second Chance Pell grants, especially with the reinstatement of Pell eligibility for incarcerated individuals beginning July 2023.

“We expect to see new colleges and universities across the country creating new programs to serve incarcerated students, so we want to be in a position where we are visiting, we’re listening, and we’re connecting people so that we make the most out of these new investments and opportunities for students everywhere,” said Kvaal. He added that the Second Chance Pell program has “strong bipartisan support, and we’re really excited to open it up to every college and university that is interested.”

Accompanying Kvaal’s team were representatives from the Michigan Department of Corrections, Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and members of the state legislature and the CCCU. The day included a tour of the classrooms, facilities, and vocational village, as well as a 90-minute roundtable discussion with CPI graduates. Kvaal noted this was his first visit to a prison, and he called it a “special opportunity” after conducting listening sessions with incarcerated students and those who maintain the programs.

Reverence for education was in the air during the entire tour. Each inmate, whether quoting classic literature, building a baby crib, or training therapy puppies, took his calling seriously while mastering new skills. Afterward, Kvaal reflected on the uniqueness of the CPI program. “The CPI has a strong sense of mission and it really has touched people’s lives — changed their lives — and I think that is an incredible opportunity for these students.”

The Calvin Prison Initiative project provides inmates an opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree in faith and community leadership. Incarcerated students in the five-year program take the same classes as traditional Calvin students, like “Fundamental Questions of Philosophy” or “Oral Rhetoric.” Kvaal stated that permanent Pell funding was necessary for programs like the CPI because it provides stability and will reduce skepticism by providing financial support to show longevity and commitment to the community. Research from the RAND Corporation shows how much of a difference these kinds of education programs can make in reducing recidivism and lowering incarceration costs. Inmates participating in educational programs are 43% less likely to recidivate when they are released, and every dollar invested in prison education reduces incarceration costs.

Calvin’s program is one of 21 prison education programs currently in the CCCU that provide hundreds of incarcerated students the opportunity to engage in quality Christian liberal arts education that encourages development of both education and faith in ways that transform lives.

“We believe God is redeeming even the darkest places of society,” the CPI website notes. “There is no corner of creation that cannot be touched by the power of the gospel. By attempting to transform prison culture, we hope to not only restore peace and shalom within prisons, but also within our local neighborhoods and communities.”

AMANDA STAGGENBORG is the CCCU’s chief communications officer. She holds an Ed.D. from Missouri Baptist University, and her master’s and bachelor’s from Webster University in Missouri.
Given trends, the CCCU has been exploring how we can better serve your students during the summer.

AS THE STUDY ABROAD sector continues to rebuild after the pandemic, the number of students looking for short-term programs and experiences off-campus continues to grow. We already saw this trend before the pandemic — 64.6% of all U.S. college students who studied abroad in 2017-18 did so on short-term programs of less than eight weeks. This trend seems to be continuing post pandemic. Though research shows that longer-term programs provide stronger outcomes for cross-cultural understanding and personal growth, short-term programs do offer benefits such as a higher rate of satisfaction with the overall college experience, as well as general awareness and appreciation of other cultures. Given these trends, the CCCU has been exploring how we can better serve your students during the summer.

Our Scholarship & Christianity in Oxford (SCIO) summer program has a long tradition of offering students the opportunity to study away each summer. So to add to that, we will be launching two exciting new opportunities next summer (2023) in both Jordan and Washington, D.C. Together, these summer programs offer your students a full range of options to fit their interests:

• The Middle East Studies Program (MESP) will offer a four-credit course from May 13 to June 4 based in Amman, Jordan: The Middle East: The Crossroads of Religion, Culture, and History. This course will explore the many dimensions of Islam as a living religion in the context of the diverse mosaic of Middle Eastern culture in Jordan. Students will have a hands-on, immersive experience as they interact with local hosts in ways that broaden learning, enrich friendships, and foster mutual understanding and respect. Travel excursions will enhance their learning, as students will experience some of the most amazing historical, archaeological, cultural, and geographic sites in Jordan: the Citadel and Roman theater of Amman; Petra; the Dead Sea; Wadi Mujib; Jerash; Wadi Dana; Wadi Rum; and Aqaba.

• The American Studies Program (ASP) will offer a one-week, one-credit seminar in late May (exact dates TBD) in Washington, D.C.: Best Practices in Encouraging Healthy and Diverse Dialogue on College Campuses. This seminar will explore best professional practices for student government and student groups, especially in addressing controversies and disagreements that become public. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences (including what has worked for them and what hasn’t), learn from their peers from other campuses, and connect to D.C.-based professionals and resources that address these issues in a variety of public spaces. The student leaders and student life professionals who come for the seminar will take back to their campuses new ideas, new friends, and a larger network of allies and peers.

• The SCIO program will continue to offer students the opportunity to take two classes (six credits total) from June 16 to July 17. Courses available to students explore such topics as Jane Austen, C.S. Lewis, and Science and the Christian Tradition.

We encourage your students interested in one of these opportunities to visit the CCCU’s GlobalEd website (www.cccuglobaled.org) for additional information. Application deadline for Summer 2023 programs is May 1.

DON DEGRAAF is the CCCU’s senior director of educational programs.

Photo courtesy of Don DeGraaf
Mission Fit?
Researchers, Undergrads, and the Common Good

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH (UR) has become an important form of pedagogy and formation for our students (long identified as a high-impact practice by AAC&U). The norm expected for UR posts we provide guidance to our students in those areas where we ourselves have advanced research competence. That can be challenging for smaller liberal arts institutions that have typically 75-120 full-time faculty covering a wide range of disciplines. Partnerships with others and engaging in coalitions with other similar institutions for advising support can mitigate that challenge (and I hope to address this challenge in the future). But that is not really the point of this discussion. The current UR model offers the strength of close mentoring relationships and focused training so that we can confer to students what we know best. But the model has a potential flaw and weakness: It can be tempting to train our students to research in the ways we learned to carry it out, toward the purposes we learned, and perhaps with the narrowness of focus that we have mastered.

Many of us have experienced a relatively singular career path. We entered undergraduate studies, moved on to graduate school (perhaps with a stop or two in between), then sought careers in academia. Many of us learned a primary approach to research that we have ourselves advanced research competence. That can be challenging for smaller liberal arts institutions that have typically 75-120 full-time faculty covering a wide range of disciplines. Partnerships with others and engaging in coalitions with other similar institutions for advising support can mitigate that challenge (and I hope to address this challenge in the future). But that is not really the point of this discussion. The current UR model offers the strength of close mentoring relationships and focused training so that we can confer to students what we know best. But the model has a potential flaw and weakness: It can be tempting to train our students to research in the ways we learned to carry it out, toward the purposes we learned, and perhaps with the narrowness of focus that we have mastered.

Many of us have experienced a relatively singular career path. We entered undergraduate studies, moved on to graduate school (perhaps with a stop or two in between), then sought careers in academia. We entered and followed this relatively singular path with passion, with vision, with commitment, with delight. Some found their way by other means, but by and large, the professoriate is still defined substantially by faculty who chose and trod this path from relatively early on. Many of us learned a primary approach to research that we then used for years before developing new and more varied sets of research skills. Should the narrower focus, representing the training in our day, be the only path toward research skills for our students as undergraduates?

It is unlikely that this will continue to be the normal path. We already see many alternatives among the current professorial ranks with more varied experiences and broader arrays of training. This will continue and expand. We know higher education is struggling on so many fronts, and the current economic model is not sustainable. This will certainly affect the future of the professorate. Hence, we should not expect our students to pursue their professorial paths in a similar fashion to ours. Likely, they will experience far more change and variety. Their paths will appear to meander. Agility, insight, and determination, among other things, will be key qualities they need to flourish. So do we devise research opportunities that structurally expect them to apply the benefits of their training and transferable skills to other endeavors outside research and aside from professional scholarship?

Giving students research skills that are transferable and flexible to new situations will be a valuable offering for them as well as for your program. How is your institution and how are your faculty shaping the curriculum and the experience to aid and form such qualities? Is this on the agenda, the syllabus, as a key output and benefit? I recently came across (thanks to a colleague at Dordt University) a valuable @ article from April 2021 titled, “Reimaging STEM Workforce Development as a Braided River.” It can be applied to any discipline. The article suggests moving away from a traditional “pipeline” model to that of a “braided river.” “A braided river,” the authors note, “is a wide, shallow system comprising numerous interwoven and changeable channels separated by small islands.” What makes this model particularly valuable is that instead of a single main entry point, like a pipeline, it allows for multiple ways to enter into a particular field. This approach offers practical insight and direction and is worthy of our consideration. To take such an approach seriously may also require us to adapt our pedagogy and, in particular, adapt the ways we form students as researchers.

I also believe there is an aspect to forming young researchers, shaped by the braided river motif, that is profoundly missional for our institutions. Training students to be skilled in research holds rich prospects of contributing to our goals of enriching both our students’ lives and — beyond that — their communities. It can have a multiplier effect.

For example, developing both an appreciation for and skill in research offers a tool to help us better form students who are savvy about digital connections and media but not discerning about the quality of digital information they engage. Students trained in research, one can reasonably hope, will be better able to sift political rhetoric, to test ideas, and to contribute to their communities by representing and contributing to others’ enhanced prudence, judgment, and common sense. A key point, then, is not to create researchers for the sake of accomplishing research, though that is clearly a beneficial outcome, but to create well-formed students who will be citizens informed by the lessons and methods that go with learning research skills. This commitment to research can offer new pathways to develop impact.

As pedagogues committed to the Kingdom of God, and shaped by the likes of the late Charles Malik’s Two Tasks (forming the mind among the faithful and forming faith among the scholars), this is a valuable contribution toward advancing our mission of Christ-centered higher education, helping our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.

STANLEY P. ROSENBERG is the CCCU’s vice president for research and scholarship and the executive director of SCIO: Scholarship & Christianity in Oxford, the CCCU’s U.K. subsidiary.
HUMANITIES DEGREES AT CCCU INSTITUTIONS

CHANGE IN HUMANITIES AT CCCU INSTITUTIONS

The charts below show the changing numbers of degrees awarded in the humanities over the last decade (left) and of degrees in all categories broadly (right).

2009-10 BACHELOR DEGREES AWARDED

- 48,983 Total Degrees
- 13,221 Humanities Degrees

2019-20 BACHELOR DEGREES AWARDED

- 49,976 Total Degrees
- 11,941 Humanities Degrees

PERCENTAGE OF HUMANITIES DEGREES OUT OF ALL DEGREES AWARDED AT CCCU INSTITUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2019-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISTRIBUTION OF HUMANITIES DEGREES AWARDED BY CATEGORY

Just as the overall number of humanities degrees has shifted over the last decade, so too has the distribution of the particular majors students have completed.

2009-10

- Visual and Performing Arts: 16.4%
- History: 9.6%
- Philosophy and Religious Studies: 8.2%
- Liberal Arts and Sciences: 7.5%
- Communications and Journalism: 7.3%
- Area, Group Studies: 4.4%
- Theology and Religious Vocations: 4.3%
- Foreign Languages, Linguistics: 3.8%
- English Language, Literature: 3.3%
- Legal Professions: 3.1%
- Interdisciplinary Studies: 2.2%
- Profession: 2.0%
- Social Sciences: 1.8%
- STEM: 1.5%

2019-20

- Visual and Performing Arts: 21.4%
- History: 8.2%
- Philosophy and Religious Studies: 7.9%
- Liberal Arts and Sciences: 7.3%
- Communications and Journalism: 7.3%
- Area, Group Studies: 4.5%
- Theology and Religious Vocations: 4.3%
- Foreign Languages, Linguistics: 4.3%
- English Language, Literature: 4.1%
- Legal Professions: 3.5%
- Interdisciplinary Studies: 3.1%
- Profession: 3.0%
- Social Sciences: 2.8%
- STEM: 2.5%

PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE IN NUMBER OF DEGREES AWARDED BY CATEGORY

Given the overall changes in humanities degrees awarded over the last 10 years, as well as the changes in which humanities majors students are pursuing, this graph highlights the percentage of change in each major from 2009-10 to 2019-20. (Specific numbers for each degree are given in the parentheses, first from 2009-10 and then from 2019-20.)

- Communications and Journalism (2,496 | 2,424): -3%
- Theology and Religious Vocations (2,912 | 2,444): -16%
- English Language, Literature (1,275 | 983): -23%
- Area, Group Studies (66 | 49): -26%
- Liberal Arts and Sciences (1,613 | 1,169): -30%
- History (867 | 606): -38%
- Philosophy and Religious Studies (674 | 419): -42%
- Foreign Languages, Linguistics (407 | 236): -43%

The data in this report was compiled using a list of 120 CCCU Governing Member and Collaborative Partner institutions as of September 2021. More comprehensive reports with information on campus diversity and STEM are available at www.scio-uk.org/research/supporting-stem.


For a complete list of the CCCU’s research reports and data, visit https://www.cccu.org/programs-services/research/.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOUG AND PATTI MAGNUSON

IN 1993, STUDENTS from Christian colleges across the U.S. gathered in Cairo, Egypt, for the very first semester of the CCCU’s Middle East Studies Program (MESP). In the 30 years since, the program has relocated several times — first to Jerusalem, Israel, in 2012, then to Amman, Jordan (its present location), in 2014 — and benefitted from the leadership of four directors and countless faculty, staff, and lecturers. But what has remained consistent through the years is MESP’s commitment to providing students a Christ-centered, academically rigorous experiential opportunity to listen, learn, and grow in understanding and loving Middle Eastern neighbors both inside and outside the classroom.

We asked Doug Magnuson, the current MESP program director, and his wife, Patti (who also serves as the program administrator), to reflect on MESP’s necessity, impact, and history. Their comments have been edited for length. To learn more about MESP, visit www.cccuglobaled.org/mesp.

Why is it important for the CCCU to have a Christian experiential study away program in the Middle East?

Doug Magnuson: There are a lot of reasons; I’ll name some, though not in any particular order. One of the greatest challenges for Christians in the world today is relating to the Muslims of the world. These are the two leading monotheistic religions and the two largest groups of religious people in the world. So we often run into Muslims, no matter where you are in the world, and it’s important we know how to relate to them, how to engage and build relationships without being afraid. Jesus says the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. That encompasses everyone around us, so the question here is, what does it mean to love our Muslim neighbor? You can’t really love someone without knowing them and without relating to them. Unfortunately, often Christians and Muslims end up fighting in one way or another. But it’s imperative for us as followers of Christ not to fight, but to love and to learn how to understand and relate, how to serve, how to exist together in the world. One of the things at the heart of MESP is the opportunity for students to do that — to become comfortable in Muslim settings.

So for example, within the first few days that students are in Jordan, we usually meet with some of our Muslim Jordanian friends in a local mosque. And for many students, it’s the first time they’ve ever been in a mosque and had a chance to observe prayer. Afterward, we sit in a circle on the floor in the mosque and these friends of ours share their journey of faith and practice. It’s a disarming event for our students because it makes them realize, “We’re meeting other human beings who are real people like us, and I didn’t know that they might have this kind of experience.”

Another reason to have a program here is that the Middle East is in the news a lot, but often Americans don’t have a full understanding of what is going on. So having MESP here gives
students a chance to come and understand this complex and important region, whether it’s some of the conflicts in Egypt or Afghanistan or Iraq, or whether it’s the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also gives students the chance to enter a situation where there’s difference and polarization and try to understand different perspectives.

For example, with the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, we’ll discuss Jesus’ statement, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” What does it mean for us to be peacemakers in a situation of conflict so that we don’t add to the conflict but instead start to relate to those in the conflict and to the situation?”

Patti Magnuson: One of the ways we do that is that our students usually take a trip to Israel and do homestays with both Palestinian and Orthodox Israeli families. So they are literally living with these different narratives — it’s not just reading and studying them. We actually go in and are with these families.

One of the ways we do that is that our students usually take a trip to Israel and do homestays with both Palestinian and Orthodox Israeli families. Every student who comes, even if they have better understanding of the region, finds their opinions and experiences and understanding shifting quite a bit as they actually engage with the people of the Middle East.

How do you see students growing in their faith in Jesus throughout a semester at MESP?

DM: Generally, when you look at the news and talk to people, people aren’t engaging with those who are different from them very well right now. There’s a desperate need for people who have the ability to engage with differences in a more positive way. The Middle East is one of the most complex and difficult to understand regions in the world — there’s nowhere that’s a better place for becoming a peacemaker. Every student who comes, even if they engage with those who are different than us.

I think sometimes students are fearful of questioning some things, and it’s an incredibly powerful experience to be studying something difficult and to realize there’s nothing to be afraid of — God is bigger than these questions. It helps things become centered in a much deeper way than they’ve experienced before in their lives.

Broadly speaking, how has the program made a direct impact on some of the alumni of the program in their vocation and calling?

DM: MESP students have a wide range of vocational interests — some come interested in working in the foreign service or in long-term ministry in the Middle East or in a Muslim context. Some come with an interest in NGO work or relief and development. Some come not quite knowing what they want to do and end up getting direction throughout their time here.

Afterward, some might find their trajectory strengthened and continue on in that career path they were planning on. And then some take their experience back home in unique ways, even if they aren’t planning on it. We have one couple, both MESP alumni, who got married and settled back in Canada, where they were from, and a large family group of Syrian refugees arrived there. Because this couple had been in the Middle East, they were basically the local experts to help this family get settled. They realized they needed a bit more Arabic training, so they came back to Jordan for a time to learn more Arabic and then renewed home to continue working with refugees and refugee resettlement. All of that from their one semester at MESP.

We’ve also found that MESP helps prepare students uniquely for other experiences. There’s a school in Jordan where some of our students will do a service project. The school is often looking for American teachers, and so some of our alumni will come back and teach there for a few years, and they are far more likely than other Americans who have been recruited to be able to make the cultural adaptation and be willing to stay for more than a year, even if they were technically less qualified as teachers. We’ve had other students who have received fellowships — Boren and Fullbright — to study in the Middle East and have shared that with us MESP gave them the preparation and training to get the most out of those experiences.

As MESP celebrates its 30th year, what does that mean to you?

Can you reflect a bit on the history and impact of the program?

DM: So the program was started in Cairo, Egypt, in 1993, and the first director was Cliff Gardner and his wife, Marilyn. We were in Tunisia in the time, so we didn’t know them at the time, but we have since become good friends with them. We moved to Cairo in 1996, the same year that Rick Caul became the second director. We met him early on and were involved with the program throughout the seven years we lived in Cairo — we did some teaching of different courses, hosted students at our house, and led the trip to Israel-Palestine one year when Rick and his wife were expecting. So we got to see how the program developed and expanded and the incredible impact it was having on students.

Then David Holt became director in 2002 and served for 11 years. The program continued to expand in those days, and there were so many opportunities for students to learn about major events — the Israeli Palestinian talks, the Oslo Accords, the aftermath of 9/11 — and hear directly from people involved.

Then the program moved to Jerusalem when the Egyptian revolution happened in February 2011, where they laid a new foundation for the program using the connections and context they already had there. Then we came on board in 2013, and then the program moved to Amman in 2014. So we’ve been able to build on what we’ve inherited and added in some of our own connections and experiences into the program.

PM: What’s fascinating to me is that the same four classes that were offered in the beginning are still what we teach. The content has been updated and tweaked, of course, but it’s amazing that those who launched the program had the foresight to lay that kind of foundation. 42
An overview of the legal underpinnings of religious freedom in education.
Nearly a third of the Supreme Court’s cases on religious freedom have addressed religion and education; almost all have concerned state and local laws and policies.

The Evolution of Government’s Role in Religious Education

The role of government in private religious schools — particularly questions of government funding and support for religious schools — was hotly contested in the individual states long before the Supreme Court got actively involved. By 1921, 35 states had passed state constitutional amendments that barred state funding of religious schools. Moreover, in some states, various anti-Catholic and self-professed “secularist” groups pushed hard to eliminate religious schools altogether and to give public schools a monopoly on education.

In the response, the Court developed a general argument about the place of private religious schools in modern society and the role that government could play in them. Private schools of all sorts, the Court repeatedly held, are viable and valuable alternatives to public schools, and parents and students have the right to choose between them. Private religious schools, moreover, allow parents to educate their students in their own religious tradition, a right that they must enjoy without discrimination or prejudice. Given that public education must be secular under the First Amendment prohibition of religious establishments, private education may be religious under the First Amendment protection of the free exercise of religion.

To be accredited, all private schools must meet minimum educational standards so that their graduates are not left culturally or intellectually behind their public school peers. Free exercise objections to these baseline requirements by schools, parents, or students are of little avail. But these private schools may teach these subjects from a religious perspective and add religious instruction and activities beyond them. They may favor teachers and students who share their faith. And these religious schools are pre-emptively entitled to the same government-funded “secular” services and support — school bus rides, textbooks, laptops, lab equipment, gymnasium, and more — that are made available to their counterparts in public schools.

The Supreme Court developed and applied this “accommodationist” logic, as it was called, from 1925 to 1971; abruptly reversed course in favor of strict separationism from 1971 to 1985; and since then has returned to a new variant of accommodationist logic, now often framed in “equal access” and “equal treatment” terms grounded in the First Amendment free exercise clause.

Accommodating Religious Education

The most important early religious school case was Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925), which struck down an Oregon law requiring all children to attend public school. This law, the Court held, violated the rights of religious parents to choose where to educate their children, and the right of religious schools to offer them a form of Christian education. This early accommodation of religious schools and students continued in a dozen cases into the early 1970s. Everson v. Board of Education (1947), for example, though offering sweeping rhetoric on the need for a high wall of separation between church and state, still held that states could provide school bus transportation to religious and public school children alike or reimburse the parents for the costs of using school bus transportation. “Courting off church schools [and their students] from these services, so separate and indisputably marked off from the religious function, would make it far more difficult for the schools to operate,” Justice Black wrote for the Everson Court. “But such obviously is not the purpose of the First Amendment. The Amendment requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and non-believers; it does not require the state to be their adversary."

The Court struck a similar tone in Board of Education v. Allen (1968), holding that states may offer secular textbooks and supplies to public and private schools and students alike. This continued this accommodationist tone in a trio of cases upholding government funding for construction of buildings at religious colleges and universities. In Tilton v. Richardson (1971), the Court rebuffed a challenge to a federal grant program sponsoring all manner of new buildings at public and private colleges
and universities across the country — including library, science, and arts buildings at four church-related colleges. Chief Justice Burger wrote for the plurality that the act that created the grant program “was carefully drafted to ensure that the federally-subsidized facilities would be devoted to the secular and not the religious functions of the recipient institution.” This feature, together with the reality that most funding was directed to state, not religious, universities and colleges, was sufficient to ensure the act’s constitutionality.

Then in Hunt v. McNair (1973), the Court upheld a state program of funding the construction of similar “secular” buildings at various universities within the state, including a religiously chartered college. Again in Roemer v. Board of Public Works (1977), the Court upheld a state construction grant program that included five church-related schools among its 17 grant recipients. The Court counseled against too zealous an application of the principle of separation of church and state, given the reality and reach of the modern welfare state: “A system of government that makes itself felt as pervasively as the welfare state: ‘A system of government whose role ends with the provision of public benefits that are neutral and available to all.’” To cross paths with the church… [R]eligious institutions need not be quarantined from public benefits that are neutrally available to all.”

The Court stretched its furthest in accommodating religious education in Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972). Faced with a Wisconsin requirement to send children to school until they were 16, a community of Old Order Amish (dedicated to a simple, biblically inspired agrarian lifestyle) refused to send kids to high school, lest they be tempted by worldly concerns and distracted from learning the values and skills they would need to maintain an Amish life. After they faced fines for disobeying school attendance laws, the parents and community leaders filed suit, arguing that the state had violated their free exercise and parental rights.

The Yoder Court agreed and ordered that the Amish parents and students be exempted from full compliance with these mandatory school attendance laws. The Court was impressed that the Amish “lifestyle” was centuries-old and “not merely a matter of personal preference, but one of deep religious conviction, shared by an organized group, and intimately related to daily living.” In the Court’s view, compliance with the compulsory school attendance law would pose “a very real threat of undermining the Amish community and religious practice as they exist today; they must either abandon belief and be assimilated into society at large, or be forced to migrate to some other and more tolerant region.” To exempt them was not to “establish the Amish religion” but to “accommodate their free exercise rights.” This case is the classic example for the home schooling options now on offer in most states.

Separating Public and Religious Schools
But in Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971), the Supreme Court abruptly reversed course. Drawing on the strict separation of church and state logic of its earlier establishment clause cases — which prohibited religious teachers, prayers, Bible reading, and religious symbols in public, state-run school — the Court now adopted a firm policy against governmental aid to religious schools and against most forms of cooperation between religious and public schools, teachers, students, facilities, and programs. Parents and students have the right to make a clear choice between state-funded public schools and privately funded religious schools, the Court reasoned. The more clearly the operations and officials of these two schools are separated, and the more clearly the religious schools are cut off from state funding and dependence, the better it is for all parties and for the First Amendment values that protect them. Public schools can stand on their own without the risks of undue religious influence or mixed messages to their students. Religious schools can stand on their own without the dangers of unwelcome political interference by or undue financial dependence upon the state.

In implementing this new logic, the Lemon Court crafted a three-part test to be used in all future cases arising under the First Amendment establishment clause, including those dealing with religious schools. To meet constitutional objections, the Court held, any challenged government law must:
1) have a secular purpose; 2) have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and 3) not foster an excessive entanglement between church and state. The Lemon Court applied this test to strike down a state program that reimbursed schools for the costs of teaching state-mandated secular subjects, arguing that this improperly advanced the religious mission of these private schools, and risked too much entanglement between state officials and religious teachers in supervising the use of these funds.

Lemon left open the question whether the state could give aid directly to religious students or to their parents, as the Court had allowed in earlier cases. Two years later, the Court closed this door tightly in Committee for Public Education v. Nyquist (1973) and Sloan v. Lemon (1973), striking down state policies that allowed low-income parents to seek reimbursements from the state for religious school tuition. In Nyquist, Justice Powell characterized such policies as just another “of the incongruous plans of channeling state aid to sectarian schools.” Responding to the state argument that “grants to parents, unlike grants to [religious] institutions, respect the ‘wall of separation’ required by the Constitution,” the Court declared that “the [primary] effect of the aid is unmistakably to provide desired financial support for non-public, sectarian institutions.” Over the next decade, the Court issued 15 cases seeking to separate strictly public and private education.

Accommodation and Equal Treatment of Religious Education
But mandating strict separation of church and state in the educational sphere — while alluring for some in theory — ultimately proved unworkable in practice.

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Accommodation and Equal Treatment of Religious Education
But mandating strict separation of church and state in the educational sphere — while alluring for some in theory — ultimately proved unworkable in practice. An early example of this shift back was Witters v. Washington Department of Services for the Blind (1986), where the Court upheld a state program that furnished aid to a student attending a Christian college. The program provided funds directly to visually impaired students “for special education and/or training in the professions, business or trades” at programs of their choice. Mr. Witters’ condition qualified him for the funds. His profession of choice was the Christian ministry, and he sought funds to attend a Christian college in preparation. The state agency denied funding on grounds that this was direct funding of religious education in violation of the federal and state prohibitions on religious education establishment. The Court disagreed. The policy served a secular purpose of fostering educational and professional choice for all, including the handicapped. It involved no entanglement of church and state. Its primary effect was to facilitate this student’s professional education, which happened to be religious. As Justice Marshall wrote for the Court, “In this case, the fact that aid goes to individuals means that the decision to support religious education is made by the individual not by the State.”

In several more cases over the next two decades, the Court repeated this holding that indirect state aid to religious education through the private choices of parents or students was constitutionally permissible. The most consequential — and controversial — of these cases was Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (2002), which upheld an Ohio school voucher program that enabled parents to choose among public or private (religious) education for their children. Chief Justice Rehnquist wrote for a sharply divided Court that the primary effect of the program was not to advance religion but to enhance educational choice for poor students and parents living in a notoriously failing public school district. “Where a government aid program is neutral with respect to religion, it provides assistance directly to a broad class of citizens, who, in turn, directly govern aid to religious schools wholly as a result of their own genuine and independent private choice,” there is no establishment of religion. “The incidental advancement of a religious mission, or the perceived endorsement of a religious message, is reasonably attributable to the individual, not the government, whose role ends with the disbursement of the funds.”

In its most recent cases, the Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment free exercise clause mandates that religious schools, parents, and students be given equal access to government support made available to all others. In Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer (2017), Missouri excluded a
In this case, Montana offered its citizen of Revenue (2020), the Court not compelling enough. What is being “compelling interest” for doing so, and laws imposing “special disabilities on what it is — a church,” Chief Justice was denied a grant simply because of is no question that Trinity Lutheran of the free exercise clause. “Here there The Court held this to be a violation tion on funding religious education. The Court held this to be a violation of the free exercise clause. “Here there is a compelling interest for doing so, and a general state constitutional prohibition on funding religious education is not compelling enough. What is being funded here is rubber asphalt, not religious education. In Espinosa v. Montana Department of Revenue (2020), the Court widened this equal access logic. In this case, Montana offered its citizens state tax credits if they made donations to nonprofit organizations that awarded scholarships for private school tuition. But the state program would not allow scholarships to go to private religious school students, since the state constitution prohibited all state aid to religious education. Three mothers whose children could not get scholarships to attend a Christian school sued under the free exercise clause, claiming religious discrimination contrary to the free exercise clause. The Espinosa Court agreed. The state’s “interest in creating greater separation of church and State than the Federal Constitution requires ‘cannot qualify as compelling’ in the face of the infringement of free exercise here.”

The Court repeated this ruling in Carson v. Makin (2022). The state of Maine had a longstanding tuition assistance program that allowed parents who lived in thinly populated rural school districts without their own public high school to use public funds to attend a public or private school of their choice, including schools outside Maine. But the state would provide assistance only if the chosen school was not “sectarian” — based on the state’s review of the school’s curriculum, practices, character, and mission. Citing Trinity Lutheran and Espinosa, the Court struck down this policy as a violation of the free exercise clause. These private schools are disqualified from state public funds “solely because they are religious,” the Court determined, and that is an unconstitutional discrimination against religion. The state may “not exclude some members of the community from an otherwise generally available public benefit because of their religious exercise.”

**Labor and Employment in Religious Schools**

The First Amendment requires that religious organizations, including religious schools, be given room to carry out their unique missions and functions. This is partly because religious organizations are places where religious organizations are open to the public because of their religious schools, colleges, and universities, or other educational institutions or institution of learning is, in whole or in substantial part, owned, supported, controlled, or managed by a particular religion or by a particular religious corporation, association, or society, or if the curriculum of such school, college, university, or other educational institution or institution of learning is directed toward the propagation of a particular religion. The core cases where Section 702 applies are easy. A synagogue does not have to hire a Baptist minister to serve as its rabbi or read the Torah. A denominational Christian seminary can dismiss a dean or professor who converts to Islam. The marginal cases


**The First Amendment requires that religious organizations be given room to carry out their unique missions and functions.**

raise harder questions. Does the religious hiring exception — or “ministe- rial exception” as it is called — apply to non-clerical or non-ordained employ- ees of the religious organization, such as teachers, secretaries, groundskeep- ers, suppliers, or janitors? What if the religious line-drawing by the religious employer adversely affects a party who is part of an otherwise protected class under the Civil Rights Act? Do women, say, who are denied ordina- tion or religious leadership positions because of religious teachings have a sex discrimination claim under the Civil Rights Act? Or what of same-sex parties who are denied employment or membership because a religious group teaches that homosexuality is sinful?

The Supreme Court has provided only limited guidance to address these hard questions, although it has strongly affirmed the constitutionality of the ministerial exception. In Presid- ing Bishop v. Amos (1987), the Court upheld Section 702 against an estab- lishment clause challenge, and further allowed its application to a non-clerical employee. Amos was a building engi- neer for a gymnasium open to the public and owned and operated by the lo- cal Latter-Day Saints Church. He was dismissed from his position because he was no longer a member in good stand- ing of that church. He sued, claiming religious discrimination in violation of the Civil Rights Act. The church defended its decision by invoking the religious hiring exception in Section 702. Amos argued the exception didn’t apply in this case since he was an engi- neer, which was a secular position, not a religious one. Moreover, he argued, Section 702 violated the establishment clause because it unduly favored reli- gious employers and employment over all others. Why should a public gym run by a church be able to religiously discriminate against an engineer when an identical public gym run by a lo- cal business corporation cannot do so? The Court applied Section 702 and held for the church, and it also upheld the constitutionality of this provision. The establishment clause does not for- bid Congress from allowing religious organizations to hire members only of their own faith for both secular and religious jobs, the Court concluded. It was no establishment of religion for Congress to give more protection to religious employers than might other- wise be required by the Constitution. Such “benevolent neutrality” is not a “unlawful fostering of religion.”

These early precedents led several lower courts to give ample deference to religious schools, colleges, and universi- ties to set their own standards of ad- mission, employment, and discipline. In Homan-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC (2012), the Court reinforced this deference by
Over the past century, the Supreme Court’s First Amendment cases have swung back and forth...

Given the centrality and controversy of both religion and education in American life, it is inevitable that such swings will continue.

grounding the ministerial exception in the First Amendment. Hosanna-Tabor was a church that operated a small K-8 school with both “called” and “lay” teachers. Cheryl Perich was a called teacher, which meant she had completed theological studies at a religious college, been endorsed by a local church, and passed an oral examination, and performed various spiritual functions in the school, including leading chapel and teaching Bible. When she became ill and took disability, the school filled her position with a lay teacher. She recovered and planned to return, but the school did not want her back. After some back-and-forth, ultimately the school board and church congregation revoked her call and fired her. Perich filed a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), alleging that she had been wrongly terminated in violation of the non-erotic firing provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A unanimous Court held for the Hosanna-Tabor church and school. “The establishment clause prevents the government from appointing ministers, and the free exercise clause prevents it from interfering with the freedom of religious groups to select their own,” Chief Justice Roberts wrote for the Court, citing precedents that went back to the 1215 Magna Carta. To force a church to “accept or retain an unwanted minister, or punish a church for failing to do so” would “interfere with the internal governance of the church.” This would violate the free exercise clause, “which protects a religious group’s right to shape its faith and mission through its appointments.”

Further, it would violate the establishment clause by involving the government in “ecclesiastical decisions” over the policy, property, membership, and leadership of the church, all of which are forbidden to courts. The Court accepted Hosanna-Tabor’s characterization of Perich as a “called teacher” who fit into the ministerial exception. The Court also refused to second-guess the church’s stated religious reason for firing her — that she violated its commitment to “interfere with the internal governance of the church.” This would violate the Establishment Clause by involving the government in “ecclesiastical decisions” over leadership of the church, all of which are forbidden to courts. The Supreme Court held for the schools, citing Hosanna-Tabor as dispositive. These two teachers performed even more ministerial functions in their schools than Cheryl Perich had performed at Hosanna-Tabor, the Court found. That left their employment status within the jurisdiction of the schools and diocese.

Limits on Religious Autonomy for Religious Schools

This right of religious schools and other religious organizations to engage in such religious line-drawing is not unlimited, however. Bob Jones University v. United States (1983) was an early case on point. This case involved two private Catholic schools under the Archbishop of Los Angeles. Each school was committed to “religious instruction, worship, and personal modeling of the faith” and held its teachers to those Catholic standards. Agnes Morrissey-Beru and Kristin Beil were both lay teachers on annual contracts. Both had some religious training and taught religion courses at their schools. They worshiped and prayed with their students each day, and they counseled and cared for them in the Catholic faith. Both were discharged for underperformance.

Both sued. Morrissey-Beru claimed age discrimination because she had been replaced by a younger teacher. Beil claimed retaliatory firing because she had requested a leave of absence to undergo breast cancer treatment. The religious schools claimed the ministerial exception. The teachers countered that they were not ministers; they were lay people, with only modest religious training. They did not hold themselves out as ministers, and indeed could not be ministers since the Catholic Church ordained only males as ministers. The Supreme Court held for the schools, citing Hosanna-Tabor as dispositive. These two teachers performed even more ministerial functions in their schools than Cheryl Perich had performed at Hosanna-Tabor, the Court found. That left their employment status within the jurisdiction of the schools and diocese.

Recent Trends in the Court

Over the past century, the Supreme Court’s First Amendment cases have swung back and forth between more tolerant “accommodationism” and more stringent “separationism” approaches to the relations between government and religious schools. The Court has sometimes digressed and occasionally reversed itself, prompting loud academic and public commentary. Part of this back-and-forth is typical of any constitutional law in action, and it further reflects the reality that shifts in bigger constitutional doctrines like federalism, judicial review, and separation of powers inevitably produce shifts in more specialized areas like First Amendment religious freedom. “Constitutions work like clocks,” American founder John Adams once put it. To function properly, their “pendulums must swing back and forth,” and their mechanisms and operating parts must “get wound up from time to time.”

Given the centrality and controversy of both religion and education in American life, it is inevitable that such swings will continue. Two decades ago, after completing a long run of strict separationist cases, the Supreme Court seemed content to leave many religious freedom and education questions to statutes and to states, reflecting its new attitude at the time for separation of powers and federalism. Federal statutes, like Section 702 of the Civil Rights Act, were thought to provide enough religious freedom protection, including in the education field. And with softened standards of First Amendment review, state and local governments were able to engage in greater local experimentation in their schools, following the logic of federalism.

Many states, however, building on 19th century state constitutional restrictions on religious educational funding, and 21st century attacks on religious freedom altogether, began to provide for less protection for religious freedom in education. In response, the Supreme Court of late has again weighed in heavily in favor of religious freedom, including in the area of religious education where it has issued seven major cases in the past decade, from Hosanna-Tabor 2012 to Carson in 2022. These cases have strengthened constitutional and statutory protections for religion in education and relaxed limits on government actions and funding for religious schools, parents, and students.

Compared to a generation ago, religious parents and students now have more educational choice, and religious schools have more equal access to general governmental support and more autonomy to make their own internal employment decisions. But these are only very recent Supreme Court precedents, and they remain constantly contested in public debates and tested in local courts and legislatures. Religious schools and parents alike would do well to remain vigilant to protect religious freedom in education.
## Important First Amendment Cases

### A Timeline

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<td>1925</td>
<td>Everson v. Board of Education</td>
<td>The First Amendment’s establishment clause is applied to state law.</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>Pierce v. Society of Sisters</td>
<td>Oregon law that required all children to attend public school is struck down.</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Lemon v. Kurtzman</td>
<td>Statutes that provide state funding for non-public, non-secular schools violate the First Amendment’s establishment clause.</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>Bob Jones University v. United States (1983)</td>
<td>Religious employers can choose employees for nonreligious jobs based on their religion, and the religious exemption in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act is constitutional.</td>
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<td>1983</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>Wisconsin v. Yoder</td>
<td>Amish children in Wisconsin cannot be placed under compulsory education past 8th grade.</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Witers v. Washington Department of Services for the Blind</td>
<td>Participants in Washington’s vocational rehabilitation program can use the funds for ministerial education and not violate the establishment clause.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Locke v. Davey</td>
<td>A Washington state scholarship program did not violate a student’s First Amendment rights when it denied him the opportunity to use a publicly funded scholarship to major in theology.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue</td>
<td>Montana’s state law, which prohibited funds from a tuition assistance program to go to private religious schools, violated the free exercise clause of the First Amendment and is struck down.</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC</td>
<td>The “ministerial exception” for employees performing religious functions can apply to a teacher who teaches secular curriculum as well as religion classes and other religious activities.</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer</td>
<td>Excluding churches from otherwise neutral and secular aid programs violates the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.</td>
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American higher education began as a religious mission. What now?

OXFORD WAS FOUNDED more than a millennium ago. Its first known lecturer was a theologian. And some Muslim centers of learning date back even further. Religion was central to the core identity of the world’s earliest universities. And, in colonial America, a student enrolling at Yale, Princeton, or Columbia would have had a very different experience than what he’d expect today. He wasn’t there to do scientific research or get credentialed for professional school. He was there to shape his soul.

And yet, today American universities may be some of the most secular places in the country. Faith is an afterthought, if that, in most of American higher education. And that’s a pity, because the two grew up together, deeply influenced each other, and still have much to learn from each other. Religious higher education isn’t obsolete; properly conceived, it’s more important than ever.
Harvard, the first college in the United States, for example, was established by Puritans. Ten of its first 12 presidents were ministers. The early Harvard motto was Veritas pro Christo et Ecclesiae — “Truth for Christ and the Church.” For many of America’s first colleges — Brown, Dartmouth, Georgetown, and others — the Christian faith was central to their core identity.

By the mid-19th century, a religious organization founded almost every university and college in the U.S. and Europe. According to the eminent historian George Marsden, until well into the 19th century, “higher education remained primarily a function of the church, as it always had been in Western civilization.” A strong relationship between religious faith and learning was given, and by the early 1860s, 262 of these institutions were ministers. The early Harvard motto, “Veritas pro Christo et Ecclesiae,” is translated as “the Christian rationalism that had been so much fine scholarship from traditionalist Christians concerning so many different areas. But that hardly exhausts the list of contributions the Christian faith can make to human life and contemporary higher education. Christian higher education institutions are essential to conserving and transmitting the best of Christian thought.

Christian scholarship, especially among traditionalist Protestants, is largely a development of the past quarter century or so.” (This renaissance in Christian scholarship is occurring at precisely the same time that anti-intellectualism is spreading in certain parts of American Christianity, particularly within the evangelical subculture.)

The influence of Christianity can also create a richer and more diverse intellectual culture since much of contemporary higher education lacks a spiritual center. In many places the intellectual dimensions of faith simply aren’t taken seriously. Academics in non-Christian colleges and universities may or may not be outwardly hostile to the Christian faith; mostly they find it an alien concept. But Christian thought clearly has something important to contribute to academic discourse. And as an alternative to naturalism and materialism, Christianity tightly understood is at least worth considering, since it strengthens the case for human rights and inherent human dignity.

One of the greatest documents in American history, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” articulates the grounding for human dignity beautifully. The epistle can’t be understood apart from King’s Christian faith. Neither can the role of faith be pried apart from Augustine’s Confessions, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, C.S. Lewis’ The Chronicles of Narnia, the poetry of John Donne and T.S. Eliot, the paintings of Rafael and Michelangelo, or the music of Bach and Handel. Religious faith has inspired excellence in so many different areas.

At their best, Christian higher education institutions appreciate the fundamental purpose of education, which is to shape the human soul, to pursue the moral good, to love the right things. Christian colleges are almost alone today in intentionally developing students who, in the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah, “act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with their God.”
ADVANCE

charges for even raising questions that are deemed threatening. Christian universities can be on the forefront of creating a culture where free expression is valued. They are hardly perfect in this regard; they have their own challenges to face, their own pressures to resist, doctrines they need to conform with. And unlike secular campuses, the pressure on Christian colleges is often coming from the right rather than the left. Still, the stifling conformity of thought we see in much of American higher education today tends to be less pronounced among Christian colleges and universities, according to a recent National Survey of Student Engagement that found that Christian college students feel they have the most freedom to talk about the most issues.

But there’s something even more fundamental that Christian higher education can provide, which is to embody the liberal arts ideal at precisely the moment when much of the rest of American higher education is moving away from it. Non-Christian institutions of higher education increasingly view a college education as a commodity. Market-based thinking is dominant, and higher future earnings is the mark of success. At their best, Christian higher education institutions appreciate the fundamental purpose of education, which is to shape the human soul, to pursue the moral good, to love the right things. It is a deeply integrative view. Christian colleges are almost alone today in intentionally developing students who, in the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah, “act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with [their] God.” They do this imperfectly, of course, but more than any other institution in American higher education, they have the best chance to do it. Playing a redemptive role in the world — producing students who will be voices for justice, for truth, for reconciliation — is something about which Christian colleges and universities are explicit. But they also fall short, in some cases dramatically short, and that’s important to acknowledge.

Kristin Du Mez, professor of history and gender studies at Calvin University and author of the best-selling book *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, told me that in the last couple of years in particular, she has witnessed firsthand “the utter intellectual impoverishment that characterizes many siloed Christian academic spaces.”

According to Du Mez, “They’re essentially engaging in propaganda rather than seeking truth, misconstrue actual academic arguments, and are either unwilling or unable — due to coercive pressure or deficient academic training — to engage in rigorous, good faith conversations about things that matter. And this sort of pseudo-intellectualism is rewarded in their spaces. For a faith that claims to hold to truth, this fundamentally distorts the faith and destroys their witness. And it imperils our democratic system.”

“This doesn’t mean — nor would Du Mez argue — that the core mission of Christian colleges and universities is wrong or that the academic, comprised of around 5,300 colleges and universities, wouldn’t benefit from the truths and insights that Christian institutions of higher education can provide.

But it requires individuals to personify that mission in how they conduct themselves, in ways that are faithful and winsome, that manifest integrity and honor. A mission statement without those willing to carry it out is meaningless.

For C.S. Lewis, who held academic positions in English literature at both Oxford University and Cambridge University, “The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments.” He believed students needed to be taught the right order of the loves, to right the world — producing students who will hold to truth, this fundamentally distorts the faith and destroys their witness. And it imperils our democratic system.”

“Some of us find that vision of education to be compelling because it is taking soulcraft seriously; it is making a correct assessment of the full human person. That isn’t to say that there isn’t value, even great value, in an education that isn’t aimed at soulcraft. I received an excellent education at the University of Washington and, during my college years, my faith was strengthened by ministries to college students. Still, an education that refines our sentiments, that teaches us to cherish the true and the good, is a gift beyond measure. At their best, this is what Christian colleges and universities have to offer, and it’s a lot.”

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CONVERSATIONS OF HOPE

IN A CULTURE OF CRISIS

WITH CONTROVERSIES ON THE RISE BOTH ON CAMPUS AND OFF, CHRISTIAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THEIR COMMUNITIES LEARN HOW TO DISAGREE — WITHOUT BECOMING DIVIDED.

BY RICHARD LANGER
CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES

have had significant conflicts with the surrounding culture on social issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and transgenderism, and critical race theory. What is different in recent years is that the venues of these controversies have begun to change: The conflicts that were once external are now internal. Many fear that culture wars have now become civil wars within many Christian institutions.

These are not controversies between Christian beliefs and a secular worldview. These conflicts are happening between committed Christians who give biblical reasons for their convictions. These stories are not surprising just because Christians disagree — even a casual reading of the New Testament would make disagreements between believers expected. What is striking is the anger, animosity, and contempt expressed in many of these discussions. The trend toward affective polarization in the broader culture is clearly found in our Christian institutions as well.

In early 2020, Biola University launched the Winsome Conviction Project (WCP) to help improve the communication climate regarding contentious issues and to address the challenges of polarization on our campus and in culture more broadly. Our mission was to facilitate large and small group conversations in which deeply held convictions would engage honest disagreements in a virtuous communication climate. Our primary concern was not to generate agreement. It was to make room for mutual love and respect, even in the face of disagreement. We were particularly concerned to help participants care deeply, think clearly, speak graciously, and listen patiently.

This article gives a brief account of some of the efforts we have found helpful on our campus, as well as some of the lessons learned. The hope is that our experience will encourage other universities to engage differences within their respective communities and to experiment with techniques for developing deeply held convictions without dividing our communities.

ENGAGING CONFLICT THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

To respond to challenging conversations and tensions on campus, the WCP initiated a series of interventions aimed at facilitating better discourse, decreasing polarization, increasing mutual understanding, and promoting both social and intellectual virtues. These programs and events included both small groups and large public events on campus, as well as trainings and workshops in schools, churches, and Christian organizations.

One of the most important ways to change a communication climate is by having lots of small group conversations. Large, public events have their place, but when dozens or hundreds of people gather — even those with a robust Q&A session — most people are passive. Small groups are different. In group of six to 10, everyone can contribute by listening and by speaking. We have found these groups to be invaluable for creating healthy conversations. No matter the setting or focus, a clear structure and a moderator who enforced the structure were essential to a successful conversation. Below are some of the kinds of discussion group experiences that we offered to the Biola community.

"Can We Talk About This?" This group, meant to help faculty talk about important social and political issues, was launched in the fall of 2020 by way of an email to all faculty members from the provost’s office, which read in part:

Do you long for a safe space to explore contentious issues facing our culture today? Many of us would love to talk to others with different viewpoints, but it just doesn’t seem safe. In fact, it often seems downright dangerous. So we gravitate to echo-chamber groups, even though we long for a safe space to do something more. But safe spaces are made, not born.

We had over a dozen faculty respond to the invitation. Before the first meeting, we sent out a survey with seven issues. For each issue, two positions were given — one using statements from the Democratic party platform and the other from the Republican party platform. Participants were asked to identify the statements they most agreed with. We identified the four issues our participants most disagreed about and used them as discussion topics for each meeting. The meetings took place on Zoom, which we found to be surprisingly effective. Each session lasted 90 minutes, ensuring everyone had time to participate.

We also discovered that many of our faculty felt uninformed about some of the issues that we talked about, so we distributed short readings (blogs or brief articles) before each session so everyone could get up to speed on the issue. We asked faculty to tell us after the final session what they found to be particularly valuable. Answers included appreciation for hearing different perspectives; value in a discussion format that promoted seeking understanding (not persuasion); and appreciation for the safe space to engage in conversations with a small number of people. The main challenge for the moderator was keeping contributions to a relatively brief 2-3 minutes. The structure of the conversation exercises went a long way toward mitigating contentious interactions. (See “Conversation Chain” for further discussion of what this looked like.)

Social Justice Reading Groups. This group emerged from two colleagues who shared an interest in surfing but disagreed on matters related to social justice. They decided to team up together and start a group that read and talked about small group conversations that have been helpful on our campus, as well as some of the lessons learned. The hope is that our experience will encourage other universities to engage differences within their respective communities and to experiment with techniques for developing deeply held convictions without dividing our communities.

CONVERSATION CHAIN

This exercise was developed by the Winsome Conviction Project and has been used in a wide variety of workshops, events, and small groups. The structure allows participants to engage in a sustained conversation about a controversial topic, but in a controlled fashion.

The chain begins with one person saying, “Here’s what I heard you saying…” The links of the conversation chain are formed by requiring participants to make an intentional positive link to the previous speaker before adding their own contribution using the following pattern:

1. Here’s what I heard you saying…
2. Here’s what I resonated with… (or “something I agreed with,” “something that resonated with me,” “something that made me stop and think,” etc.)
3. Here’s what I’d like to add to the conversation… (or, alternatively, a person might choose to respond to a question from someone who has already spoken: “I wonder if you could tell me more about this…”)

The moderator is responsible for reminding people to follow the structure and to be sure to give meaningful responses. We have noticed that people become eager to share their opinion and tend to rush through the first two questions. Moderators need to help people resist this temptation. The sequence of steps is important. Following the structure maintains civility and mutual respect, but it also slows down the interaction and gives people time to process what they have heard.

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ACHIEVING DISAGREEMENT SOUNDS EASY, BUT MISUNDERSTANDING IS MUCH MORE COMMON THAN REAL DISAGREEMENT. ACHIEVING REAL DISAGREEMENT ALWAYS INVOLVES BOTH FACTS AND FEELINGS.

were also introduced to the Biola community in a morning chapel service. The participants were drawn exclusively from our own faculty members. These events were well attended and generally well received. (In fact, it was through one of these events that two donors came forward; their generosity resulted in the formal creation of the Winsome Conviction Project).

In addition to the Duologues, we hosted a variety of other public events with guest speakers to maintain a tangible emphasis on civil discourse about contentious issues. The WCP also launched the Winsome Conviction Podcast and is actively involved in writing and speaking both locally and nationally.

Facilitating a wide variety of trainings, workshops and consultations with Christian schools, churches, and Christian organizations was valuable for refining many of the activities we used in our on-campus events. We discovered a remarkable consistency in the challenges facing the Christian community regardless of size, geographical location, or ministry focus, but the specifics of these events move beyond the focus of this article.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is helpful to synthesize what we have learned by drawing some lessons from our experience, but it is also important to regard these lessons as provisional reports rather than the confirmed findings of a systematic research project. With this clarification in place, here are some lessons we have learned about helping people speak face-to-face without going toe-to-toe.

Achieving disagreement is a worthwhile goal. Achieving disagreement sounds deceptively easy, but achieving misunderstanding is much more common than achieving real disagreement. The easiest way to test if one has really achieved disagreement is to have a person to state the position of their opponent. Until you can state the opinion of your opponent in a way that makes them nod their head and say, “Yes—you’ve got it,” you have failed to achieve disagreement. Achieving real disagreement always involves both facts and feelings. We don’t achieve disagreement until the conflicting parties can clearly state what each other believes and why the matter is so important to them.

Exchanging stories, not just conclusions. Valuable conversations usually include a lot of backstories about conviction formation. Sharing only the final statement of one’s conviction masks the reasoning process that went into forming the conviction. In all cases, we want to bring our thinking in line with biblical teaching. If an issue is not directly addressed in Scripture, then getting to a specific, action-guiding conviction requires quite a bit of philosophical and theological reasoning, which is not always clear when we just state our final conclusion. We need to view this like a math test for which one not only needs to give an answer but also shows the work.

In short, convictions have a backstory. Leading workshops that require participants to unpack the black box of their convictions has proven helpful in at least two ways. First, hearing a story slows down the conversation and decreases quick and dismissive responses. Second, when people are pressed to tell the story of a conviction, they often discover that it isn’t as easy as it sounds. The complexities of real life often require nuanced thinking that is hard for all of us; admitting this can prod us toward intellectual humility.

Seeking to be curious instead of seeking to be victorious. Our small group events served as hotbeds of curiosity. It did not take long for people to get excited about asking someone to “tell me more.” It is such a simple phrase, but it opens the door to so many powerful stories and unexpected insights.

However, a desire to win the argument or convert a person to another viewpoint is the enemy of curiosity. In a highly polarized environment, showing curiosity toward the other side is often misread as being unfaithful to our own side. Therefore, curiosity demands courage, especially if other members of your in-group are present.

Practicing a hermeneutic of charity instead of suspicion. Put simply, a hermeneutic of charity refuses to take another person’s words at face value and instead tries to find the hidden things that shape what they feel or believe. In contrast, a hermeneutic of charity gives an intentionally generous reading to the comments of others and gives them the benefit of the doubt. It need not assume that everything people say is right or that all their self-perceptions are accurate. It simply begins with the best and most reasonable understanding of what a person has said, rather than assuming the worst of every statement.

It is natural to think that a hermeneutic of charity is biblical and a hermeneutic of suspicion is unbiblical. In reality, however, we encounter both charity and suspicion in Scripture. The biblical corrective is not to eliminate a hermeneutic of suspicion, but rather to apply it to ourselves instead of others. This is difficult and counterintuitive for many of us, so we developed some preparatory exercises for participants in our workshops. In particular, we wrote a five-day personal devotional guide that began with helping people avoid thinking of themselves too highly and instead cultivating a sober introspection (Rom 12:3). The devotional also encouraged prayerfully asking God to search hearts and reveal any hidden, hurtful ways (Psalm 139:23-24). Toward others, it asked people to identify and mediate on positive qualities in those with whom they disagree and even express gratitude for ways in which they may have blessed a person or the community of which they were a part. This devotional has often been identified as a particularly valuable part of our conversation workshops.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the last several years, we have put substantial effort into having healthy conversations about the conflicting convictions within our community. We have had many successful group experiences — both large and small. We have been encouraged by many individual stories. We have developed strategies and structures for having good conversations despite our differences, and many of these have proved effective.

But all of this has taken place against a cultural backdrop that is increasingly dark and contentious. We are experiencing consistent and ever-increasing pressure towards polarization. We explicitly state that our goal is not creating unanimity, but even when that has been acknowledged, it is hard to fully celebrate healthy and respectful disagreements. Our hearts seem to yearn for agreement, and anything less than that can feel like a disappointment that drains more out of our emotional tanks than it puts in. We believe that pursuing community that includes disagreement is the right thing to do, and over the course of time it pays off in a better life for the institutions of which we are a part, but progress feels slow and painful.

Nonetheless, at the end of the day, learning to listen to others and respect them as human beings made in the image of God is not something that is optional. It is an essential task of Christian discipleship. In a similar way, creating institutional structures that preserve Christian fidelity and at the same time allow for freedom of conscience and diversity of thought simply must be done, no matter how difficult it might prove.
IN RECENT YEARS, there have been several surveys conducted at religious institutions of higher education seeking to learn more about the experiences of sexual and gender minority students seeking and/or being referred for counseling services.

One such survey was published in 2021 by College Pulse on behalf of the Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP) and discussed in an Inside Higher Ed article (“Being LGBTQ+ on a Christian Campus”). One person quoted in the article claimed the survey showed some students “face mandatory counseling, reparative therapy, and loss of campus privileges when their identities are brought to the attention of campus administration.”

The context of that quote made it seem as though this was common, but findings of the survey itself showed that it was a very small percentage — less than 10% of students indicated they were “suggested counseling” or other efforts to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

While every student story is important and worthy of consideration, the Inside Higher Ed article and others like it make it seem that sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) or gender identity change efforts (GICE) are widely accepted and commonly practiced in Christian college counseling centers. We (the authors) have each worked in, trained in, provided training to, or directed a counseling center at a Christian college or university. We are uniquely familiar with those settings. The declaration that SOCE or GICE are widely accepted and commonly practiced in Christian college counseling centers has often been confusing to us, as we have not seen it practiced, nor have we seen it as a part of any training or equipping of counselors in such settings. Even the REAP data does not show it as a common practice — yet the perception persists.

At the same time, we know that sexual and gender minority students do indeed seek out mental health services at their college or university. In the research done for Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses, 34% of participants reported that they had already gone to the counseling center for assistance, and another 15% indicated that they would go. This makes sense given the concerns raised in various studies about potential health and mental health disparities for sexual and gender minority students both at private religious institutions and at public universities (see, e.g., “Queer-Spectrum and Trans-Spectrum Student Experiences in American Higher Education,” Greathouse et. al., 2018).

Thus, the REAP research and subsequent discussions made us wonder: How do counselors at Christian colleges and university counseling centers actually...
The responses show a more balanced, nuanced approach that seems very much in keeping with what might be expected from all mental health professionals, including those at a Christian college or university.

The Approach We Took
To answer that question, we developed a study with a goal of better understanding the counseling and referrals provided at CCCU member institutions when students seek services for concerns related to sexual or gender identity. Counseling staff in these settings have a unique role when one looks across college mental health centers in higher education. Counselors, like those in CCCU schools, navigate the counseling needs of the students, the mission of the college/university, and the ethics of their particular professional associations. We sought to gain a better understanding of how staff think through different goals in treatment, particularly in light of recent claims that students who seek services at counseling centers at CCCU institutions may have negative experiences.

Staff in these settings learned about the study via email invitation from the counseling center director. Staff who were interested in participating in the study were then directed to a secure, anonymous questionnaire.

A sample of 81 staff members reviewed six different clinical vignettes that presented variations on sexual or gender minority students seeking services at their college counseling center. We presented scenarios related to faith and sexuality or gender: how being gay fits with their Christian faith; dating the same gender; feeling troubled by their same-sex attractions and requesting help to not act on feeling troublesome by their same-sex attractions and requesting SOCE; responding to teasing and having their same-sex attractions and requesting help to not act on feeling troublesome by their same-sex attractions; their same-sex attractions and requesting help to not act on feeling troublesome by their same-sex attractions. Across all scenarios, the likelihood of discussing various approaches was largely dependent upon students’ presenting concerns.

When it comes to addressing institutional policies with a student and helping them align with policies, staff generally ranked that fourth or lower. The exception was with the scenario in which the student presents with concerns about the school’s policies — even then, however, it was still ranked as less important than having a student approach an affirmational approach. About half of the clinicians would be likely or very likely to include some discussion of institutional policies in their work with the students. In light of the community context for Christian higher education, it is presumed that understanding the influences of the unique environment at CCCU schools might be important, even in the more common student-centered approaches.

Regardless of student concerns, and even when the student presented with wanting to change attractions, clinicians ranked the approach of shifting sexual attractions as the least prioritized treatment option for all vignettes. Shifting sexual attractions would be the closest to what is referred to as sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) or the equivalent with gender identity change efforts (GICE). Across all scenarios, 90-90% of the clinicians indicated they would discuss their concerns, including research findings, with clients seeking this kind of treatment.

Reflecting an identity or affiliation with the students seeking help, with apparently some awareness of the appropriateness of the various treatment approaches. About half of the clinicians indicated they most likely would include some awareness of the appropriateness of the various treatment approaches. This emphasis on shaping therapy around students may explain how staff ordered the other treatment options. For example, in addition to first using a student-focused approach, counseling staff tended to next emphasize an affirmational approach to the student as a gay person regardless of policy, and align with sexual or gender change goals. Participants could also indicate on a five-point Likert-like scale from Definitely Not Discuss (1) to Definitely Discuss (5) how likely they were to discuss any of these considerations if the student did not object. We also asked them to rank on a five-point Likert-like scale from Extremely Unlikely (1) to Extremely Likely (5) that they would refer a case out based on the information obtained.

What We Found
There was great consistency in how staff indicated they would approach these clinical concerns about sexuality and gender. Across the board, therapists prioritized treatments that focused on students and adapted to how students best engaged and processed the questions they were struggling with. In fact, 9 out of 10 counselors ranked a student-focused intervention as among their top two preferred options, and 95% would likely or definitely discuss students’ own processing, questioning, and values. This emphasis on shaping therapy around students may explain how staff ordered the other treatment options. For example, in addition to first using a student-focused approach, counseling staff tended to next emphasize an affirmational approach to the student as a gay person regardless of policy, and align with sexual or gender change goals. Participants could also indicate on a five-point Likert-like scale from Definitely Not Discuss (1) to Definitely Discuss (5) how likely they were to discuss any of these considerations if the student did not object. We also asked them to rank on a five-point Likert-like scale from Extremely Unlikely (1) to Extremely Likely (5) that they would refer a case out based on the information obtained.

The responses show a more balanced, nuanced approach that seems very much in keeping with what might be expected from all mental health professionals, including those at a Christian college or university.
Strategic planning is a universal experience in higher education, but high-quality plans do not seem to be ubiquitous. At RHB, our work requires us to mine strategic plans for language and imagery we can use to help institutions meet enrollment or organizational goals, often in response to requests for proposals that explicitly mention strategic plans as orienting documents. Our general impression has been that we have had to do a lot of digging to get to the gems in those plans. Specifically, we felt that plans often did not present or reflect the best scenes in institutional stories, nor did plans often map clear directions for where an institution should go and how to tell when it arrived. We became curious about whether it was really that common for strategic plans to seem insufficient to the purposes they could be serving, and we realized we were not entirely sure what purpose these documents served. Nor were we sure for whom these documents are produced. So we decided to test our general impressions against a corpus of active strategic plans. The instability of 2020 was a further driver for this research. We wanted to know whether these plans lent stability and guidance during the historic and fast-moving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the spreading movement to create social justice and racial equity.

We undertook a study of more than 100 strategic plans covering institutions of different sizes, with a goal of capturing a plan for one public and one private institution in each state when available online. We included in our dataset strategic plans from public and private institutions that were publicly available on institutional websites. All 50 states were represented in the dataset at least once.

To sum up our results, we found that the vast majority of strategic plans are low on strategy and high on operational planning; they also tend to not be written with audience clarification, prioritization, and mobilization in mind. By that we mean it can be difficult for people who care deeply about action and accountability in strategic endeavors to know how to contribute just by reading these plans.

However, out of the 108 plans we studied, we identified 16 that contained some of the most strategic tendencies. These 16 plans included much clarity about process, goals, and measuring outcomes including key performance indicators (KPIs). Wanting to understand how these plans came to contain strategic commitments, we invited the presidents and chancellors of these 16 institutions to participate in interviews about their strategic plans. What follows is an overview of the eight characteristics these successful plans had in common.
COMMON ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC PLANS

1. As part of an inclusive, transparent process, successful plans contained a description of a process of brutally honest self-examination and a genuine desire to forthrightly engage challenges. The best-written plans were by those who were able to take an honest look at ugly truths and beautiful gems within their reach. Those who most clearly stated the challenges they faced and who could also catalogue the many wonderful things and people that make an institution distinctive were best equipped to make a persuasive case that the goals and outcomes they set were the correct ones.

2. Successful plans included an intent to involve marketing and communications functions early in the process as fundamental agents in creating engagement with the people who matter most to the institution. Over the last decade-plus, the rise of the CMO (chief marketing officer) has brought the importance of the marketing function to a leadership role in higher ed, but our study showed that even so, marketing is still seen primarily as a promotional function. But marketing can serve a more strategic role beyond that, such as informing program development and helping shape the constituent experience. Since strategic plans touch all facets of an institution, marketing can bring an institution-wide perspective that layers in a constituent-centric understanding of market perceptions and opportunities.

3. Successful plans envisioned a detailed and holistic perspective toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives. The overwhelmingly top priority in all the plans we saw was developing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives. Successful plans envisioned this in holistic ways. Not only were there demographic goals in terms of recruitment or student success measures, but there were also goals for making the physical plant safer and more accessible for different abilities, updating curricular offerings, or developing new and innovative relationships with alumni from diverse backgrounds who could mentor students. We also saw that initiatives for faculty, staff, and administration were addressed as well, such as thorough plans to improve hiring, mentorship, and retention at all points on the employment ladder. Successful plans also reiterated how DEIB work is everyone’s responsibility, not just that of a few people or teams.

4. Institutional leaders who applied a mental framework of abundance thinking, rather than a scarcity model, were better able to inspire their campus communities toward exploration. Even in times of challenge and tremendous uncertainty, these leaders assume a stance in which there are enough resources to meaningfully move an institution forward after a period of thoughtful decision making. We have probably all heard (and maybe used) the phrase “doing more with less” many times since the economic downturn of 2008. This mental shift requires moving from this perspective to one that favors the assumption that you will find what you need. It reveals a different universe of possibilities and provides an opportunity to create a shared sense of drive around new priorities — enabling development of true strategic goals.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE STRATEGIC?

Before identifying the shared themes of successful strategic plans, we must clarify what it means to be strategic. Broadly speaking, strategy requires change: changing one’s behavior or making choices that others do not.

Many so-called strategic plans are actually heavy on tactical or operational plans. If you are thinking about doing something you’ve been doing but enhancing those efforts, you are probably not thinking strategically. If you are planning to do something you should be doing already, you are not thinking strategically. You may actually be thinking tactically about how to refine a pre-existing process or find new ways to assess success of initiatives, and you may have more or less nailed down how that might work. But that is still not necessarily strategy.

Here’s an “opposite test” from Peter Eckel: consider an action you are thinking about taking and flip it so you are considering doing the opposite. Would you ever do that? If you would not do the opposite of an action, it’s probably not strategic. Ultimately, strategy is an exercise in making choices — where an institution will compete, where it will invest, how it will define success — which a strategic plan should reflect. If everything is a priority (one plan we saw had more than 20 overarching goals), how will your campus community and other stakeholders know what is most important and what the institution’s direction is?
Successful strategic plans assigned accountability and process management roles, often to a cabinet-level staff member who would oversee the plan’s execution. We spoke to presidents who either depuritized an administrator or staff member with duties to oversee the process, or who hired a person specifically for a role with a title along the lines of “chief strategy officer.” Another option is to assign oversight duties to specific members of working groups or committees that have scope over portions of the plan.

In developing and executing a successful strategic plan, presidents led in the way that was most authentic to them, with the discernment to assess when to be visible in the process and when not to. One president put it this way: “College presidents have to be visionary, but not hallucinatory.” Presidents need to have some big ideas that ultimately also need to be doable. That means presidents need to understand what kinds of initiatives they can back, but also that they need to be astute judges of the plan, which can include advocating with legislators, donating, volunteering, or spreading the word through their communities.

Successful plans took an audience-centric perspective: audiences for the plan were defined early in the process, and the plans were written to be both pleasant to read and practically useful. As one university put it, the strategic plan was meant to be used, “not to sit up on a shelf.” Thus, the first step is to determine who the audiences for your strategic plan are. Consider who your various stakeholders or constituents are and what kinds of engagement a new plan can create for them. Plans that are poorly designed, that contain dense or un-specific language about opportunities and pathways, and that provide vague measures for tracking success are not user-friendly. Plans should contain explicit calls to action so that readers—those both internal and external to the institution—know what to do once they have read the plan, which can include (among many possibilities) advocating with legislators, donating, volunteering, or spreading the word through their communities.

Student success and well-being was as fundamental an aspect of the successful plans as the institutions’ own. It makes a lot of sense from a pragmatic angle to create plans that are tightly focused on institutional success and legacy. After all, the job of a president and cabinet is to steward through the current moment and set up the next people in those roles for success. But the plans with the most strategic tendencies discussed students and student well-being and success more frequently than others. Undergraduate and graduate students were also members of working groups or task forces, giving them the ability to contribute to the process and to see how it worked so they could explain it to others. Moreover, the plans often conceptualized post-graduation success as a life well-lived, with a more holistic approach to outcomes beyond short-term placement rates.

STRATEGIC PLANS SHOULD CONTAIN EXPLICIT CALLS TO ACTION, SO THAT READERS—THOSE BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TO THE INSTITUTION—KNOW WHAT TO DO ONCE THEY READ THE PLAN, WHICH CAN INCLUDE ADVOCATING WITH LEGISLATORS, DONATING, VOLUNTEERING, OR SPREADING THE WORD THROUGH THEIR COMMUNITIES.

When circumstances change, successful plans can help.

It would be the sensible thing to suppose, given how much disruption has occurred since March 2020, that even the best-considered strategic plans would be rearranged or even discarded. But as one of our interviewees noted, crises like the COVID-19 pandemic don’t reveal new problems. They reveal the truth about problems that already exist—the ones that we should have been aware of already.

Remember, well-designed strategic plans excel in pointing toward solutions that have already been identified by an honest, open, and critical self-examination. Thus, we were both surprised and excited to hear from our interviewees how the strategic planning process had actually prepared them to meet the challenges we’ve faced. The pandemic and movement for racial justice did not actually introduce new challenges—they confirmed for how well the plans identified existing challenges.

Every institution is on its own journey, and strategic planning is part of it. Since we identified 16 most-strategic plans, that means 92 of the 108 plans we studied were not as strategic. Consider the time, effort, and emotion that went into producing documents that will not do justice to the important work of the institutions that produced them. That’s too bad—strategic planning can be a positive, unifying experience for your institution.

We hope that this research provided examples of what has worked for other campuses. We are not interested in prescribing how you should do things on your own campus. What we want is to give you grace to know yourself and your institution, and the flexibility to make the right decisions for your context. You do have the power to design an effective strategic plan, one that sets your institution on the trajectory for stability and desired growth over the long term. ✨

AIMEE HOSEMANN, Ph.D., is director of qualitative research for RHBI. ROB ZINKAN, Ed.D., is RHBI’s vice president for marketing leadership. CONNOR LAGRANGE served as graduate student research assistant for the survey. In 2021 he earned his master’s degree in philanthropic studies at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and is now a fellow at The Patterson Foundation.

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Navigating the Hard Work of Faith Integration

Three considerations for developing faith integration on campus for a new generation of students.

BY REGINALD FINGER
“Do not let it be said of your university that everything outside of your Bible and theology department is indistinguishable from a secular institution.”

On every campus, faith integration is lauded as an important goal for the academic mission. This means that this challenge: “Do not let it be said of your university that everything outside of your Bible and theology department is indistinguishable from a secular institution.” This means that this work and can be a struggle, but taking the time to help students learn biblical ideas and background knowledge is important in helping them succeed in understanding and applying their faith to their work. After all, as precious and important as Christian higher education is, it is the means to an end — that end being the transformation of future generations for Christ.

REGINALD FINGER, M.D., is an assistant professor at Indiana Wesleyan University’s School of Health Sciences.

Recommended Reading


AMONG CCCU INSTITUTIONS, the phrase “integration of faith and learning” (or its shorter form, “faith integration”) is widely understood to be foundational to our work. But what is the integration of faith and learning?

In 2020, I was entrusted with a key role in faculty development on this very subject at Indiana Wesleyan University, where I also serve as an epidemiology faculty member in the School of Health Sciences. To prepare, I embarked on a rapid journey of reading and key conversations. For the previous five years, I had led an online class for CCCU faculty on integrating scripture into the teaching of health sciences, but now my assignment was much broader: promoting faith integration for all academic disciplines in ways that went above and beyond the integration of scriptural themes in coursework.

The voices of long-looked leaders in this field resonated with this challenge: “Do not let it be said of your university that everything outside of your Bible and theology department is indistinguishable from a secular institution.” This means that this work and can be a struggle, but taking the time to help students learn biblical ideas and background knowledge is important in helping them succeed in understanding and applying their faith to their work. After all, as precious and important as Christian higher education is, it is the means to an end — that end being the transformation of future generations for Christ.

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Recommended Reading


Four Ways to Help Your Institution Navigate the Great Resignation

Bad news: The Great Resignation is here to stay. Good news: There are steps colleges and universities can take to mitigate its impact.

By William Vanderbloemen

William Vanderbloemen is the CEO and founder of Vanderbloemen Search Group, a pastor search firm, and author of Culture Wins: The Roadmap to an Irresistible Workplace.

IN 2020, THE PANDEMIC significantly impacted all businesses, including educational institutions. We saw the warning signs and trends pointing to massive job turnover before the Great Resignation became a reality, and we continue to see evidence that the job churn of the past year is likely to stick around for at least a couple more.

We have helped hundreds of educational institutions, non-profits, and churches navigate this brave new world. As we continue to serve and learn, we are seeing best practices emerge that we believe can help mitigate the impact of the turnover that we believe will be with us for at least the next two years.

1. ENABLE — AND ENCOURAGE — OPEN COMMUNICATION.

In seasons of transition, it is critical that open communication between faculty, administration, students, and boards is not only allowed, but encouraged. During times of transition, people assume the worst, not the best. And under-communication is a petri dish for bad assumptions. Smart educational institutions are keeping the number of meetings they have (not lowering them), with a clear focus on communication around change. If your team feels able to ask honest questions about their futures at the school, trust will be fostered and stability will grow.

One way to immediately encourage this is to perform a culture audit to better understand what is preventing communication. (If you’re interested in learning more on this, my book Culture Wins: The Roadmap to an Irresistible Workplace identifies eight key areas of cultural health.)

2. ENCOURAGE REST.

Anyone on your staff who has stuck around to this point is likely experiencing some level of burnout. The pandemic and the Great Resignation have only exacerbated the burnout dynamic. During lockdowns, everyone was asked to move to more virtual work, which created a myriad of “other duties as necessary” in everyone’s job description. This was especially true in the educational sphere. Chances are, your staff is dealing with personal exhaustion from the pandemic, plus from possibly navigating political and racial strife that has divided congregations, as well as likely changes to job expectations since the onset of the pandemic. Your team has gone from working one job to working two: They’re maintaining the in-person aspect of the school while now having to also foster an online learning component. In some ways, this falls under open communication, yet leaders can work, you will be grateful in the long run.

At Vanderbloemen, because of the breadth of our work, we get to hear from Christian leaders all over the world and the nation. And the key thing we are hearing is that people are struggling in the midst of all of this turnover. We encourage you to have open communication, good policies to protect your staff, and regular rest, but ultimately, no system will be able to fully protect you from turmoil and tiredness. The good news is, at the end of the day, we serve a God whose work cannot be disrupted by the chaos of the world.

As Isaiah 40 says, “He does not grow faint or weary, and His strength does not fail.”

3. LISTEN.

In some ways, this falls under open communication, but it is important that we clarify the ways that leaders should be distinctly listening to their staff. As leaders, we tend to expect to be the ones communicating, rather than being the ones communicated to. Instead of speaking to what you think your staff needs and trying to encourage them, choose to listen for what their needs actually are. Right now, they need you to listen more than you speak. Come up with better, regular, and creative ways to listen to your team members. If they don’t respond one way, try another until you are actually able to hear their needs and adequately respond. Create space for your staff to express their needs, hurts, desires, and expectations.

4. LIMIT WORKING HOURS.

Regardless of whether you think otherwise, it’s not sustainable to work 60-hour weeks regularly. Your staff can’t, either. The human body doesn’t have the bandwidth to sustain that much work, because God designed us to need rest. Consider forming accountability systems to ensure that neither you nor others on your staff are working more than a certain amount. As a leader, this might be frustrating to get used to — we tend to want to pour ourselves completely into our ministerial work and abandon all other needs. But doing so is not as selfish as it seems. You need to set boundaries for yourself and your staff. Ministry in education is a long, long marathon, not a series of sprints. The body may be able to sprint for a while, but eventually it will exhaust itself and cause long-term harm to what it is capable of doing in the future. If you limit how much you and others can work, you will be grateful in the long run.

EndNote
IN LUKE’S STORY of 12-year-old Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:41-52), Jesus says to Mary, “I must be about My Father’s business.” In saying this, Jesus is emphasizing: “I must keep the calling that I am to pursue in focus.”

Mary says, “Son, why have you done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” Jesus responds, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” While Mary speaks of herself and Joseph, Jesus speaks of himself and God, of the necessity God has laid upon him. There is a necessity God has required of him. There is a necessity God has declared about him. It is that necessity about which he must direct his life. There is a calling upon him that he must pursue.

Jesus doesn’t want Mary to be confused. The necessity of his life is not found in the carpentry business. The reason for his being in the world and the reason toward which his life is aimed is not construction. The reason for his life, the necessity of his life, lies not in his occupation but in his vocation. He must be about the Father’s business and calling. He must be about what the Father has declared and demanded from his life. He must be about what the Father is laying upon his life.

Necessary Christianity is a maturity in Christ that knows the difference between occupation and vocation. It knows the difference between making a living and living the life God has called us to. While our life includes our occupation, it’s more than our occupation. We are called to a vocation. We have a charge to keep. We live life knowing that the Father has some business for us to attend to. There’s an assignment for our life, a calling on our life. God has requirements for our life. He has made a declaration about our life. He must be about our Father’s business. We must be about the claim God has made on us. We must be found faithful in the stewardship with which we have been entrusted.

Jesus said, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” It’s as though he was saying, “If you had remembered that I must be about my Father’s business, you would have known where to find me. You would have known where to look for me. You would have known where I was. If you had remembered that I must be about my Father’s business, you would have known to look for me in my Father’s house first rather than last. You would have known that I’d be where the Father wanted me to be.”

When we are about the Father’s business, we are found where the Father is. We are found where the Father assigns us and where the Father has called us. There are some places where we must be found when we’re about the Father’s business. We must be found in the Father’s house worshiping him and giving him glory. We must be found in the Father’s house learning about him. We must be found in the midst of the fellowship of the saints of God. We must be found in the field being a witness for the Lord. We must be found on our knees praying to God. We must be found with our delight in the law of the Lord and meditating on his law day and night. When we live a necessary life, people should know where they can find us. They should know that they can find us pursuing the call of God.

BISHOP CLAUDE R. ALEXANDER JR. is senior pastor of The Park Church (Charlotte, NC) and a CCCU board member. This has been adapted from his new book, Necessary Christianity. ©2022 by Claude Richard Alexander Jr. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press. www.ivpress.com.
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