

COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

ADVANCE

FALL 2026

MAGAZINE

SYNERGY IS STRENGTH

50 YEARS OF GOING FURTHER TOGETHER

50 Years of Faithfulness
p. 6

**Christian Colleges Still
Matter**
p. 22

**Stewarding the Moment,
Strengthening the Mission**
p. 46

**Cultivating the Craft,
Carrying the Vision**
p. 50

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FAITHFULLY PREPARED



Twenty-five years ago, at the 2001 International Forum, former CCCU president Bob Andringa offered a sobering prediction about the future of Christian higher education. Looking ahead to 2028, he warned that 25% of CCCU institutions would close, 25% would struggle, 25% would remain stable, and 25% would thrive. His words have stayed with me, not because they were meant to discourage, but because they named the reality that *faithful mission requires faithful preparation*.

As we stand closer now to the year he named, we can give thanks that God has sustained this movement. Yet, we also know the challenges before us are real. In recent years, we have seen institutions close, others face deep uncertainty, and all of us sense that the landscape around Christian higher education is changing. This is not a moment for fear, but it is a moment for clarity, courage, and renewed dependence on Christ.

Matthew 25 tells the parable of ten virgins who are waiting for the bridegroom, all of them with lamps. They all intend to join the celebration, yet only five women brought enough oil. Only five were prepared for the unexpected delay. Only five were ready when midnight came. In many ways, this parable speaks directly to this moment in Christian higher education. The world around us is shifting rapidly, culturally, politically, financially, and spiritually. We sense growing skepticism towards higher education. We see the pressures on religious liberty. We watch the demographic changes reshaping enrollment realities. Yet the call of Christ remains unchanged to keep your lamps burning, stay awake, and be prepared.

Consider the next 25 years of the CCCU through the lens of this parable and the CCCU's three priorities: strengthening membership, faith integration, and advocacy.

First, strengthening membership: carry oil in reserve. In the parable, all 10 virgins had lamps, but only the wise ones brought extra oil. They had prepared for realities they could not predict. In higher education, our lamps represent our missions, our commitments to Christ-centered

learning and formation. The oil represents not our commitment, but our readiness: the financial resilience, strong governance, data-informed planning, spiritual vitality, and collaborative support that enable our missions to endure. Some CCCU institutions are in seasons of remarkable strength, while others carry burdens and quietly face enrollment pressures, budget constraints, or regulatory uncertainty. Still others are in profound strategic transitions. No institution should face these challenges alone. The CCCU exists to strengthen membership, so the whole body supports every member. As 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it." Strengthening membership means deepening collaboration through shared services, shared wisdom, shared innovation, and shared prayer. Our endeavor, both as an organization and as a collective network sharing the mission of Christian higher education, over the next 25 years is to ensure that every CCCU institution has the oil it needs.

Faithful mission requires faithful preparation.



Our second priority is the integration of faith and learning: we believe that leadership development and spiritual formation happen long before the door opens when midnight arrives. Character cannot be borrowed. Formation cannot be rushed, nor can wisdom be improvised. When the foolish virgins asked the wise for oil, they replied, “we cannot give you ours.” Not because they were selfish, but because spiritual preparation is not transferable. Rather, spiritual preparation must be cultivated over time. Christian higher education exists for this very purpose, to form students who carry the light of Christ into the world that is increasingly confused, divided, and searching for truth.

If the last decade has taught us anything, it is that technical knowledge alone cannot sustain a life. Talent is no substitute for virtue. Intelligence is no substitute for wisdom. Credentials are no substitute for Christlikeness and moral character formation. The next 25 years will require institutions that do not merely educate minds but shape hearts. Like the wise virgins, our students must be formed before the cultural challenges emerge, before the ethical dilemmas arise, and before pressures mount. Our responsibility is to light their lamps, teach them to keep their oil ready, and prepare them to shine in the darkness.

Finally, our third priority is advocacy: stay awake and keep watch. Jesus says, “therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour.” Advocacy is our collective diligence, our commitment to remaining awake to the policy changes, cultural narratives, and legal realities that will shape the future of Christian higher education. We cannot assume the environment will remain favorable. We cannot wait

for the threats to religious liberty to mature into a crisis. We cannot fall asleep while legislation moves, courts rule, and public perception shifts. Advocacy is not a defensive posture. Advocacy is a faithful posture, standing firm in truth. Advocacy requires us to build relationships with legislators and influencers before the midnight hour. It ensures that the voice of Christian higher education is not only heard, but trusted and respected. We do this work because we must, for our students, for our institutions, and for the sake of the gospel we carry.

Friends, as we celebrate 50 years of God’s faithfulness, the parable of the ten virgins reminds us of the road ahead. Strengthen one another. Carry oil in reserve. Deepen the formation. Prepare the next generation of wise and faithful leaders. Stay awake, keep watch. Advocate boldly and prayerfully.

When midnight came, the only thing that mattered was whether their lamps were burning. In seasons of change and uncertainty, the institutions that shine most faithfully are those that remain deeply rooted in their Christian mission—keeping Christ at the center and bearing his light with conviction, humility, and hope. As we step into the next 25 years, my prayer for the entire movement is that our lamps will burn bright, our oil will not run out, and then when Christ calls, whether midnight or in the morning, we will be ready, faithful, and full of light. May the God who has sustained this movement for 50 years continue to guide us with wisdom, courage, unity and hope. **A**

When midnight came, the only thing that mattered was whether their lamps were burning. In seasons of change and uncertainty, the institutions that shine most faithfully are those that remain deeply rooted in their Christian mission—keeping Christ at the center and bearing his light with conviction, humility, and hope.

Congratulations

to CCCU’s CEO, Dr. David Hoag, whose fundraising skills are strengthened by the Certificate in Fund Raising Management (CFRM) that he earned from The Fund Raising School.



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“I earned a certificate in fundraising management through The Fund Raising School early in my advancement career. That experience played a vital role in preparing me for the work I have done, and continue to do, on behalf of Christian higher education.”

—DR. DAVID HOAG



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about The Fund
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1
FROM THE PRESIDENT
David A. Hoag

18
ON SCHOLARSHIP
Stanley P. Rosenberg

6

FIFTY YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS

David A. Hoag



14

THE PRESSURE PRINCIPLE

Nicole Martin



22

CHRISTIAN COLLEGES STILL MATTER

Now they must prove it

James Steen
Irene Neller
Bryce Chapman



30 FLOURISHING LEAVES FOOTPRINTS

Rethinking how we support the whole student

ORU's Healthy Academic Communities Research

34

NEW PRESIDENTS INSTITUTE

Equipped to Excel Together

Chip Pollard



38

GLOBAL VOICES

International Institutions Spotlight

Leadstar Christian University
London School of Theology



42

ONE MISSION, MANY CAMPUSES

Global Engagement Across Christian Higher Education

Ted Song



46

STEWARDED THE MOMENT, STRENGTHENING THE MISSION

Why Prioritize Faith and Learning Now

Noah Toly



50

CULTIVATING THE CRAFT, CARRYING THE VISION

What Does Faith and Learning Look Like in Practice?

Tricia Wilson

THE COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (CCCU)

is a higher education association of more than 170 Christian institutions around the world. Since 1976, the CCCU has served as the leading voice of Christian higher education. With campuses across the globe, including more than 130 in the U.S. and Canada and more than 30 from an additional 21 countries, CCCU institutions are accredited, comprehensive colleges and universities whose missions are Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith. Most also have curricula rooted in the arts and sciences. The CCCU's mission is to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.

THE MISSION OF THE CCCU is to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education throughout the world.

DISTRIBUTION

Advance is published each year and is mailed to members, affiliates, and friends of the CCCU. It is also available online at www.cccu.org/magazine.

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ADVERTISING

Advance accepts advertising from organizations that serve the students, faculty, or administration of our campuses. For more information and/or to receive a CCCU Media Kit, please email advertising@cccu.org.

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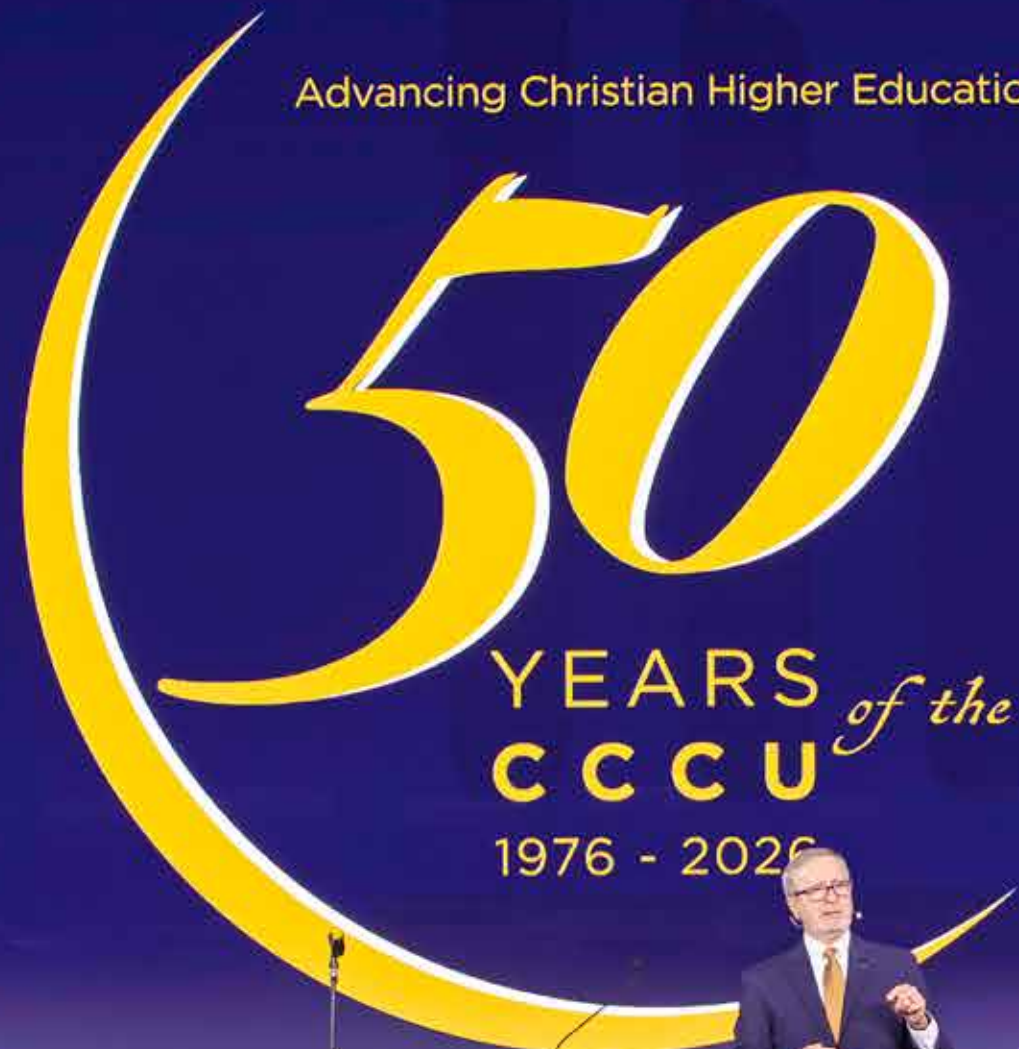
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Advancing Christian Higher Education



YEARS *of the*
CCCU
1976 - 2026

FIFTY YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS

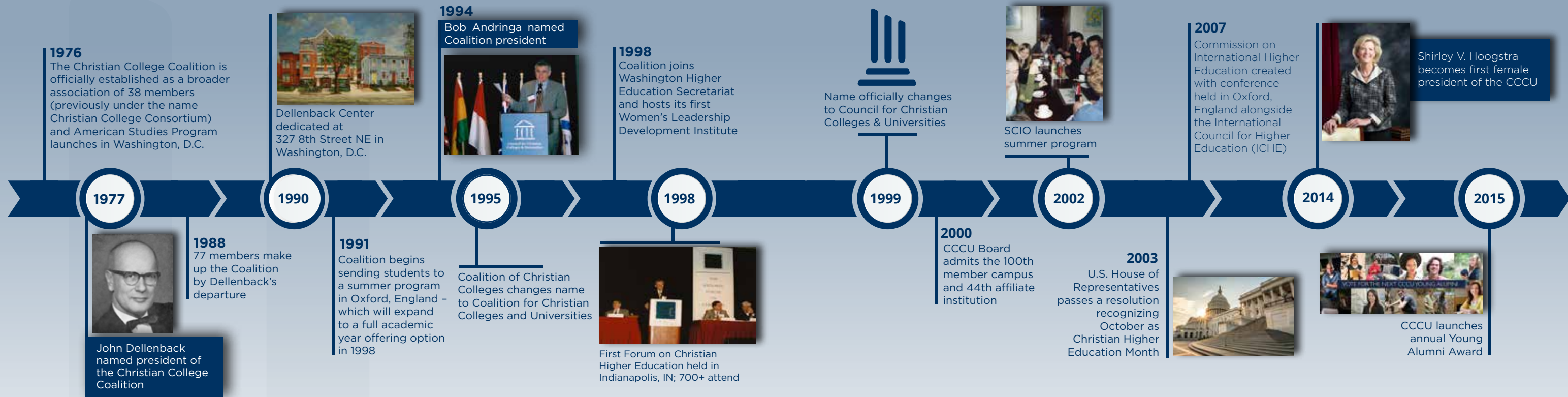
God's faithfulness framed the CCCU's 50th anniversary celebration at the 2026 International Forum, offering a grateful look back at five decades of God's work through Christian higher education. Robin Baker, president of George Fox University, traced that history and hosted a conversation with presidents emeriti Bob Andringa and Shirley Hoogstra. Their plenary session was a chance to reflect and reminisce on the organization's journey through very distinct eras within higher education. It was also an opportunity to appreciate its endurance in endeavoring always to be—as Jesus taught his disciples—"a house built upon a rock."

In 1976, the Christian College Consortium recognized the need to make more "space at the table" in national discourse and higher education policymaking for institutions that shared a common vision of integrating Christian faith into the learning and living experience on their campuses. The simple premise underlying this bold move was that more Christian colleges and universities working together would amplify their collective voice to the world. With that sustainable outcome in mind, the broader association that is known today as the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities was formed to bring a stronger voice to advocate for the value and needs of Christian higher education—a shared faith and combined strength.

From that founding moment, the CCCU has existed to serve its member institutions. Each season has brought new challenges and strategic initiatives to anticipate and adapt to the issues and opportunities of its member schools and partners. Yet from its inception, several enduring pillars have undergirded the CCCU's work and continue to provide value in a changing landscape: coalition-building, shared resources, and a common kingdom vision.

Most importantly, CCCU members continue to share a bedrock foundation for an excellent educational experience that is distinctly Christ-centered and dedicated to forming students through rigorous scholarship and spiritual development. Across varied contexts, member colleges and universities remain committed to lives transformed in and beyond the classroom. Together, they form a network of faithful believers spurring one another on to pursue a common mission in diverse ways. This shared vision has defined the CCCU since its founding and continues to guide its work five decades later and beyond.





Fifty Years of the CCCU

CCCU Celebrates 50 years of work and advancement at the International Forum in Dallas, TX with 1,000+ attendees



David A. Hoag named eighth president of the CCCU



2024

2024



U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upholds dismissal of Hunter v. Department of Education Lawsuit

2024

CCCU offices at 321 8th St NE in Capitol Hill neighborhood are sold; new office space lease begins at 20 M St SE

2021

Hunter v. Department of Education Lawsuit filed; CCCU files motion to be a participant in the case so it can defend Title IX's religious protections

2023

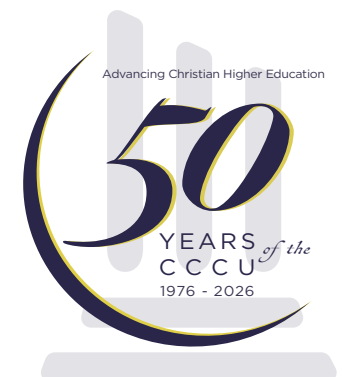


Leadership Development Institutes celebrate 25 years of leadership and learning

2020



Announcement that BestSemester will rebrand to CCCU GlobalEd





TOP LEFT: CCCU President David Hoag welcomed Forum attendees. **TOP RIGHT:** The exhibit hall provided space for attendees to learn about many different opportunities from CCCU partners. **MIDDLE LEFT:** International Forum sponsors mingled with attendees in the exhibit hall. **MIDDLE:** Christianity Today CEO Nicole Martin shared a devotional with attendees. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** A table-group discussion at the Advancing Women In Leadership Pre-Conference. **BOTTOM LEFT:** CCCU President David Hoag and Grace College President Drew Flamm presented Lucas Fonseca with the 2026 Young Alumni Award. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Covenant College professor Kelly Kapic shared during a plenary session with attendees. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Attendees listened to plenary content ranging from human flourishing, belonging, leadership, and more.



TOP LEFT: Attendees shared their insights between sessions. **TOP RIGHT:** Attendees heard from seasoned CCCU professionals at the Faith & Learning Pre-Conference. **MIDDLE LEFT:** The CCCU celebrated their 50th anniversary at the 2026 International Forum. **MIDDLE TOP RIGHT:** Carlos Campo, CEO of the Museum of the Bible addressed Forum attendees during a plenary session. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** The Hall of Faith was debuted to recognize and honor men and women who have made significant contributions to the flourishing of Christian higher education. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Adam Christing, the conference emcee, delighted audiences with his humor. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Leaders from LeTourneau University and Wheaton College shared their insights at the Faith & Learning pre-conference.

CCCU 2026 INTERNATIONAL FORUM



TOP LEFT: Fresno Pacific University president André Stephens greeted a colleague during a session break. **TOP RIGHT:** Breakout sessions provided learning opportunities to hear from peers. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Communication and PR colleagues formed connections during a roundtable during the Strategic Messaging Pre-Conference session. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Tyler J. VanderWeele, Ph.D. (left) of Harvard University and Byron Johnson, Ph.D. (right) of Baylor University took questions from the audience after the plenary session exploring The Global Flourishing Project. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Attendees spent time in prayer during a networking break. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The 2026 International Forum provided opportunities to network and connect with peers from across Christian higher education



TOP: Attendees participated in numerous worship sessions, led by Dallas Baptist University student worship teams. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Anderson University (SC) faculty & staff present during a breakout session. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Plenary session speaker Dr. Curt Thompson also spent time connecting with attendees during a follow up breakout session. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Mark Batterson, author and pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C., spoke during a plenary session. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** More than 1,000 attendees took part in attending plenary and breakout sessions, networking with peers, connecting with sponsors, and being encouraged to advance the meaningful work of Christian higher education forward for the future.

THE PRESSURE PRINCIPLE

BY REV. DR. NICOLE MARTIN

NO MATTER WHERE YOU LOOK, IT SEEMS LIKE
THERE IS PRESSURE FROM EVERY DIRECTION,
TO DO SOMETHING, TO BE SOMEONE, TO GO
ANYWHERE OTHER THAN WHERE YOU ARE
RIGHT NOW.



Not all pressure is bad. In this day, it seems like everywhere we look, there is negative pressure to take on the values of the world, and this is exactly what the enemy wants. God instead wants you to thrive under pressure when the world tries to bring you down. In John 7, we see Jesus surviving pressure from the enemy who did not understand his motive, pressure from his brothers who did not know Him. And yet Jesus did not succumb to the pressure, rather, in the text he thrived under pressure.

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival because my time has not yet fully come." After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee.

However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.
John 7:1-10 (NIV)

The first thing that the text points out is that Jesus was able to thrive under pressure because he knew who he was in God. The text begins with Jesus experiencing this pressure from his brothers attempting to convince him to go to the festival of Tabernacles in Judea so that he could "get more followers." They valued fame and fortune, so they pushed their values on him. Jesus was able to overcome his brothers' pressures because he knew who he was. He was not designed to fit their mold, because he lived beyond the mold. He was not designed to meet their standards because Jesus lived above and beyond worldly standards. They wanted him to be just like them. But Jesus wasn't like them; Jesus was God. However, because they didn't know him, and because Jesus knew they didn't know him, he was able to thrive under pressure because he knew who he was in God.

The people around you will pressure you and project their values on you, but the way you thrive is by knowing who you are in God. There is nothing anyone can do to change you from what God has said about you. The world will try to name you. The pressures will try to mold you. But you can thrive under pressure when you know who you are.

Secondly, Jesus was able to thrive under pressure because he knew what time it was. In verse 6, he says, "now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime." Earlier in the chapter, John tells us that Jesus stayed away from Judea for a time because the people there were trying to kill him. He wasn't worried about the place or about the people. He was worried about the timing, because he was sent by God, he could not go when other people said go.

He could only go when God said it was time.

Time governed everything about the life of Jesus, and at just the right time he was born and conceived of the Holy Spirit, at just the right time he was born in a manger, time was everything to Jesus. But Jesus understood that there are also different types of time.

There is the Chronos time that is on our watches. But God does not function on the Chronos time alone. God is not phased when the watch is missing. Our God functions on Kairos time. And Kairos time is about the specific ordained moments of God. When you order your life according to the Kairos time of God, you are never late, because God is always on time. When you order your life according to the Kairos time of God, you may find yourself delaying when others are rushing forward. You may find yourself accelerating when others are taking their time. But if you are on God's time, you know he's not just ordering your life, but he's ordering the lives of everyone else around you as well.

May God give
us the boldness
to do things that
other people do
not understand.



That leads me to the last point of our text: Jesus thrived under pressure because he understood his assignment. Jesus says to his brothers in verse 7, "the world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil." Jesus understood something important about the call of God for leaders today, that the call of God is not for you to make people happy. The call of any leader is not for you to placate and please people all the time, because if you do that, you will find yourself pulled by the strings of too many entities all at the same time. Jesus understood, if I follow my assignment, there will be some who hate me and some who love me. But because he understood his assignment, he was willing to do what God said, no matter what the people said. Jesus knew that to fulfill his assignment, he was going to have to do some things that other people didn't understand.

May God give us the boldness to do things that other people do not understand. Why in the world are you still running a college at a time when educational institutions are losing popularity? Because I have an assignment by God, and I'm going to stay on this assignment until God says, "Go." It's simply because we understand the value of obedience and obedience is a long road, I'm told. Obedience requires that we sacrifice ourselves and surrender our will, but if we follow our assignment, we will get our reward.

...if you are on God's time, you know he's not just ordering your life, but he's ordering the lives of everyone else around you as well.

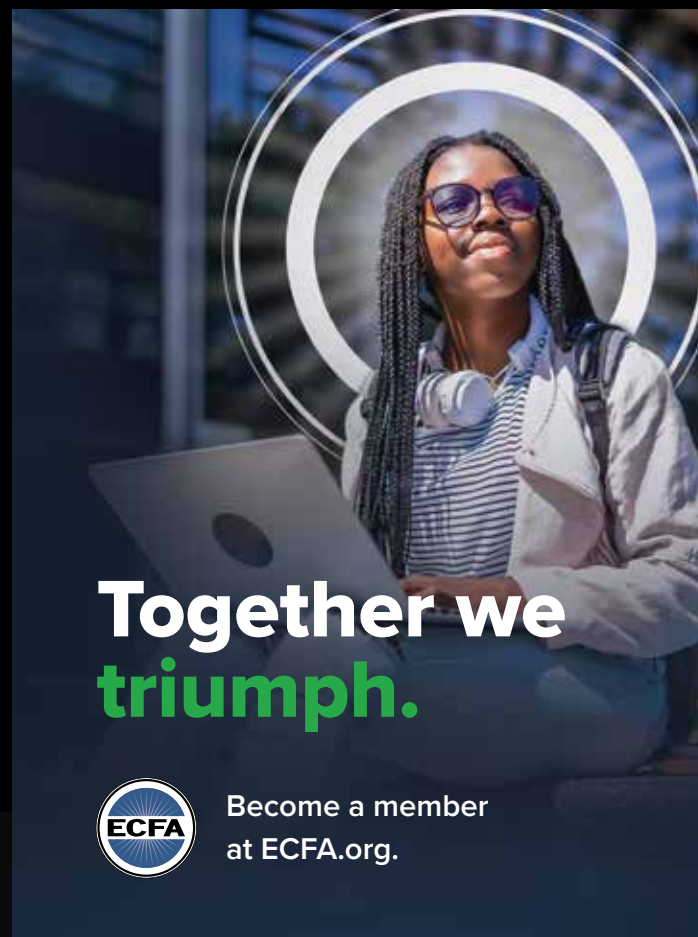
Your assignment is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you, and when you do your assignment on Earth, I believe you'll receive a heavenly reward. I pray that we might hear the blessed words, "well done, thy good and faithful servant. You did not succumb to the pressures of the world, but you held on to God's unchanging hand."

These are trying times. These are not easy times. These are turbulent times. But you cannot succumb to the pressure of the times. You must know who you are as a child of God. You must know whose time matters. And you must be steadfast on your assignment before God. If I'm steadfast, then I'll get the reward that I'm longing for, not the promotion, not the accolades, but the words of affirmation from the one who matters most. **A**



Rev. Dr. Nicole Martin

Rev. Dr. Nicole Massie Martin holds degrees from Vanderbilt University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She is the President and CEO at Christianity Today and founder and Executive Director of Soulfire International Ministries. She is an accomplished writer and author of three books including Nailing It: Why Successful Leadership Demands Suffering & Surrender. She serves on various boards and councils and leads the Grow Ministry at Kingdom Fellowship AME Church in Maryland. She and her husband, Mark, are proud parents to two amazing daughters.



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 WATCH NOW

Watch Rev. Dr. Nicole Martin's full devotional talk from the 2026 International Forum.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE:

An AI Oath to Establish Limits and Guide Aspirations

By Stan Rosenberg, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research & Scholarship



Artificial intelligence has moved from an emerging concept to daily companion with astonishing speed, and with that speed has come a legion of troubling questions including: who, if anyone, is teaching this powerful new tool restraint? And to accomplish that, how are the coders responsible guided, constrained, and inspired? Each week seems to bring fresh evidence of AI’s promise and its peril—systems that can accelerate discovery, deepen learning, and expand access, but also confuse truth, erode trust, make human and humane skills redundant, and outpace the moral habits needed to govern them. We have opened something vast. The urgent question is not whether we can close it, but whether we can create interventions that shape it wisely before it reshapes us.

With the goal of building theologically informed ethical materials to inform and shape AI engineers, practitioners, and executives, the CCCU’s UK subsidiary—Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford (SCIO)—was part of founding the Oxford Collaboration on Theology and AI (OCTAI). Based out of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, OCTAI’s first major project has been the creation of the Oxford Oath and Open Letter which is modeled on the historic oath that has shaped medical professionals for centuries, the Hippocratic Oath. Like that oath, the AI oath speaks to both affirming positive aspirations and outcomes while also setting limitations, as well as exerting caution and encouraging humility.

The project is collaborative and interdisciplinary, led by members of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford within a wider cross-institutional core group including AI professionals, and shaped by business leaders, AI engineers, and academics from Oxford, other UK universities, among other influences.

We are conscious that our creativity is both a gift and a responsibility, and that the tools we form in turn form us, including our cognition and moral reasoning.

OCTAI has given particular weight to global majority perspectives, drawing substantial participation from contributors outside the UK, continental Europe, and the USA, and from those working in roles without significant institutional control such as engineers.

One of the project’s aims is to develop vocational principles for ethically serious AI practice, now emerging publicly through the Oxford Oath and its companion Open Letter.

With funding from the John Templeton Foundation, the team set about interviewing and working with a diverse variety of AI-related practitioners representing all continents and multiple industries. I am a member of the core team which includes Oxford’s Regius Professor of Divinity, Andrew Davison, the Andreos Idreos Chair of Science and Religion, Mark Harris, and SCIO’s former director of grants and research, Dr. Michael Burdett, now associate professor of theology and Christian ethics at the University of Nottingham. The Oath is deeply informed by Christian theological anthropology but endeavours to reach broad audiences. To this end, the oath can be taken and signed in either a religious form or a secular form, but the commitments are the same. **A**

The text and the variations are as follows:

OATH

- (OPTION 1) In the presence of God and
- (OR OPTION 2) In the light of truth and my conscience and in the presence of these witnesses, I make these commitments:

DISPOSITION

I will bring optimism and caution to my work.
I will approach my work with humility.
I will honour the dignity of humanity.

VISION

I will make my work governable and an enabler of proper human judgement.
I will align my work with worthy motivations and objects of attention.
I will develop my work to advance the common good of humanity.

RESPONSIBILITY

I will embed appropriate truthfulness in my work and demonstrate honesty in how I describe my work.
I will build with restraint and towards conditions that support justice, peace, and care of the natural world.
I will orient my work towards respect for human identity, enhancement of human creativity, and support for dignified human work.

CONCLUSION

I will uphold the integrity of this oath.
(OPTIONAL: May God who has given me the will to profess these commitments grant me also the grace to perform them.)
(OPTIONAL: May truth inform me, and my conscience guide me, as I strive to keep these commitments.)

In addition to providing this to working AI researchers, practitioners, and enterprises, our hope is to see the oath implemented in educational environments much as medical schools have a ‘white coat ceremony’ with the taking of the Hippocratic Oath at matriculation. That is why the Oxford team is inviting CCCU member institutions to join this effort and implement the oath as part of their curriculum for those students working in AI-related studies. Additionally, CCCU member administrative leadership and faculty are invited to be signers to our open letter! (See the sidebar.)

Might you or your institution join this effort? We have a collective opportunity to impact the establishment of standards for the development and use of AI at this watershed moment with a technology poised to redefine so many aspects of daily life, educational instruction and future learning. But the window will close quickly. Your voice matters, and the time to take action is now.



Scan to learn more and sign the AI Oath.

OPEN LETTER ON RESPONSIBLE USE OF AI

We, the undersigned, offer our support for these statements:

We are committed to the dignity and worth of every natural human person. Technology should serve humanity and contribute to the common good, enhancing human freedom and protecting the vulnerable. The intelligence of artificial systems does not confer on them equality of moral worth with humans, much less divine-like status. While anthropomorphism can be useful, we should guard against misrepresenting artificial systems as if they were humans.

We are conscious that our creativity is both a gift and a responsibility, and that the tools we form in turn form us, including our cognition and moral reasoning.

We celebrate the ways AI can aid understanding, improve well-being, democratise opportunity, enhance creativity, support efficiency, and empower humanity in our shared vocation to develop knowledge, advance human flourishing, and enrich culture.

We observe that AI can offer pathways towards or away from knowledge of reality. We believe that design choices around data and algorithms involve implicit and explicit moral and ethical decisions, noting especially the issues of truthfulness and transparency.

We recognise a responsibility to sustain and care for the natural world, and to avoid forms of development that impose reckless or irreversible harm.

We regret the ways AI has been used to erode attention, confuse understanding of reality, misuse data, displace dignified work, and contribute to new burdens in societies and the natural world.

We recognise that work on AI techniques, systems, and products requires the ongoing exercise of judgement for technical choices made amid uncertainty, with limited information and agency. It also requires judgement about how we present to others the choices we make, and the impact of those choices on the nature, imperfections, biases, influences, and limits of AI systems. Our judgements in these matters have consequences for humanity, and we commit to giving serious attention to the moral reasoning these judgements require. When faced with a conflict between conscience and the demands of our profession, we will exercise wisdom in giving voice to conscience. We acknowledge the reality of wide variation in individual agency to effect change or speak out.



Glass to Class

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CHRISTIAN COLLEGES STILL MATTER

NOW THEY MUST PROVE IT

With

Dr. James Steen

Irene Neller

Bryce Chapman



TO BORROW A PHRASE MADE POPULAR BY PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN IN THE 1980'S: "TRUST - BUT VERIFY."

That sums up a significant perceptual shift over the last decade on whether students and families most likely to be a great fit for Christian higher education are likely to pursue it, according to a major collaborative research study released earlier in 2026.

While findings (see page 27 for details) affirmed the enduring relevance of Christian higher education as interest among prospective families remains strong, it also confirms an ironic challenge—prospective students and parents are no longer likely to make the investment on faith alone. Students and families now evaluate colleges earlier, more independently, and with sharper focus on affordability, outcomes, and lived experience. Misperceptions—particularly around cost and career preparation—often shape decisions before institutions even have the opportunity to engage with prospective families.

What does this mean for those schools competing in an environment already constrained by rising costs and a shrinking pool of college age students? We asked three professionals at CCCU institutions to reflect on what they learned and how it applies to making the best case for the value they can offer.

What one (or more) finding really surprised you?

Irene Neller, VP for Enrollment, Marketing, and Communications, Westmont College:

The study's findings, compared with previous research conducted in 2000 and 2009, demonstrate just how significantly parent and student attitudes and behaviors have changed—not only in what they are looking for in a college, but in how they conduct the search and, importantly, who is influencing the decision. In all my years in Christian higher education, this study validates and affirms the radical shift I am experiencing firsthand in working with today's parents and students.

Dr. James Steen, VP for Enrollment Management and Marketing, Houston Christian University:

Considering the fact the prospective students surveyed had already demonstrated a propensity or potential fit for a Christian institution, there are definitely some concerning results that should be on our radar as enrollment managers. Obviously cost (at 49%) being "the biggest barrier" is not surprising; however, "too many rules" being number two (at 39%) is an interesting finding suggesting that a significant number of students today perceive Christian higher education as being restrictive. This was followed by "too conservative" (at 32%) and "not diverse enough" (at 29%). In this day and age, these responses surprise me, but clearly that perception exists. So, we need to communicate clearly about actual experiences of current students at our institutions.

Bryce Chapman, SVP for Enrollment, Marketing and University Communications, Missouri Baptist University:

I think what surprised me most was just the stark contrast between the findings of this report and the last report 16 years ago. Families today are far more informed, discerning, and sophisticated when it comes to higher education. They have access to more data, more comparisons and more firsthand perspectives than ever before, and they are no longer willing to spend significant money on college simply because institutions "tell" them it is valuable. And I don't think any of this is negative. In fact, I think it leaves leaders in Christian higher education with a clarion call—now is the time to do the hard work and "show" (not merely "tell") the world the value of Christian higher education that we see play out every day.

At Missouri Baptist University (MBU), that challenge is daily shaping how we think about our responsibility to prospective students and families. That means being more transparent about scholarships and net cost, more intentional about communicating career outcomes, and more specific about the ways our faculty, programs, internships, partnerships, and alumni help prepare students for meaningful work and purposeful lives.

What one (or more) data point confirmed your own experience recruiting in the current market for Christian higher education?

Steen: No surprise that parents are still the number one influencer(s) and play a significant role in the college search process for their students. Not only are we recruiting students, but we have to engage their parents as well, maybe even more so as a Christian institution.

I experienced this firsthand recently with a good family friend of ours. Their daughter visited a Christian university and came away with perceptions that it was way too restrictive for her (curfews, visitation hours,

dress code) so she also eliminated two other Christian institutions where she had been admitted and focused on a much larger state university. Over the summer, the daughter started having second thoughts because that state institution had a reputation as a party school (even though she was planning to room with a friend from her youth group back home). So, I strongly encouraged her parents to take their daughter to visit that other Christian institution over the summer and convinced them it was not too late. They visited that other Christian institution and by the end of the day, she deposited and planned to enroll there. Parental influence made a difference.

Neller: At Westmont, parents are increasingly focused on career preparation, outcomes and return on investment, while also seeking generous financial aid packages, regardless of what the FAFSA wealth index may suggest. Students, meanwhile, are looking for community, belonging and the "fun" side of the traditional college experience. The integration of faith and learning still matters, but increasingly, students are willing to compromise on that value when cost becomes a determining factor. I find that disturbing, but it is not surprising when you consider the broader societal and media narratives about the value of a college degree and what higher education is expected to deliver.

Chapman: For me, the findings surrounding affordability strongly confirm what we are experiencing at MBU. But I do think it is important to emphasize that the data points to a perception problem, not a true affordability problem, for Christian higher education. In fact, according to the report, 55% of inquiry students ruled out a college because of cost, compared with 35% in 2009. This tells me that today's students are smart and are doing their homework long before they inquire. Again, this is an opportunity to tell our story better and earlier so that families don't have to wait until they receive award packages to realize Christian higher education is affordable and often less expensive than our public competitors.



So much has changed in how students and families search, how they consume information, and how they make decisions. The delivery methods have changed. The searchability has changed. The influencers have changed. But there are also some surprising findings that affirm something I believe deeply: storytelling still matters. We simply have to tell our stories well, tell them authentically, and tell them in more places.



How is this new research informing your marketing or recruiting strategies?

Neller: We have zeroed in on three key messaging and programming priorities: outcomes, affordability and community—creating a true sense of belonging. This new research, coupled with the Chronicle of Higher Education's December 2025 issue—Students Are Changing. Can Colleges Keep Up? —reinforces what we are seeing in real time. Namely, that these are the factors which increasingly matter most to parents and students as they choose a college. So much has changed in how students and families search, how they consume information, and how they make decisions. The delivery methods have changed. The searchability has changed. The influencers have changed. But there are also some surprising findings that affirm something I believe deeply: storytelling still matters. We simply have to tell our stories well, tell them authentically, and tell them in more places. For Christian colleges in particular, we have an extraordinary story to tell—not simply about a degree, but about the kind of person that degree helps form. We need to keep telling the stories of our graduates and the difference they are making in every sphere of society they serve. The methods may be changing, but the power of a compelling story—and the significance of a life well formed—have not.

Chapman: At Missouri Baptist University, these findings confirm we need to be demonstrating value, not just talking about it. This means communicating scholarships and likely net cost earlier. For example our main campus enrollment counselors provide customized cost estimate worksheets during campus visits. MBU Online enrollment counselors also provide cost estimates and are cross-trained on many financial aid-related functions. We are committed to showing career outcomes by academic program in much more transparent ways than ever before, and highlighting internships, employer relationships, and alumni success. We want to feature "unpolished" authentic student stories on our social media channels. We need to invest significantly in our

recruitment experience for most students. And in making the right first impression, we are rolling out the “navy” carpet when families visit MBU. Among many other things, this has meant adopting a campus wide “Hospitality Playbook,” which provides employees with practical expectations when it comes to guest interactions. It sets a standard and instills confidence in our employees as they seek to serve others.

Steen: Students are finding information about higher education through more channels today than we could even begin to fathom a decade or two ago. Of course, we have to aggressively manage our website to ensure optimization for Google and other search platforms, but AI is quickly changing all of that. Search engine optimization (SEO) is no longer enough. We need to have AEO (answer engine optimization) and GEO (generative engine optimization) to shift from traditional search rankings to AI-generated answers and search results. For example, being on page one of a Google search—the gold standard we all strived for even just a few years ago—does not move the needle as much in this age of AI results that often lead to zero-clicks. This online behavior is rapidly evolving with the new technology, and as Christian institutions,

we have to stay on top of this trend, or we will get left behind. We can’t assume prospective families will find us organically.

Is there a set of data or a qualitative question you would want to cover in future research?

Chapman: I would welcome any research that more closely examines how families come to terms with affordability. We often hear that cost is a barrier, but I would like to better understand the journey: when families begin forming assumptions, what precisely causes families to self-select out of the search process, which messages or experiences help them best understand net price, and what ultimately gives them confidence that the investment is manageable and worthwhile.

Neller: Yes! Three in particular. First, discover deeper reasons and tipping points that cause parents and students to compromise faith for cost or brand name prestige. And second, more research on search engines, especially when it comes to AI – what language draws students and parents in or turns them off? What offends them and kills the interest? Understanding their digital preferences would help us discover their invisible journey. So

much stealth search is occurring and I want it “exposed,” so to speak. And third, it certainly would be helpful to have year-to-year insight on the role of the church as an influencer. Does the church still influence college choice? This used to be a strong indicator for faith fit but not nearly as strong as it was in 2009 or pre-pandemic years, and terms such as “evangelical” or “Christ-centered” often carry nuanced or precarious perceptions. And if these questions could be answered categorically by gender and diversity, that would be ideal!

Steen: From a qualitative perspective, it would be interesting to probe prospective students and parents about how they weigh the spiritual/mission fit of choosing a Christian college as opposed to the cost and ROI of choosing a public, secular institution that may have a stronger academic reputation, a bigger brand, and even cost less. And as more institutions deploy direct admission strategies, I am also curious about qualitative feedback from direct admit enrollees to research if removing the application as a “barrier to entry” changes how they experience their college of choice. **A**



Irene Neller

Irene Neller became Westmont College’s first vice president for enrollment, marketing and communications in December 2017 after serving 26 years at Biola University and four years at Fuller Theological Seminary, building and redefining new functions of strategic enrollment and marketing. She is passionate about supporting diversity growth in higher education and started the annual Advancing Women in Leadership (AWIL) national conference with the CCCU (first offered in 2016). She has also chaired the CCCU’s national committee for communication officers. Irene graduated from Bethany College with a degree in communications and earned a master’s in communications promotions management at CSU Fullerton.



Bryce Chapman

Bryce Chapman serves as Senior Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and University Communications at Missouri Baptist University. During his 22 years at MBU, Bryce has helped advance the University’s enrollment, visibility and commitment to creating an exceptional student experience. He holds an MA in Media Communication from Webster University and BA in Technical Journalism from Colorado State University.



Dr. James Steen

Dr. James Steen is the vice president for enrollment management & marketing at Houston Christian University, where freshman enrollment has quadrupled during his tenure, from 268 in fall 2006 to 1,075 in fall 2026. Steen is also a senior associate consultant with Encoura + RNL completing more than 100 consultations with at least 20 campuses to improve their admissions, recruitment, marketing, and strategic enrollment planning efforts. Previously, Steen served as assistant vice president for admission and enrollment services at Baylor University. He holds a PhD from Azusa Pacific University and an MBA and BA from Baylor University.

We simply have to tell our stories well, tell them authentically, and tell them in more places. For Christian colleges in particular, we have an extraordinary story to tell—

—not simply about a degree, but about the kind of person that degree helps form

THE MARKET STUDY RESEARCH REPORT

The updated study was conducted in 2025 by JM Partner Solutions and commissioned by the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU) and the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals (NACCAP). The project is the fourth of its kind in the last forty years—last conducted in 2009—and documents a starkly different landscape for Christian higher education. When the CCCCU first commissioned comprehensive market research in 1986, the world looked very different. Christian institutions faced questions about faith and fit, but families generally trusted that a Christian education was a sound investment in character formation and community. Today, families think differently about colleges as recent research has shown only 35% of Americans believe college is very important—down from 75% in 2009, according to the most recent Gallup poll on this topic. Implicit trust in the value of higher education has eroded, and college choice is now shaped by digital first impressions, heightened scrutiny of affordability and return on investment, and shifting cultural attitudes toward faith and politics.

MOST NOTEWORTHY AMONG THE FINDINGS:

Students are most often introduced to Christian colleges through their peers— 70% of students report knowing someone who attended a Christian college, and 76% say that person is a peer—placing greater weight on personal endorsement than institutional messaging when it comes to awareness or initial interest.

Parents still play an outsized role in the college search process. Three-quarters of parents report that they research colleges with their child or lead the research, and three-quarters of inquiry students say their parents are at least somewhat influential in where they enroll. In fact, 52% of inquiry students stated their parents have steered them toward or away from certain colleges or universities. Parents, more than students, focus on affordability, academic quality, and safety. Cost assumptions cause students to drop out early, but those assumptions often reflect family budget discussions.

Families understanding—or misperceiving—cost at the outset can make or break a school’s chances. Fifty-five percent of inquiry students have ruled out a college because of cost, up from 35% in the most recent 2009 study. Half of inquiry students say Christian colleges feel too expensive and cite cost as their top concern. These assumptions often form before students have any contact with the institution as families equate “private” with “unaffordable,” especially when compared to public universities’ lower sticker prices. Parents and students often lack clarity on net price, available aid, and the true cost of attendance. As a result, many disengage quietly rather than requesting information. Conversely, students who make it through the admissions funnel often find that Christian colleges provide better financial support than they expected.

Students today are more practical than ever before. They want outcomes from their education. Preparing for a successful career or graduate school is very or extremely important to 91% of students, the highest rated attribute in the college decision process. Parents echo this priority with 94% stating career outcomes are very or extremely important. However, only 26% of inquiry stage students strongly agree that Christian colleges prepare students for careers just as well as nonreligious colleges—a gap that likely indicates misperception and opportunity for more effective communication and marketing from institutions to better demonstrate proof of return on investment. Christian colleges have robust career development programs, but they must show how faith, academics, and professional preparation intersect.

Community is the most consistent and credible differentiator for Christian colleges. Across all audiences, this attribute emerges as the most durable strength of Christian colleges. Among students who recently made their college choice, 61% cited a faith-based culture and 35% cited a sense of community and belonging as key reasons they chose their institution. Small classes, caring faculty, and supportive peer networks create an environment where students feel known and these factors, along with campus safety, significantly shape parent opinion and expectations as well. Social listening—conducted to analyze more than 1 million posts across TikTok, Instagram, X, Reddit, and other platforms—shows community as the most common theme in positive posts, appearing across conversations about academics, athletics, faith, and campus life. Community does more than create a positive atmosphere; it strengthens perceived value.

When students feel a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to persist, succeed, and recommend their institution. Community also mediates other concerns. Students who experience authentic community are more confident in outcomes and alumni are more likely to feel their education was worth the investment.

BACKGROUND ON THE STUDY

More than 60 NACCAP and CCCCU member institutions participated in the research, providing historical institutional data and outreach lists from which JM Partner Solutions recruited representative survey respondents and focus group participants from inquiry students, parents, alumni, and guidance counselors. Recruitment also included student outreach through ZeeMee, one of the project’s sponsors. The research team supplemented primary data with secondary sources, including a detailed competitive landscape analysis.

JM Partner Solutions is a higher education advisory firm that partners with colleges and universities to strengthen enrollment, marketing, and institutional strategy. NACCAP serves more than 400 member institutions, including K-12, undergraduate, graduate, seminary and degree completion programs, as well as associate members from around the world.



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FLOURISHING LEAVES FOOTPRINTS

RETHINKING HOW WE SUPPORT THE
WHOLE STUDENT

*By ORU's Healthy Academic Communities
Research Group*

What if we've been measuring the wrong things?

For decades, colleges have tracked student achievement through test scores, GPAs, and personality traits like grit, resilience, etc. These metrics are helpful. But on their own, they don't tell the whole story, especially for institutions committed to educating the whole person. Our research at Oral Roberts University suggests that the physical body, often overlooked in academic analysis, may hold some of the clearest evidence of student flourishing. Not metaphorically, but measurably.

Over the past ten years, our team has collected and analyzed more than 15,000 biometric, behavioral, and academic data points from undergraduates from every major. Across a dozen published studies [1-12], we've examined how step counts, resting heart rate, grip strength, sleep-wake preferences, personality traits, and lifestyle patterns predict academic outcomes like GPA, retention, stress resilience, and even weight change.

The findings have been consistent.

Students who walk more each day are not just healthier; they also tend to earn higher grades and are more likely to stay enrolled. Those who sleep in alignment with their biological clocks report greater emotional stability and perform better in class. A lower resting heart rate is associated with reduced stress load. And yes, even something as simple as handgrip strength has been linked to academic persistence.

As the data accumulated, a deeper, holistic pattern emerged: **student flourishing is not just cognitive and spiritual, it is also physical.** In our setting, where spiritual life is integrated into the daily rhythms of campus, from required chapel services and discipleship groups to leadership mentoring and faith-infused classrooms, students are constantly invited to grow in identity and purpose. But what we found is that this formation is reinforced when students also steward their bodies well.

This shouldn't surprise us. Scripture doesn't treat the body as separate from the soul.

We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, so not in isolation, but as an integrated whole. In our research, this theological truth found practical expression; we saw that students who were thriving academically were often those who showed consistency and attentiveness in physical areas: walking more, sleeping better, making healthy food choices, exercising moderately. In fact, these simple physical patterns often predicted student outcomes better than standardized test scores or demographic factors.

Importantly, this is not about idolizing fitness or reducing people to metrics. It's about recognizing that flourishing, in a Christian liberal arts context, involves the body just as much as the mind and spirit. And if we are serious about forming resilient, purpose-driven graduates who can serve and impact the world, we should also be serious about the environments and habits that sustain them.

What makes this possible, in part, is the intentional design of a campus culture that integrates spiritual and physical life. At our university, chapel is not an extracurricular event. It's a required, communal practice that reinforces belonging, alignment, and spiritual growth. Students know they are part of something bigger, not just academically, but in terms of calling and identity. This sense of shared formation provides a foundation that supports not only faith development but also behavioral stability and emotional health.

Our research has shown that these overlapping domains, spiritual, physical, psychological, and academic, are not separate silos. They are a system. When students are grounded in faith, engaged in movement, and surrounded by a community that prioritizes wholeness, they flourish. And the best part? Much of this can be measured, tracked, and intentionally cultivated.

For Christian colleges facing growing pressure to demonstrate value, relevance, and outcomes, this is good news. We don't need to abandon our mission or mimic secular models of success. Instead, we can lean deeper into our theological distinctives and pair them with behavioral insights. We can foster spiritual growth and physical stewardship. We can use data to support discipleship. We can form whole students, and have the evidence to show that it matters.

Because in the end, flourishing isn't just a feeling. It's a pattern we can see. It's a way of living that takes root in spirit, mind, and body.

And yes, flourishing leaves footprints. A

When students are grounded in faith, engaged in movement, and surrounded by a community that prioritizes wholeness, they flourish. And the best part? Much of this can be measured, tracked, and intentionally cultivated.

ORU's Healthy Academic Communities Research Group:

Myra J. Bloom - University Libraries
Scarelt R. Jost - Health, Leisure and Sport Sciences
Andrew S.I.D. Lang - Computing and Mathematics
Nancy V. Mankin - Health, Leisure and Sport Sciences
Philip P. Nelson - Behavioural Science
Enrique F. Valderrama Araya - Computing and Mathematics

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A group of five diverse farmers are seen from behind, walking through an apple orchard. They are carrying wooden baskets filled with red apples. In the background, a tractor is visible, and the sun is setting over a range of mountains, creating a warm, golden glow. The orchard rows are filled with trees laden with fruit.

NEW PRESIDENTS INSTITUTE

EQUIPPED TO EXCEL TOGETHER

By Dr. Chip Pollard

I've heard it said that Peter Drucker once identified the university presidency as one of the four most difficult jobs in the world, right alongside the U.S. president, a hospital CEO, and the pastor of a large church. If that is even half-true, it certainly explains why, the moment a person accepts the call to lead a campus, they are inundated with invitations to "new president" conferences. We all recognize we are going to need a little help getting started.

The Harvard School of Graduate Education offers a well-known, expensive (over \$10,000) summer seminar, that can lead to a certificate for the new president (which feels a bit like extra credit since all the participants already have the job). EAB, a top higher education vendor, also hosts a conference in July that is free, though vendor conferences are never fully free. The Council of Independent Colleges hosts an excellent new president workshop in sunny places such as Florida or California in early January, which means a new president has a few months of initial experience to bring to the gathering and can enjoy a warm setting in midwinter.

Each of these programs has similar sessions on governance, board relations, finances, fundraising, crisis management, leadership teams, government relations, enrollment, strategic planning, and university mission. All of these topics are important, but the breadth of institutions represented tends to make the discussions a bit generic. The CCCU's New Presidents Institute is uniquely valuable because the participants share a common Christian commitment, which orients every discussion.

CCCU has offered its NPI on an annual or bi-annual basis for at least 30 years. My wife Carey and I couldn't find someone to watch our four young children when we were newly hired at John Brown University 23 years ago, so we didn't go, which was a loss for us. I made up for that loss by meeting with experienced presidents at conferences or in their offices during my first couple of years. They were all so generous with their time that I committed to pay it forward when the opportunity arose.

So, Carey and I were quick to say yes when we were asked to be a mentor president and spouse for the CCCU NPI in 2010, and we have served in that capacity multiple times since. Those institutes have brought us great joy and gratitude as we have met the varied, talented, and faithful people that God has called to serve.

The CCCU's NPI covers most of the same topics in a welcoming retreat setting, but the conversations are different because they are infused with the Christian missions and cultures of each CCCU institution. It is one thing to raise money by inviting people to a skybox at a football game and quite another thing to ask a donor to invest in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual discipleship of the next generation of the church. Making a change in your leadership team or instituting a reduction-in-force looks different when you recognize that all people are made in the image of God. Engaging governmental officials about deeply held religious beliefs

is different than asking them to increase Pell grants. These missional conversations are essential, thoughtful, rich, and beneficial for both the new presidents and spouses.

The CCCU NPI has always encouraged spouses to attend, and whether a president is married or single, all presidents need to sustain important family relationships, spiritual vitality, and life-giving friendships in these roles. We share practical tips (consider entertaining university guests at lunch so that you can reserve evenings for family or personal commitments) and common struggles (how do you worship in church when people want to engage you about the university). People often nod or laugh in recognition during these sessions as they realize they are not alone in these challenges.

Indeed, as is true at almost any CCCU gathering, it is the relationships, even budding friendships, that are the sweetest outcome from NPI. A university president is without peer in his or her organization, so it is deeply encouraging to develop peer relationships with other presidents and presidential couples that share a faith in Christ and desire to serve faculty, staff and students. It is encouraging even for those of us who have been doing this work for many years. I had one new president tell me that she was surprised and heartened that I still seemed to have the "joy of the Lord" after being a university president for 23 years. I was grateful for her compliment and recognized that it was true, in no small part, because of the deep friendships that Carey and I have developed through the work of the CCCU.

If you have the opportunity to join a CCCU commission, attend a Leadership Development Institute, or even attend a future NPI, I encourage you to say yes. The experience will enrich your life and better your work through the CCCU colleagues you meet, learn from, and befriend. 



DR. CHIP POLLARD

Dr. Chip Pollard has served as president of John Brown University since July 2004. During his tenure, JBU has been blessed to receive over \$385 million in gifts and grants, to grow its endowment to over \$200 million, and to grow to over 2,000 students. JBU has been recognized as an outstanding university by outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, Time, Chronicle of Higher Education, and others. Dr. Pollard has served on many nonprofit boards, including the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and Wheaton College. Chip, and his wife, Carey, love working with college students, including through hosting a class in their home, regularly attending chapel, musical performances, art openings, and sporting events, and informally mentoring students over lunch or a cup of coffee.

CHRISTIAN COLLEGE PRESIDENT QUICK FACTS

2006
2022
The average college presidency has shrunk from 8.5 years (2006) to 5.9 years (2022).

55%

of presidents plan to step down within five years and most are not retiring.



36 of roughly 150 CCCU schools changed presidents between 2020 and 2024.



39 long-serving CCCU presidents (7+ years) are approaching the typical transition window.



Data courtesy of CarterBaldwin Executive Search, a trusted partner of the CCCU.

Why Are Colleges and Universities Outsourcing Their Investment Operations?

One of the biggest challenges for colleges and universities is navigating a complex financial ecosystem while servicing the investments that finance their missions. Limited resources, investment strategy know-how and operations management all present barriers to operating in these challenging waters. Given these complexities, it is becoming more common for institutions of higher learning to consider engaging the services of an **Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO)**.

What is an OCIO?

An OCIO is a service provider that performs investment management-related functions on behalf of its clients. Organizations often choose an OCIO to help cut costs, improve their investment program's oversight and governance, capitalize on their provider's scale, and free up capacity.

How OCIOs compare to other investment models

In a traditional investment model that does not utilize an OCIO, boards or investment committees are responsible for these investment functions.

Adding investment-focused staff is also an option available to organizations seeking help with their fiduciary responsibilities, but the costs of developing a full-fledged investment team internally can be quite high. By contrast, in an OCIO model, a third-party provider takes on many of the routine investment decision-making responsibilities.

Another alternative is an investment advisory service or consultant. Investment consultants provide several of the same functions as OCIOs, but they do not offer discretionary portfolio management services. OCIO services are closer to all inclusive, covering everything from fund design to manager selection and often-times daily performance reporting.

Growing interest in OCIO services

The OCIO model continues to gain in popularity as more investment committees recognize its potential to increase the effectiveness of their investment programs.

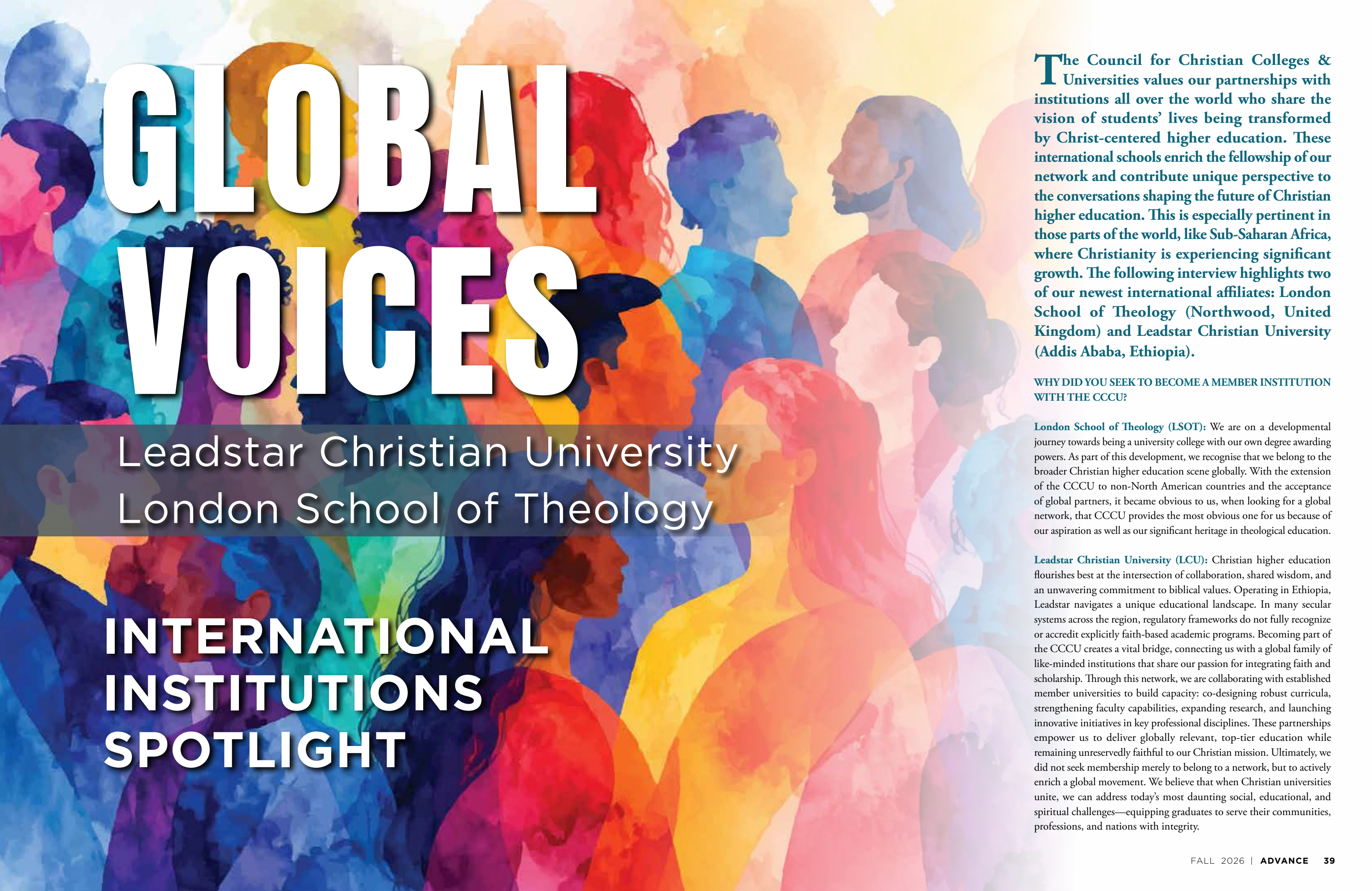
Which OCIO provider is right for you?

Start by defining your specific investment goals identifying the functions that will benefit most from outsourcing, and determining if your institution's mission aligns with that of a prospective OCIO.

If your college or university is considering an OCIO or assessing its current OCIO provider, Wespath Institutional Investments (Wespath) may be an option. Wespath is a faith-based, nonprofit investment firm that provides OCIO services exclusively to nonprofit organizations, including faith-based colleges and universities. To learn more about Wespath's OCIO services, visit **Wespath.com** or contact us at **847.866.4100**.

Wespath

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENTS



GLOBAL VOICES

Leadstar Christian University
London School of Theology

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SPOTLIGHT

The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities values our partnerships with institutions all over the world who share the vision of students' lives being transformed by Christ-centered higher education. These international schools enrich the fellowship of our network and contribute unique perspective to the conversations shaping the future of Christian higher education. This is especially pertinent in those parts of the world, like Sub-Saharan Africa, where Christianity is experiencing significant growth. The following interview highlights two of our newest international affiliates: London School of Theology (Northwood, United Kingdom) and Leadstar Christian University (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).

WHY DID YOU SEEK TO BECOME A MEMBER INSTITUTION WITH THE CCCU?

London School of Theology (LSOT): We are on a developmental journey towards being a university college with our own degree awarding powers. As part of this development, we recognise that we belong to the broader Christian higher education scene globally. With the extension of the CCCU to non-North American countries and the acceptance of global partners, it became obvious to us, when looking for a global network, that CCCU provides the most obvious one for us because of our aspiration as well as our significant heritage in theological education.

Leadstar Christian University (LCU): Christian higher education flourishes best at the intersection of collaboration, shared wisdom, and an unwavering commitment to biblical values. Operating in Ethiopia, Leadstar navigates a unique educational landscape. In many secular systems across the region, regulatory frameworks do not fully recognize or accredit explicitly faith-based academic programs. Becoming part of the CCCU creates a vital bridge, connecting us with a global family of like-minded institutions that share our passion for integrating faith and scholarship. Through this network, we are collaborating with established member universities to build capacity: co-designing robust curricula, strengthening faculty capabilities, expanding research, and launching innovative initiatives in key professional disciplines. These partnerships empower us to deliver globally relevant, top-tier education while remaining unreservedly faithful to our Christian mission. Ultimately, we did not seek membership merely to belong to a network, but to actively enrich a global movement. We believe that when Christian universities unite, we can address today's most daunting social, educational, and spiritual challenges—equipping graduates to serve their communities, professions, and nations with integrity.

HOW DOES YOUR COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS, OR ACCESS TO CCCU RESOURCES, STRENGTHEN YOUR MISSION AND IMPACT?

LSOT: We appreciate that we have an enormous amount that we can learn from others in Christian higher education, as well as enriching others in turn in their own distinctive educational mission. The CCCU network provides the opportunity to collaborate with other institutions, for example with semester abroad programmes, or through collaborative research projects. We are committed to both research and professional practice informed teaching. By collaborating with institutions in the CCCU that also have these commitments, we hope there will be significant levels of synergy that will benefit all parties.

LCU: At Leadstar, we believe lasting impact is built through authentic relationships. As a rapidly growing Christian university, our mission is to cultivate leaders who are academically brilliant, ethically grounded, and driven by a heart for service. Access to

CCCU collective wisdom of peer institutions allows us to expand our institutional capacity and elevate student support. We particularly value walking alongside universities that have successfully navigated institutional growth challenges similar to our own. Above all, our partnership reaffirms that Christ-centered higher education is a collective calling: together, we are equipping the next generation to serve God faithfully in an ever-changing world.

WHAT IS AN INSTITUTIONAL GOAL YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? IN WHAT WAYS DO/COULD YOU SEE THE CCCU AND FELLOW MEMBER INSTITUTIONS HELPING WITH THAT GOAL?

LSOT: We are looking to develop a major research collaboration that aligns with our research strategy around our key themes of (1) Church and society, (2) theology, spirituality and formation and (3) evangelicalism and ecumenism. CCCU and fellow members could help us to create this important strategy network and provide resources (facilities, travel funds and workshop and conference funds) to

enrich and strengthen the impact of research and professional practice informed teaching at the institutions involved.

LCU: Over the next five years, Leadstar Christian University aims to solidify its position as one of Ethiopia's premier Christ-centered universities—distinguished for academic excellence, digital innovation, servant leadership, and real-world impact. To realize this vision, we are actively expanding high-quality academic programs aligned with emerging national and regional economic and workforce needs, elevating our research output and scholarly contributions, advancing flexible, technology-enabled dynamic learning platforms, and deepening community transformation through social entrepreneurship and ethical leadership. The CCCU network is an invaluable partner in this journey. Through collaborative research, faculty and student exchanges, curriculum co-development, and executive mentoring, CCCU peer institutions can help us scale our impact while keeping us anchored in our foundational mission. 



AT A GLANCE

LEADSTAR CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Founded in 2016

Total Enrolled Students

17,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students

Global Alumni Network

9,000+ students

Flagship Academic Programs

Theology & Biblical Studies; Transformational Leadership; Business & Management; Community Development; Peace & Conflict Studies

Strategic Priorities

- Flexible and Distance Education**
Expanding flexible online platforms to make quality higher education accessible to working adults and students in rural regions
- Research and Innovation**
Launching interdisciplinary centers focused on national development priorities, local economic growth, and governance.
- Faculty Development and Mobility**
Partnering with international institutions to fund joint research, advanced degree completion, and teaching exchanges for core faculty.
- Spiritual and Leadership Formation**
Embedding structured mentorship, ethical training, and career readiness into every academic program.
- Community-Driven Initiatives**
Directing student capstone projects and faculty research toward local civic needs, sustainable development, and regional peacebuilding.
- Global Quality Alignment**
Continuously updating internal quality assurance protocols to match international higher education benchmarks.

LONDON SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Northwood, United Kingdom
Founded in 1943

Total Enrolled Students

337 students

Global Alumni Network

3,000 students

Flagship Academic Programs

BA (Hon) Theology, BA (Hon) Theology and Counselling (accredited by the British Association of Counselling Practitioners), MA Biblical Studies, MPhil/PhD Programme.

Strategic Priorities

- Secure Teaching Degree Awarding Powers from the Office for Students, the regulator for higher education in England, and submit an application for Research Degree Awarding Powers.
- Develop LSOT's educational offering by introducing validated, bite-sized lifelong learning modules alongside its validated degree programmes, taking advantage of the UK Government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement.
- Explore strategic partnerships with organisations that share LSOT's ethos and contribute to its mission of forming disciples, resourcing churches, and impacting society.



ONE MISSION, MANY CAMPUSES

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT ACROSS
CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Dr. Ted Song

Iknew it was one of the most significant moments of my life. Worshipping God alongside 5,000 people from over 200 countries at the 2024 Lausanne Congress in Korea, I was overwhelmed with joy—joy that brought tears to my eyes. While I learned so many things by attending the congress as part of the North American delegation, I was chiefly impacted by seeing God at work all over the world. Yes, God has blessed me and my family, the people I love, and the places where I live and work. It was also a great reminder that God deeply cares about every nation, including the people in countries I barely knew about. He truly wants to see all people on earth experience the love and grace that only comes through faith in Jesus.

So it is not surprising that the gospel message continues to prevail around the world, along with the growing interest in integrating faith and life, including educating the next generation of believers. The CCCU community has also grown more global as we have welcomed more non-U.S. member institutions into our organization. This is wonderful news worth celebrating, as we have so much to learn from one another. Still, there is much work to be done, and I hope that we can be more intentional in developing relationships across institutions worldwide.

During my seminary days, I found Acts 17 one of the most compelling passages in the Bible. This is where Paul reasoned both in the synagogue and in the marketplace in Athens; he understood his audience and their cultural and historical context. While he proclaimed the same gospel message of Jesus Christ, he delivered it in a way uniquely suited to his listeners. Paul's knowledge and experience across cultures shone at that moment, and I believe this is more relevant than ever in today's world as we engage with people from various cultures—not only abroad but also in our own communities.

While international Christian universities vary in age, they tend to be younger than their U.S. counterparts. One of the most valuable things international members can gain from CCCU membership is the experience U.S. schools have accumulated in integrating faith and learning. This work begins in the classroom and extends well beyond it, encompassing hiring policies, programming for spiritual formation, and the development of students' character through residence life. These efforts shape how students think about knowledge, human flourishing, and their role in God's kingdom. Although U.S. institutions have not found all the answers, the effort that has unfolded over many decades—including mistakes and missteps—can serve as a valuable resource for younger Christian universities.

These efforts shape how students think about knowledge, human flourishing, and their role in God's kingdom.

At the same time, this is a wonderful opportunity for U.S. institutions to learn from international members and collaborate with them to help students become global leaders. Seeing how the integration of faith and learning differs across cultural and historical contexts can deepen our own understanding of integration and benefit all the students we teach. Furthermore, as we seek to develop global citizens capable of leading people inter-culturally and internationally, collaboration with partners abroad is essential. Together, the CCCU community can produce future leaders with a perspective and understanding of the Global Church, and we should cherish this opportunity, as such collaboration was more difficult years ago.

So what steps can we take to strengthen global education within the Christian higher education community? First, we should pray for our sister Christian universities around the world as they do the good work of educating the whole person for God's kingdom. Second, we should stay engaged with the world within our own context. This may sound daunting, but it could be as simple as hosting a meal for international students on your campus—being curious about their experiences, listening to how they are processing studying abroad, and learning about what is happening in their home countries. The insights gained from a deepened relationship can be remarkable. Lastly, we should consider developing a deeper and broader relationship with universities abroad. This may include establishing exchange programs, arranging joint mission trips, or having a faculty member spend their sabbatical at a sister Christian university abroad. The CCCU Global Engagement Commission was recently established for this very reason, and I look forward to seeing our community work more closely together to ultimately help our students think and live more globally.

Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations for His kingdom, and we have the privilege of participating in this great commission. Yet this is not a task we can accomplish alone. We will have far greater opportunities to fulfill it when we collaborate globally, crossing cultures and boundaries, so that our students better understand the global context and become the next disciple-makers of all nations wherever they go. May the Lord bless our work in equipping our students as global leaders, and may we continue to draw closer together and seek His guidance as we pursue greater collaboration. **A**



Dr. Ted Song

Dr. Ted Song serves as Chief Innovation Officer and Chief Intercultural Engagement Officer at John Brown University, where he began as a professor in 2012. Trained in engineering (Ph.D.), theology (M.Div.), and law (M.S.L.), he serves as a Peer Reviewer Team Chair for the Higher Learning Commission, has chaired the CCCU Commission on Kingdom Diversity and Biblical Unity, and was an inaugural CCCU Presidential Fellow.

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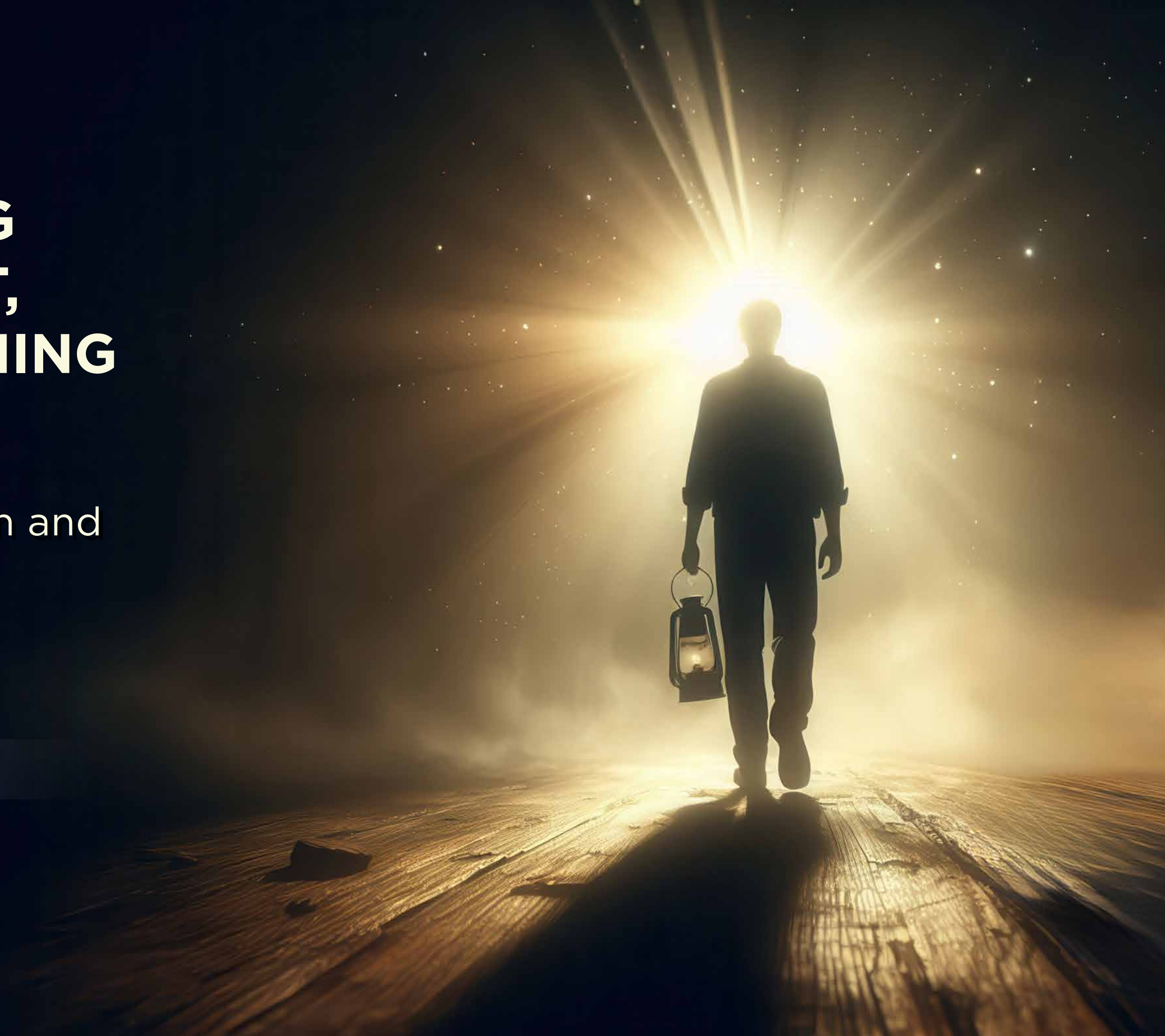


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STEWARDED THE MOMENT, STRENGTHENING THE MISSION

Why Prioritize Faith and
Learning Now?

By Noah J. Toly



Higher education in the United States is being remade before our eyes. Polarization, shifting government regulations, changing accreditation expectations, global conflict, a jagged demographic cliff, and the rise of artificial intelligence are reshaping academic programs, straining business models, and sending strategic plans back to the drawing board.

Our experience of this moment goes by many names – disruption, “the great upheaval,” VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). Whatever we call it, navigating it will require unusual wisdom and focus.

That raises a fair question: amid so many urgent demands on our attention and resources, why should the CCCU and its members prioritize the integration of faith and learning now?

By the integration of faith and learning, we mean teaching, learning, and scholarship from a distinctly Christian perspective. It’s education that understands every subject in the light of God’s Word and God’s work in the world. But it doesn’t stop there – it invites academic insights into our conversation with our deepest Christian convictions in ways that also enrich our faith.

That may not sound like an answer to our biggest challenges, but three reasons make it indispensable in our current moment.

INTEGRATION ANCHORS US TO WHAT ENDURES

The institutions we love were founded and sustained with great attention to the particularities of their own seasons of crisis and opportunity, and stewarding them today requires the same discerning attention to the particularities of our moment that their founders gave to theirs. So it is not only understandable – but basic stewardship – to pay attention to our changing landscape.

Even so, seasons of change should prompt us to anchor in our enduring purpose. For Christian higher education, that enduring purpose is reflected in the integration of faith and learning.

To some, this may seem like an odd claim. A programmatic emphasis on “integration of faith and learning” emerged only in the mid-twentieth century as an answer to a specific problem. Parts of the academy had walled off faith and parts of the church had walled off the life of the mind, impoverishing both. The integration of faith and learning meant to reconnect the two, equipping faculty trained at the highest levels of their academic disciplines with the theological depth, rigor, and sophistication to see those disciplines in biblical perspective.

At the same time, integration did not invent a new paradigm; it retrieved an ancient relationship. Taking every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), testing all things and holding fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21), being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) – recognizing that these biblical commitments are at the heart of our integration anchors our work not only in something more stable than our changing moment, but in something of eternal value that predates our founding and will outlast our institutions.

INTEGRATION UNITES THE CORE COMMITMENTS OF OUR INSTITUTIONS

Integration holds together our greatest purposes: mind-stretching learning and transformative Christian formation. It is not satisfied with devotions at the beginning of class or spiritual exercises bolted onto an otherwise standard syllabus. It is not a conventional calculus course plus chapel. Rather, the integration of faith and learning seeks to frame every disciplinary problem, contemporary challenge, artistic endeavor, and enduring question within the horizon of Christian teaching. For example:

- As we develop artificial intelligence, we draw upon biblical anthropology to ask what it truly means to be human.
- The doctrine of creation shapes how an economist weighs our experience of scarcity, how a biologist teaches the dignity of life, and how an artist portrays both beauty and brokenness.

- Christian ethics presses the engineer past “Can we build it?” to “How should we build it?” and “Why should we build it?”—and “Should we build it at all?”

At the same time, learning can inform, challenge, focus, and deepen our faith as we wonder at the ways that God’s grace is already at work in our fields of study while also discerning the flawed assumptions woven into them.

INTEGRATION STRENGTHENS CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

Finally, a focus on the integration of faith and learning strengthens Christian higher education at multiple levels.

- For individuals, it refuses the divided life – thinking in one room and worshipping in another – and forms teacher-scholars and graduates who experience teaching and scholarship as discipleship.
- For institutions, it brings practices into alignment with what we profess, emphasizing the academic and spiritual character that distinguishes our institutions in the marketplace and building trust with stakeholders who need to see us invest in and excel at our distinctive Christian commitments.
- For the international movement, a shared commitment to the integration of faith and learning integration gives us something in common when disciplines, educational models, learner groups,

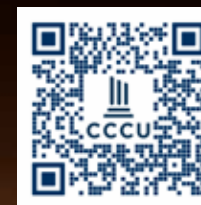
theological traditions, cultures, and continents differ. Our shared practices of faith and learning can build community, open up partnerships, and strengthen Christian higher education around the world.

INTEGRATION IS A CRAFT

The integration of faith and learning is urgent not despite the pressures of this moment, but because of them. When circumstances are volatile, we need what is stable; when uncertain, what is sure; when complex, what is fundamental; when ambiguous, what is clear.

But the fact that integration anchors us in enduring Christian commitments and practices does not mean it comes naturally. Integration – at the individual, institutional, or international levels – is a craft. It is something we can do well or poorly, something that requires intentional cultivation.

That is why the CCCU is investing directly in this work now. A new Center for Faith and Learning will build on and expand what many Christian colleges and universities have long practiced and are actively strengthening, equipping member institutions with the resources, relationships, and formation needed to master this craft for a new era. Because the first answer to a changing landscape is an enduring purpose, faithfully renewed. **A**



Discover the resources and information available to you and your campus on the CCCU's Center for Faith & Learning website.



NOAH J. TOLY

Noah Toly serves as Senior Fellow for Faith and Learning at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, Special Advisor to the President at Calvin University, and Visiting Fellow at the Center for Public Justice. He served five years as Calvin’s Provost and Chief Academic Officer, partnering with faculty, staff, senior leaders, and trustees to advance Christian mission, shared governance, and long-term institutional health. His portfolio encompassed academic strategy, faculty affairs, student success, and athletics. Previously, he spent fifteen years on Wheaton College’s faculty, serving as Professor of Urban Studies and Politics & International Relations and founding director of the Center for Urban Engagement. He has served on the CCCU’s Chief Academic Officers’ Commission and holds degrees from Wheaton College and the University of Delaware, where he earned his doctorate in urban affairs and public policy. He and his wife, Becky, have three children and live in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Integration – at the individual, institutional, or international levels – is a craft. It is something we can do well or poorly, something that requires intentional cultivation.

CULTIVATING THE CRAFT, CARRYING THE VISION

*What Does Faith and Learning
Look Like in Practice?*

By Tricia Wilson, Ph.D.

Faith and learning integration begins with our own story. As a young child, I saw “Flash Flood Warning” scroll across the television screen. I ran to my mother in tears because I thought God failed to keep his promise to never flood the earth again. She lovingly explained the difference between a flash flood and the Great Flood as recorded in Genesis. In many ways, this earliest memory of mine is significant because it brought a question about the world into conversation with Scripture, my understanding of faith, and a person who could help me make meaning. That early encounter is a lens through which I have continued to experience faith and learning integration throughout my educational and professional journey.

My undergraduate experience at Northwestern College (IA) first formed my understanding of faith and learning as relational and holistic. “Integration of faith and learning” was not merely a phrase but was a lived reality modeled by faculty and staff who knew students by name, invited rigorous intellectual engagement, and situated learning explicitly in relationship to Christ. Through those relationships, I came to recognize that all of life is an act of worship and that intellectual formation is inseparable from spiritual transformation (Romans 12:1-2). That conviction still shapes how I think about this work today.

Effective integration depends on equipping faculty and staff to engage students holistically, cultivating environments where learning involves intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation so students can be part of God’s redemptive and restorative work in whatever field they pursue.

My doctoral education at Azusa Pacific University then expanded my view, exposing me to the complexity and diversity of institutional contexts and student experiences. Institutions differ significantly in mission, theology, history, and the populations they serve, and my

research trained me to examine student learning through multiple lenses and to approach faith and learning with curiosity. My dissertation research on faculty practices, including reflective and integrative learning, found that faculty who intentionally implement these practices also tend to utilize student-centered teaching practices and rely on institutional supports and structures. These insights guide me in my work.

Advancing faith and learning across CCCU institutions means honoring our shared convictions while respecting institutional particularities and supporting the formation of faculty and staff as they create Christ-centered education.

THE IMPERITIVE AND THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH AND LEARNING FRAMEWORKS

My years as provost at Lancaster Bible College underscored the critical role that institutional structures and contextualized learning play in sustaining faith and learning. I saw firsthand the impact faculty have on students and the necessity of attending to faculty formation, so we strengthened our hiring practices, faculty development, faculty evaluation processes, and faculty opportunities for interdisciplinary learning to more effectively sustain both faith-learning integration and institutional mission. I came away convinced that meaningful faith-learning integration for students occurs most effectively when institutions intentionally create space for faculty to learn and grow together. Serving a diverse student body, including a high percentage of non-traditional students, students of color, and international cohorts, also taught us the importance of contextualized approaches where we needed to adapt faith and learning to cultural and vocational contexts while holding fast to core biblical convictions. These experiences strengthened my conviction that effective faith integration must be both faithful and contextual.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, faith-integrated learning continually calls me back to my own discipleship. The holistic nature of faith-integrated learning honed my commitment to spiritual practices where I can offer myself to the Lord and be transformed, healed,

and equipped for ministry in any context. God did not intend for us to journey through life alone, so authentic relationships are of the utmost importance. Christ-centered relationships are a key benefit of belonging to the CCCU network as we spur one another on to faithfully pursue our missional callings.

A VISION FOR FAITH AND LEARNING

As I look to the future of faith and learning at the CCCU, I am thrilled to build upon the excellent foundation laid by Dr. John Addleman and the Advisory Board. Providing resources and opportunities for CCCU member schools to intentionally integrate faith and learning on their campuses is a strategic priority for President Hoag, as he’s connected with different schools. Ultimately, what we “do” with faith and learning needs to be evidenced in our students. I believe it is our job to point students to God’s grand story as it is found in Scripture and equip them to do their part in God’s story, offering redemption and restoration found only in Christ in whatever community and profession they choose.

Future goals and opportunities will be focused on faculty and staff development, resource development, collaboration, and creating space for discussion and scholarship. Faculty and staff development will remain central to this work. As member institutions have shared, there is a growing desire not just to articulate a Christian worldview, but to see it lived out in classroom pedagogy, in curriculum design, and in the cocurricular life of a campus. I look forward to exploring how we might support faculty and staff in moving from conviction to practice, wherever they are on that journey.

Resource development will continue to expand what we offer to member institutions, ensuring that schools of every size and in every context have access to practical tools, conceptual frameworks, and knowledge. Through our work, we will continue to ask how technology can extend our reach, helping us build connections and provide access to resourcing for institutions nationally and globally. Collaboration will remain a priority as well. Partnerships with organizations like Christian Scholar’s Review and other voices already shaping this conversation will be important to stay relevant for today’s student.

Finally, creating space for discussion and scholarship, an “intellectual pilgrimage” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2025), will allow us to deepen our understanding of shared challenges and shared calling. Our members have made clear that they value the opportunity to gather across institutions, disciplines, regions, and roles to think together.

Since the inception of the CCCU 50 years ago, faith has been a cornerstone of our collective work. The days ahead are exciting as we seek new opportunities for the next generation of students to be transformed in chapel, in dorm rooms, on the field, around cafeteria tables, and in the classroom. The CCCU will be a strategic partner in helping our members advance in helping students flourish in holistic faith integrated learning.



TRICIA WILSON, Ph.D.

Tricia Wilson, Ph.D. serves as the CCCU’s Director of Faith & Learning and has more than 20 years of leadership experience in Christian higher education and church ministry, including serving most recently as provost of Lancaster Bible College.

Tricia works to advance the integration of faith and learning across CCCU member institutions by developing resources, programs, and educational opportunities that support Christ-centered learning and campus communities.

The days ahead are exciting as we seek new opportunities for the next generation of students to be transformed in chapel, in dorm rooms, on the field, around cafeteria tables, and in the classroom.

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