

INTEGRATION OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL INTO THE LARGER UNIVERSITY

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to offer response to two highly creative papers, each with significant promise to educators far beyond their own institutions. Each attempts to summarize early steps in cross-disciplinary projects that, while as seemingly different as night and day, aim at much the same goal or quest for the holy grail of our enterprise. Within the undergraduate program, how can we more effectively bring together the various liberal arts and business disciplines to create a business student graduate who embodies the best of our distinctive, religiously-informed institutional missions?

Both papers begin with a problem that is readily apparent to all—that there tends to be significant gaps in the goals, objectives, worldviews, languages, etc. of the various academic disciplines that comprise an undergraduate business education. Both papers presume that the solution, generally, is finding ways to close those gaps for the sake of our students.

Let me spend a few moments on each, hoping to provoke the authors to consider additional questions as they move forward in their work. For both papers presented today are but the first steps of longer, potentially fruitful collegial projects not only for their own institutions but for the enterprise of Catholic business education in general.

The Gonzaga paper creatively asks us to consider business education from a student perspective. As such, the student may view his/her college experience metaphorically as living simultaneously within 3 parallel universes—(1) the world of business courses, (2) the world of liberal arts foundational courses, and (3) the world of co-curricular collegiate experiences—all the other stuff that goes on at college and that is vitally important to student formation, growth, learning. Our goal, as educators, ought to be to close the gaps, and to find "corridors" or integration among those universes for the sake of "more effective holistic education for business students."

They offer a creative pedagogical method for attempting to close this gap, a method imported from the world of organizational consulting and used by corporations and nonprofits—"storyboarding" (not to be confused with "waterboarding"). Around for a number of years, this method provides a creative, dynamic, open-ended process to bring individuals together for the effective identification and pursuit of common goals.

Always one to believe educators ought to be open to creative classroom techniques, especially for undergraduates, I would think this proposal might have great promise if tested in one or both of the following venues:

(1) Would you aim to test this approach with educators at your own university? If so, it would involve business faculty, liberal arts faculty, and student life staff who come from the 3 parallel universes you propose. Would it be your aim to find out from these 3 "service providers" of your students how they might figure out how to close the gap by doing this exercise together?

To me, it would be interesting to learn what outcomes they create. What do you think the result might be?

(2) Would you aim to test this approach with business students at your own university? If so, you might engage students at the beginning of the time period at which they have declared themselves to be business majors and then immediately prior to graduation. If the storyboarding technique offers real value, then you ought to be able to compare the post and pre results and use this as a partial measure of effectiveness of your institution's educational "product". What do you think the result might be? And how will you know what results from this exercise are valuable and what are not?

Lastly, whatever results accrue from these exercises with various audiences, one might claim them to be merely "descriptive" of whatever perceptions and worldviews exist among the participants. Thus, my final question would be, How do you move from the descriptive to the normative? In other words, who will determine what is "more effective holistic education for business students?" Will you learn this from the results of your storyboarding exercises with students and/or faculty and staff, or will you attempt to determine the substantive content of this vision as a community of educators as driven from your university's mission statement? And, more importantly, what are the skills, abilities, forms of knowledge, values and attitudes that you think will adequately demonstrate this holistic education on the part of your business students?

In sum, it might be fun to present part two of this paper next year, reporting out on what you find once to devote this hypothetical exercise to trying to close the gaps that you note between these parallel universes.

With respect to the University of Dayton paper, I would first express my appreciation for the careful, thoughtful way in which it attempts to identify important disciplinary roadblocks that stand in the way of easy interdisciplinary conversation among scholars from diverse yet important academic disciplines. This paper seeks the same goal—to find ways that educators can seek conversation across their disciplines toward the quest of optimal, values-based, mission driven learning by business students. Its strength is the way in which it carefully uncovers difficulties in cross-disciplinary conversation.

I offer 3 comments. First, the paper argues that the problem is in large part a function of the "ghettoization" of faculty within traditional academic disciplines in the university setting. Language gaps among disciplines are to a large extent symptomatic of deeper chasms in the divergent worldviews constructed by those disciplines. Historically, this problem is in large part driven by the demands of the modern world, and the ways in which intellectual life within the university responded to these changes. Within the U.S., this is embodied in the historical evolution away from the older, classic model of liberal arts based education as embodied by the New England undergraduate college, to the prevalence of the nineteenth century model of the German research-based university. The prevalence of the latter model engendered the explosion and differentiation of knowledge within disciplinary niches that created highly specialized knowledge, resulting in language and worldviews embraced by academic sub-cultures that have evolved apart from each other and sometimes seemingly apart from the larger world.

Second, the good news, one might argue, is that business students do not permanently live within this academic world governed by teachers whose own socialization perpetuates such highly differentiated, specialized language. Rather, the student sojourn is temporary; they leave to enter the "real world" of business organizations and other professions. Fortunately, I would argue, the "real world" of business professionals and organizations is not so highly "ghettoized". Rather, our graduates are called upon to take what they've learned from the languages and worldviews of our various sub-cultures, and, hopefully, use it effectively for their own professional success, for the well-being of their organizations, and, we hope, for the well-being of the larger society in which they and those organizations exist. Our business graduates, thankfully, do not generally aim to be our clones, but to be effective in their new cultural contexts. In those new contexts, their feet are put to the fire, and they are expected to generate tangible results and outcomes deemed important to their organizations.

Fortunately, I would argue that the new organizational contexts within which our students find themselves after graduation, are generally more open to the kinds of cross-disciplinary translation and conversation that we sometimes seek within the academy. Business organizations often find it much easier to raise the normative questions and try to resolve them in real, practical ways, that our own faculty caught within their disciplinary nooses, are unable to do. What is the purpose of business? What is the right thing to do? Are there products we ought not to make? How should we treat our employees and our customers? How should we relate to the communities in which we find ourselves? The irony of the situation may be that business practitioners seem to have an easier job of engaging in the types of normative conversation that academics often are unable to do, perhaps because of the specialized ghettos in which we choose to hide.

Lastly, then, it could be that the important, ongoing work of the faculty at the University of Dayton, as well as countless other academic institutions, might benefit from, be enriched by, and get through our academic log-jams quicker, by adding a third leg to your stool. Might you invite business practitioners, and others, to join your conversation? Especially those individuals who would seem to share your institution's larger values-laden mission and vision of the good person, the good organization, and the good society? Each leg of the stool in some sense holds the other's feet to the fire, seeking both conceptual clarity, but also relevance to the larger world of business practice and social well-being. In other words, add conversation partners outside of your own ghettos who can help pull you into the world to which your business students will migrate upon graduation. They may likely help you bridge the linguistic and conceptual divides that our academic disciplines will likely aim to perpetuate forever.