

MONSIGNOR TERRENCE J. MURPHY (1920-2004)

Monsignor Terrence J. Murphy, served the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota for 50 years, including 25 years as its president. He has been credited with hiring an entrepreneurial staff and faculty, and with giving them rein to succeed or fail. He developed many friends in the region's corporate and political communities and assembled a board of trustees that proved to be extraordinarily generous and involved.

His 25-year tenure saw St. Thomas:

- Become coeducational and a university.
- Expand its graduate programs from one to 13, including its first two doctorates.
- Grow from 2,167 students to 9,120 students.
- Increase its faculty and staff from 257 to 1,324.
- Increase its annual budget from \$3.5 million to \$84.4 million.
- Open three new campuses outside of St. Paul.

When he retired, Murphy had the longest tenure of any college president in Minnesota. He was named to a list of the nation's 100 most-effective college presidents (and one of the top 10 Catholic college presidents). Murphy was the university's chancellor when he died in February of 2004.

QUESTIONS: What significance does the history of the college of business have for us today? In what way do we currently at OCB reflect the liberal arts in our curriculum and research?

WHY BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION? MONSIGNOR TERRENCE J. MURPHY¹

The open and participatory decision-making process which resulted in St. Thomas' becoming coeducational was also followed in other decisions of fundamental importance. One was to establish a graduate program in management, which led to significant developments at the post-baccalaureate level. Another was to build a campus in downtown Minneapolis; heretofore, St. Thomas was located only in St. Paul. Both of these decisions will be looked at more closely because they illustrate the university's commitment to certain values, especially religious values, and its willingness to take prudent risks in the interest of serving the broader community.

St. Thomas' department of business administration has a long history, almost as long as the institution itself. When the university began as St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in 1885, it had the dual purpose of training men for the priesthood or of preparing them for such professions as law and

¹ Terrence J. Murphy, *A Catholic University: Visions and Opportunities* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001) 105-111. Reprinted with permission from Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321

medicine. After the seminary moved to a separate campus in 1894, more attention was given to teaching “commerce,” probably as a means of replacing the seminarians who had left. This was at a time when liberal arts colleges rarely taught business, regarded as a poor cousin to the liberal arts. Yet the clientele of the university was composed of the sons and grandsons of poor immigrants. The city of St. Paul itself had its greatest growth at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century when immigrants and their children came into the area in large numbers. As their history would show, they had a strong desire to move up the economic and social ladder, and education, especially in business, was a key to upward mobility.

Business education continued to grow at St. Thomas, and became one of the most popular academic fields for the student body. By the late 1950s it was the largest major in the university. This growth reflected a national trend and a great opportunity for an institution concerned about the quality of life in its community.

When master’s programs in business administration were springing up around the country, the department of business recommended the establishment of a graduate program in business management. This ran contrary to a firmly established policy of concentration on undergraduate education in the conviction that limited resources should be used to improve undergraduate education. An exception had been made to that policy in the early 1950s in the field of teacher training in response to the needs of nuns teaching in Catholic schools.

A limited survey of interest in a graduate degree in business administration was done among the business community, with inconclusive results. One of the largest employers said it had no interest in such a program; nevertheless, the business department continued to press for its establishment. Then the president, the academic vice president, and the chair of the department of business set out to visit as many MBA programs as was necessary to learn whether St. Thomas was ready to offer a master’s degree in business administration. Along the way they learned a great deal about business schools.

One of the schools visited was in many ways similar to St. Thomas. It was basically a Catholic liberal arts university with a few graduate programs. Its MBA program, led by a very competent and entrepreneurial dean, was large and successful. The university was located in a metropolitan area similar to the Twin Cities—the center of a large trade area with a great number of different businesses whose corporate headquarters were located there. Moreover, there was a large tax-supported university with an MBA program in the same city. Yet seemingly contrary to the common opinion that small private institutions should not try to compete against large, well-established, tax-supported ones, the program was thriving and larger than that of the state university.

A basic question that had to be answered remained: Why should St. Thomas depart from its policy of concentrating, with one exception, on undergraduate education? Some faculty feared that resources would be drained away from liberal arts; they also saw business education, especially at the post-baccalaureate level, as almost antithetical to liberal education—such education