

## **RATIONALE FOR A MISSION-DRIVEN BUSINESS EDUCATION SEMINAR AT A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY**

Worldwide, there are over 1000 institutions of Catholic higher education. Approximately one quarter of those institutions are found in the US (231) with approximately 150 business schools and programs. As business education occupies an expanded role in Catholic colleges and universities, the future of Catholic higher education is inseparable from how the Catholic and liberal education character is appropriated within its business schools. Reciprocally, it also affects how business schools impact the understanding of the Catholic and liberal character of the university.

This relationship also impacts the larger reality of business education and business itself. Catholic business schools can play a significant role in the kind of business that is done in the world, especially if they are clear on a complex set of questions that serves as an examination of conscience: Are we as Catholic universities, and in particular Catholic business schools, educating and forming students who can promote human dignity and the common good through business? Are we producing research that does the same? Are we helping our students discover their vocation, deepen their profession, and discipline their sensitivities to the poor and marginalized? In other words, are we who we say we are?

These are challenging and complex questions for educators. For most of us, our Ph.D. programs, research agendas and curricula do not address these questions specifically. We also find that many faculty tend to be more loyal to their discipline than to their institutions, which too often causes them to ignore the institutional questions raised above. If Catholic business schools are to live out their distinctive mission, they will have to come together in a way that fosters interdisciplinary exploration, reflective listening, engagement in big ideas, and robust conversation and debate. This is precisely what this seminar is designed to do.

This faculty seminar is one small step in examining business education within a Catholic and comprehensive university. The seminar is grounded in the Aspen style, which is designed to provide a rigorous, sustained and disciplined intellectual experience. Participants are encouraged to examine and delve into the influential ideas forming the Catholic social and intellectual tradition and contemporary business theory and practice.

This mission-driven seminar is not a think tank, nor is it for “specialists” in theology or philosophy, although we examine questions and ideas from these fields. Nor is the seminar a quick fix to the Catholic mission and identity in the university. It proposes no curriculum or research agenda, although discussions and debates over these issues do occur. Rather, the seminar is designed to engage enduring ideas and texts which both support and challenge the Catholic social tradition and its understanding of business. It seeks to foster personal and institutional reflection on our vocation as teachers and administrators within Catholic business education.

For over 10 years faculty have found this seminar to be a positive and enriching experience. It provides an opportunity to reflect with colleagues from one’s own university on what it means to be mission-driven. Because of the hectic pace of life, too often faculty do not have time for

sustained and leisurely conversations that allow such thoughts to be explored. This seminar attempts to resist this pressure. It also provides a great opportunity for faculty to get to know each other in a retreat atmosphere where meals are shared, stories are told and where the intellectual foundations and practical implications of “educating highly principled global business leaders” are explored.