

The University at a Crossroads

Assessing the Purpose,
State, and Future of Christian
Higher Education in America



*A Compilation of Essays Presented at the
2018 Values & Capitalism Faculty Retreat*

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Foreword

What is the purpose of the university? At the most fundamental level, we might say that the task of the university is the pursuit of truth. As you will read later in this compilation, the pursuit of knowledge and the contemplation of truth and beauty—in its pure, non-instrumentalized form—is itself meaningful and worthwhile and a sufficient reason for these institutions to exist.

However, as John Henry Newman wrote, the purpose of the university also has the practical end of “training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world. . . . It is the education which gives a man a clear, conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them.”¹ Particularly in a free society governed through a democratic, deliberative process, the university plays a crucial role in preparing citizens for public life.

Of course, the purpose of the modern university has become even more extensive. It exists—perhaps most importantly in the eyes of students and parents today—to prepare young people with the hard skills for a job and future career. It has also become a place where students transition into independent life, experience new things, meet new people, and “discover” themselves.

And what about the distinctive purpose of Christian higher education? Many would say that Christian colleges and universities exist to form the whole person: mind, body, and spirit. They are in the business of forming students into intelligent, faithful followers of Christ, equipped to further His Kingdom through their whole lives and in a variety of vocations.

All this to say, the purpose of the university is wide-ranging and multifaceted, and institutions of higher learning play a critical role

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in sustaining the health of our society. And yet, in many ways, it appears they are at a crossroads.

The questions before us now are numerous: In actuality, what are the purposes and missions of our universities today? Have secondary purposes been promoted to primary? And when that happens, are the primary purposes crowded out? Do universities remain institutions that are foremost concerned with the pursuit of truth?

These philosophical questions are only the tip of the iceberg. We must also seriously consider how institutions of higher education will remain financially sustainable, how they will keep up with technological progress, and how they will respond to cultural and political turmoil.

This essay compilation, written by members of the Values & Capitalism Academic Network, is hopefully just one of many attempts to assess the purpose, state, and future of institutions of higher education in the United States. Because the authors all teach at private Christian institutions, the essays focus particularly on concerns facing these schools. Still, the themes and lessons that they contain are applicable and instructive even to a more general audience. We hope a deeper conversation on this important topic will begin when these short essays end.

Tyler Castle
Director, Values & Capitalism

Notes

1. John Henry Newman, “Discourse 7. Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill,” in *The Idea of the University* (CreateSpace, 2016), <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/discourse7.html>.

Not Disposable for Purposes: On the Continued Importance of a Liberal Arts Education

Peter C. Meilaender

As I began reflecting on the topic of this year's symposium, my thoughts were framed by a pair of items that had coincidentally appeared in my email that very day. The first was an article in *Inside Higher Ed* titled "Days of Reckoning."¹ The article had been prompted in particular by an announcement the previous week that St. Gregory's University in Shawnee, Oklahoma—a school founded in 1915, the only Catholic university in the state, and one that as recently as 1996 had been named "Oklahoma's fastest-growing college or university"²—would suspend operations at the conclusion of the fall 2017 semester.³ According to *Inside Higher Ed*, St. Gregory's was only the most recent of several closings or mergers this year that "would seem to support Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen's recent doubling down on his infamous prediction that as many as half of the country's colleges and universities will find themselves bankrupt or shuttered within 10 years."⁴ In a summary comment, the article observed "that many colleges closing or cutting back are Roman Catholic, and many are located in the middle of the country—the Midwest and Appalachia."⁵

The second email was more parochial in nature: I received the newest edition of Houghton College's "Faculty Herald," a biweekly newsletter containing the agenda and relevant information for our regular faculty meetings. This particular issue contained the conclusions of a recent task force created to consider different initiatives for increasing student enrollment, a challenge we have

struggled with for several years but that unfortunately became more pressing this year, when our beloved Gov. Andrew Cuomo decided to begin offering New York students free tuition at the state's public universities.

Among the task force's recommendations was a list of possible new majors or degree programs that the college might consider offering and that would be up for discussion at the upcoming faculty meeting. Here is the task force's list of possible new majors for the faculty to consider:

- Agricultural sciences,
- Clinical lab science,
- Physical therapy,
- Worship arts,
- Theater/dance,
- Music therapy,
- Jazz studies,
- Criminal justice,
- Social work,
- Master of counseling (focus on marriage and family, pastoral, and school),
- Master of education,
- Master of business administration,
- Health care administration, and
- Advertising/journalism/broadcasting.

This list is an effort to address one of the problems identified by Inside Higher Ed as characterizing struggling institutions: “academic programs that don’t stand out.”⁶ Its most salient feature is obvious: Almost all the potential programs identified here are pre-professional in nature, aimed at preparing students for specific and identifiable career options.

Houghton is surely not the only school seeking to shift its academic profile from a classical array of liberal arts options to a more professionally or vocationally tailored menu of choices. I will

consider this shift more carefully below, but first I want to juxtapose the preceding issues—about challenges to small colleges and the consequent drive to design more distinctive and professional curricular options—with a more personal anecdote.⁷

This fall my own son, our oldest child, enrolled in college himself, so I have had a recent opportunity to look at some small liberal arts colleges from the consumer's side. I will not identify the specific school he chose, but it is a relatively small Catholic liberal arts college, one I think of as academically very solid, with an attractive campus and strong programs in some of his areas of interest. I met some of his likely professors myself and was favorably impressed. I was perfectly satisfied with his decision to attend there.

My faith was shaken, however, late in the summer, when he was required, and his parents were invited, to attend an orientation day a month or so ahead of his first semester. The experience was at times, frankly, almost infantile. Apart from an opening welcome by a monk, we heard nothing about the college's religious mission. We were, however, treated to a semi-intelligible ditty sung by a group of students welcoming us in the name of the college mascot. We received little information about academic requirements and expectations; our son did not meet his adviser. We heard a great deal, however, about Title IX, sexual harassment, and what to do if your roommate abuses drugs or is so drunk that his health might be in danger. Our son was taken aback when, in a separate session for students, a fellow incoming member of the class of 2021—who announced his intended major as computer science (!)—asked whether he would need to bring a laptop to school with him.

To be fair, my own tastes probably and my background certainly differ from those of the typical parents bringing their son or daughter to college for the first time. Perhaps some of the other attendees even felt genuinely welcomed by that silly opening song. I assume, at any rate, that those organizing the event knew their audience—their customer base—better than I. And they clearly expected that their incoming students were more likely to need a warning about sexually harassing someone while drunk than to be interested in actually attending class. This is not, I repeat, a bad college. To the

contrary, I suspect we were surrounded by a fairly representative sample of incoming college students and their parents outside the country's academically elite institutions.

This experience left me with real questions about what we are or should be doing, and not doing, in Christian liberal arts education. It is particularly sobering when placed alongside the other pieces of information with which I began—the current struggles of many small colleges to survive and the efforts of schools like Houghton to meet those challenges by moving in a more preprofessional direction. For when we put these anecdotes together, the picture that begins to emerge is of a world in which colleges are less and less inclined to offer a liberal arts education to a public that is less and less interested in receiving one.

To justify that claim, I need to say something about what a liberal arts education actually is. Note that I do not say “what I consider a liberal arts education to be.” The meaning of liberal arts education is in fact definite enough, belonging to a tradition of inquiry stretching back now for more than two millennia.

The book I have found most helpful in reflecting on the nature of the liberal arts is *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* by the 20th-century German Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper. In a wonderful phrase, Pieper writes that the liberal arts are not “disposable for purposes.”⁸ What does he mean by this? Pieper draws on the ancient distinction, reaching back to Aristotle, between the *artes liberales*, or “liberal arts,” and the *artes serviles*, or “servile arts” (recognizing that the latter phrase has an unfortunate ring to modern ears). “What are ‘liberal arts?’” asks Pieper.

Thomas Aquinas provides some conceptual clarification in his *Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: “Every art is called *liberal* which is ordered to knowing; those which are ordered to some utility to be attained through action are called *servile* arts.” . . . “Liberal arts,” therefore, are ways of human action which have their justification in themselves; “servile arts” are ways of human action that have a purpose outside of themselves, a purpose, to be more exact, which consists in a useful effect that can be realized through *praxis*.

The “liberality” or “freedom” of the liberal arts consists in their not being disposable for purposes, that they do not need to be legitimated by a social function, by being “work.”⁹

When a body of knowledge is pursued in order to be put to some other purpose, for the sake of some other end to be sought through work, then it cannot be pursued “freely,” because the form its pursuit must take is necessarily subordinate to and determined by the demands of that other end. Only when knowledge is sought for its own sake, without some ulterior purpose in mind, can it be freely—liberally—pursued.

It is important to be clear about what this definition does not say, as well as what it does. It does not, for example, identify any particular body of knowledge or discipline as either inside or outside the liberal arts. To the contrary, it implies—as Pieper recognizes—that in principle at least, any kind of knowledge can be pursued in a liberal fashion, as long as it is pursued for its own sake and not in order to be put to some other purpose.¹⁰ At the same time, we would be foolish not to recognize that some fields of study lend themselves more readily than others to being pursued in a liberal fashion. Although it is possible to study, say, agricultural science or criminal justice “for its own sake,” without concern for any use to which they may be put, this is not how they are typically pursued.

To say this, however, is not to rank the various fields of study or to identify some as better than or more valuable than others. We need servile arts and liberal ones—in some senses, indeed (though not in all senses), more so. Pieper again: “Of course, the vocationally specialized exercise of a function is *the* normal form of human activity; what is normal is work, and the normal day is a working day.”¹¹ We are seeking definitional clarity, not a rank order of disciplines. Philosophy is a liberal art, health care administration typically not, but this does not mean that philosophers are more valuable people than health care administrators.¹²

Human community requires the servile arts, which are ordered to socially useful purposes, for its very existence. But it also requires the liberal arts, which are not thus ordered to utilitarian

goals. To quote one last time from Pieper: "It should go without saying, that not everything that cannot exactly be categorized as 'useful' is useless. . . . In just such a sense can the medieval statement be understood, that it is 'necessary for the perfection of the human community, that there be persons who devote themselves to the [use-less] life of contemplation.'"¹³

If we return to Houghton's list of proposed possible new majors with Pieper's definition of the liberal arts in mind, we see immediately that almost none of the suggestions are liberal arts majors. That is, of course, the point. Their appeal is precisely that they are intended to be "disposable for purposes"—the purpose of getting a specific kind of job after graduation. This is, again, a perfectly sensible goal. It is a goal that many students should presumably have in mind. One understands why those students' parents would have an interest in this goal.

At the same time, however, this means that Houghton and other colleges like it (of which I have no doubt there are many), in trying to save themselves from extinction by introducing more vocationally oriented programs, are in the process of transforming themselves from liberal arts colleges into something else. It is important to be clear about this fact and not to delude ourselves by continuing to apply the "liberal arts" label where it is no longer accurate. Merely insisting that something is a "liberal arts education" does not make it so. We must call a spade a spade. At the end of this process will be something that is no longer a liberal arts college, but rather a kind of vocational school with a smattering of liberal arts around the edges in the form of general education requirements. (It is a great virtue of Pieper's discussion that it dispels the common misconception that general education and the liberal arts are the same thing.)

Assuming that this transformation is underway at a broad range of institutions, is it to be lamented? Here I am of two minds. On the one hand, the erosion of the liberal arts would surely be unfortunate. One of the great glories of American higher education has been the country's remarkable multiplicity of liberal arts colleges, of all kinds—large and small, elite and non-elite, sectarian and secular, liberal and . . . well, perhaps we should say very liberal and

merely liberal. (Or perhaps liberal and Hillsdale?) The loss of this extraordinary liberal arts landscape would be the loss of something precious and, I believe, unique in the world.

More fundamentally, it would also represent a narrower and less expansive view of the human good. The normal day may be a working day, but not every day is a normal day. Just as a week containing only six days of work would be incomplete without a seventh day of rest, so too a community including only useful forms of labor and no free activity of contemplation would be an incomplete and partial one.¹⁴ This is Pieper's meaning when he writes that it is "necessary for the perfection of the human community, that there be persons who devote themselves to the [use-less] life of contemplation."

On the other hand, we should not romanticize the liberal arts. It has probably never been the case that more than a small fraction of the population desires, or is even especially well suited to pursuing, a liberal arts education at the college level. As ever more Americans seek a college degree, there will inevitably be increasing demand for degrees that are not really liberal arts degrees. Indeed, this is presumably a natural consequence of broader changes in American education: With the bachelor's degree replacing the high school diploma as the minimum expected qualification for many jobs, we should expect that increasing numbers of people who would have previously ended their education with high school will now be seeking additional vocational training at the college level.

Furthermore, as already noted, there is nothing wrong with vocational education, which is valuable, important, necessary, and rewarding. We need clinical lab scientists, therapists, and journalists. Perhaps even social workers. If I exercise my imagination, I can even imagine a world in need of masters of education and counseling. And when I remember my son's college orientation, I cannot help wondering why we should hope or expect that people will pay tens of thousands of dollars each year for a kind of education they do not want and will probably not even enjoy. Perhaps the world needs only so many liberal arts colleges.¹⁵

Still, as Pieper reminds us, something of profound importance is threatened by the erosion of the liberal arts: the possibility of

an education not “disposable for purposes.” Conservatives are accustomed to warning against politicized education, against the dangers of perverting the college curriculum for the sake of a political agenda. But a liberal arts education is also corrupted when it is forced to serve the demands of the job market, of economic utility, or of bureaucratic rationalism.

We suffer more obvious and more direct social and political damage when “tenured radicals” corrupt the classroom so that 20-year-old students adopt Marxist theories of class struggle, non-binary gender analysis, or ecocriticism than we do when shortsighted university presidents do so in order to produce, say, more dental technicians or veterinary assistants. But the educational damage done is comparable. In both cases the educational process is prevented from freely following an intellectual inquiry wherever it may lead and is instead subordinated to some external purpose not itself derived from the goals of education. Both phenomena represent a retreat from the liberal arts and the abandonment of an institution dedicated to the “useless” activity of contemplation.

In this idea of “uselessness”—of activity not directed toward some externally imposed purpose—we can glimpse the potential importance of specifically Christian liberal arts education in the present cultural moment. For outside the narrow world of our most elite institutions—whose graduates need not fear about getting jobs and can therefore afford the luxury of simply pursuing whatever ostensibly useless studies capture their interest—it is Christian colleges that are, or at least should be, best positioned to see the importance of a truly liberal education.

In somewhat dated but nevertheless important language, Pieper—speaking of the church, but in terms that call to mind also his discussion of the *artes liberales*—asks at one point, “Can we not see what it means for there to be an institution in the world that prohibits useful actions, or the ‘servile arts’ on certain days, and thus prepares space for a non-proletarian existence?”¹⁶ Pieper suggests that the true meaning and value of leisured contemplation, of activity pursued for its own sake rather than for some other goal, lies in its close relationship to another activity pursued for its own

sake: worship. The idea of the Sabbath provides for him here a crucial analogy. Without the idea of worship, of useless activity, of a Sabbath rest, the human being becomes absorbed entirely by the identity of worker. As Pieper points out,

There can be no unused space in the total world of work, neither an unused area of ground nor an unused time; nor can there be a space for worship or festival: for this is the principle of rational utility, on which the world of the “worker” exclusively depends.¹⁷

The worker’s activity is ordered toward the goal of his or her work and is thus never entirely free. But worship—like the liberal arts—opens up a space of freedom. “It is in the nature of religious festival,” Pieper continues,

to make a space of abundance and wealth, even in the midst of external poverty in material things. This is because *sacrifice* is at the center of the festival. What is sacrifice? It is voluntary, a gift that is offered, and certainly *not* usefulness, but the very opposite of usefulness.¹⁸

The liberal arts offer something similar: a gift that is the very opposite of usefulness, but not for that reason of little value.

Christian colleges, with their understanding of the foundational human importance of worship, are actually in a better position than other institutions to appreciate the analogous value of a truly liberal education, one not disposable for purposes. In particular, they can appreciate its potential value for a wide range of people, not only those fortunate or privileged enough to attend elite institutions. One never knows for certain which student will prove captivated by the opportunity for wonder and exploration that a liberal arts education offers, the opportunity “in reflective and remote contemplation [to] touch, even remotely, the core of all things, . . . the divine foundation of all that is.”¹⁹

At the opening of *Leisure*, Pieper places a pair of epigraphs. One is from Plato, but the other is from Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know

that I am God.”²⁰ That opportunity to “be still” and touch “the divine foundation of all that is”—“a moment,” to quote an evocative phrase from Michael Oakeshott, “in which to taste the mystery without the necessity of at once seeking a solution”²¹—has become more, not less, valuable as the vocational and professional urgencies of our age have increasingly made inroads on our campuses. Christian colleges, therefore, of all institutions, should not be too quick to abandon an education that, not being “disposable for purposes,” still offers students an opportunity to “be still” and hear the voice of God.

Notes

1. Rick Seltzer, “Days of Reckoning,” Inside Higher Ed, November 13, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/11/13/spate-recent-college-closures-has-some-seeing-long-predicted-consolidation-taking>.

2. See St. Gregory’s University, “St. Gregory’s University: History in the Making,” <http://www.stgregorys.edu/about-us/our-history>.

3. See St. Gregory’s University, “St. Gregory’s University to Close at End of Fall 2017,” press release, <http://www.stgregorys.edu/news/st-gregorys-university-close-end-fall-2017>.

4. Seltzer, “Days of Reckoning.”

5. Seltzer, “Days of Reckoning.”

6. This was only one of several factors cited: “No matter their religious affiliation, colleges under the most pressure tend to be saddled with a mix of problems like financial issues, academic programs that don’t stand out, declining enrollment and difficulty fund-raising.” Seltzer, “Days of Reckoning.”

7. I originally prepared this talk for delivery before a relatively small group of Christian college faculty, and in that context I felt no special need to add caveats to my discussion of Houghton or the college my son has chosen to attend. For readers outside that original context, however, I do feel compelled to clarify something that I would not want misunderstood: My critical comments here, which served merely as prompts for reflection, should not be misinterpreted as a blanket condemnation of either Houghton or my son’s college (should some clever reader deduce

its identity). In addition to exploring the preprofessional majors described above, Houghton has also taken important recent steps to sustain the college's core liberal arts identity. By the same token, my son has chosen to attend a fine institution. Both schools serve here to illustrate larger trends that worry me, but in each case that is only part of the story.

8. Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 22.

9. Pieper, *Leisure*, 21–22.

10. "In this sense, the special sciences are 'free' only insofar as they are pursued in a philosophical way, insofar, that is to say, as they share in the freedom of philosophy." Pieper, *Leisure*, 75.

11. Pieper, *Leisure*, 24.

12. There are perhaps limits to this line of argument. One thinks, for example, of mid-level student life bureaucrats.

13. Pieper, *Leisure*, 25–26. (The bracketed "use-less" is Pieper's, and the internal citation is from Aquinas.)

14. Thus Pieper's discussion of the liberal arts comes in a book about leisure and culminates in an exploration of the latter's connection to worship and festivity.

15. I am less certain that the best way to achieve these purposes is through the retooling of liberal arts colleges, which came into existence for the sake of other goals. I suspect that much professional and vocational training could be better and more efficiently provided by employers themselves.

16. Pieper, *Leisure*, 47.

17. Pieper, *Leisure*, 53.

18. Pieper, *Leisure*, 53.

19. Josef Pieper, "Work, Spare Time, and Leisure," in *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 23.

20. Or, in Pieper's citation, "Be at leisure—and know that I am God." Pieper, *Leisure*, 2.

21. Michael Oakeshott, "The Idea of a University," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 101.

Whither Christian Higher Education?

Past and Present Challenges

Caleb Henry, Denise Daniels, and Bradley Murg

Christian scholars have analyzed the “secularization” of formerly orthodox Christian colleges and universities for many years. There have been multiple case studies of the development of colleges and universities that were previously affiliated with mainline Protestants, Catholics, Lutherans, and Methodists.¹ Throughout these texts, there has been one consistent argument by secularizing institutions that seek to maintain their religious identity and mission: Our institution is different. The scholarship suggests that this confidence is usually misplaced.

This essay contends that the challenges confronting today’s religious schools, while similar to those that their now-secular predecessors faced, have evolved in a new direction. The first section of the essay briefly examines the existing literature on the topic and prior attempts at identifying threats to the existence or identity of Christian colleges and universities. The second section argues that there is a new challenge facing Christian higher education.

Historically, Christian scholars worried about religious schools becoming secular and indistinguishable from state universities. This essay argues that while some Christian colleges and universities today continue a gradual drift toward secularization, others, structured by deeply ingrained norms of “mission,” are taking a different path. Rather than ignoring their religious heritage, some schools with a faith-based mission are increasingly tempted to redefine their faith with respect to cultural referents instead of long-standing Christian orthodoxy. When such an approach is taken to its logical extreme, these religious schools may become

less tolerant of religiously faithful students than is constitutionally possible for state institutions.

Trends in Christian Higher Education That Threaten Identity or Existence

James Tunstead Burtchaell's *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges & Universities from Their Christian Churches* continues to serve as a core collection of case studies on the evolution of Christian colleges.² Burtchaell analyzes changes in colleges in the Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical traditions from the 1960s through the 1990s. While each denomination has its distinctive story, the narrative arc remains largely similar. The institutional and cultural pressures that faced the 17 colleges analyzed in Burtchaell's book are remarkably similar to the pressures facing Christian institutions of higher education today.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing these schools is funding. Given their typically poor endowments, most Christian colleges rely on tuition to balance their budgets. Even small drops in enrollment can have serious financial repercussions.

The Catholic college experience in the 1970s shows what can happen.³ Since Catholic colleges had higher tuition than state universities, many Catholic students chose to attend state universities. "One Catholic observer recalls that in the early 1970s the mortality rate (through closing or merger) was about one a week."⁴

Similarly, today's private colleges, including most Christian colleges, face lower numbers of college students in general, due to increasing costs and declining college-age demographics in many parts of the country. Small Christian institutions are once again suffering from this enrollment crunch.⁵

Burtchaell describes the faith-based colleges he studied moving from a more purely theological or liberal arts education toward an education with an increasing emphasis on preprofessional and vocational training. This shift is largely driven by perceptions of what students want. However, as today's religious colleges move

away from their theological and liberal arts core, they more directly compete with state schools subsidized by federal and state government, which have already made this shift. Concomitantly, some state governments also subsidize relatively less expensive online programs that center on career-focused majors such as business, education, and health sciences, thereby creating additional low-cost competitors for Christian colleges.⁶ To the extent that Christian colleges rely on preprofessional training and vocational education rather than emphasizing the value of a distinctly Christian liberal arts education, they will effectively expose themselves to state-subsidized competition, against which they cannot compete strictly on a cost basis.

In the 1960s, court cases in Maryland and Connecticut raised the question as to whether states could provide financial support to schools with a faith-based mission. “The [Catholic college] presidents were fearful that litigation . . . might disqualify their colleges and universities from receiving federal or state funds for building construction, student aid, and noncategorical grants.”⁷ Catholic colleges preemptively redefined their college missions to avoid losing these funds.

Fordham University redefined its religious identity “in terms of ‘auspices,’ ‘origins,’ ‘traditions,’ ‘opportunities,’ ‘ideas,’ ‘perspectives,’ ‘values,’ [and] ‘a loving and respectful openness.’”⁸ It successfully kept its funds, but Albany education officials “quietly expressed surprise that their dissociative measures went well beyond what seemed necessary.”⁹

Similar challenges are likely to occur in today’s legal and cultural climate if the federal government decides to reinterpret Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, same-sex practice, or gender identity.¹⁰ Supreme Court precedent suggests that a presidential administration could refuse to give federally subsidized loans to colleges that fail to subscribe to the new understanding of sexuality and gender.

Bob Jones University v. United States (1983) famously argued that the federal government could refuse to give subsidized loans to racially discriminatory colleges. Since the First Amendment

protects private discrimination, the Supreme Court argued that the federal government was making a spending choice as opposed to a First Amendment speech claim. Therefore, the Court protected a private college's right to racially discriminate while allowing the federal government's right to withhold federal funds from colleges that did so.

This principle could now be applied to schools that, for religious reasons, use selective criteria or refuse to hire from the LGBTQ+ community. Few Christian colleges or universities could survive without federally subsidized loans, particularly given the low levels of financial support these schools receive from their respective denominations.

While financial pressure from the federal government could at some future point influence the extent to which faith-based colleges and universities adhere to traditional norms of gender and sexuality in their admissions or hiring processes, these schools are already facing a different kind of pressure from their regional accrediting bodies. Azusa Pacific University initially struggled to obtain accreditation, although it eventually "became the first Bible college to achieve regional accreditation without substantially changing its curriculum."¹¹ Similarly, Gordon College was challenged to change its hiring decisions to maintain accreditation,¹² but it ultimately obtained accreditation without sacrificing its institutional views on sexuality. Other accrediting bodies will inevitably make the same argument against other religious colleges. This is also likely to become an issue for secondary accreditation in specific disciplinary areas.¹³

The penultimate trend threatening Christian higher education is faculty identification with guild rather than college. Increasingly, religious colleges are hiring new faculty whose education occurred primarily in a secular context. A focused graduate education, most often in a secular context, does not prepare faculty to consider their discipline through the lens of faith or help them fully appreciate the mission of the Christian institution. "One result of the narrowing of each faculty member's academic interests was an education that might include very little of the history, philosophy, and theology

required to give them a disciplined perspective on their own scholarly pursuits.”¹⁴

Burtchaell noted the difficulties Jesuit schools faced in relying on faculty who had not themselves received (or necessarily understood) a Jesuit education.¹⁵ Like the faculty in the Jesuit schools, faculty in many religious colleges are increasingly likely to have studied their own discipline but not necessarily how it fits with the liberal arts or Christian tradition. In short, many of these new faculty are advanced in their disciplines—bringing greater rigor to many schools—but largely ignorant of the theory and practice of a Christian liberal arts education. Since most Christian colleges and universities have high teaching loads and low endowments, faculty are unlikely to have time to engage in broader study or integrative research after being hired.

The final trend threatening Christian higher education is its increasing reliance on administrative staff. As faculty have become increasingly professional, and as the criteria faculty need to meet to be hired, tenured, and promoted have continued to increase, most aspects of student life and spiritual development have been outsourced to staff members. “One of the social forces that came to distinguish and divide administrators from faculty professionally was the way the latter soon left responsibility for student piety and morality in the hands of the formers.”¹⁶

Burtchaell notes that as the administrators pushed those duties to other administration members (chaplains, secretaries, deans, etc.), many colleges discovered that piety and discipline were not central to their purposes. This trend has only increased, with increasing regulatory demands on colleges and universities, along with guild demands on faculty. Student cultural life has a much greater connection to Residence Life offices than to the faculty.

New Challenges for Christian Higher Education

In the previous section, we outlined several trends in higher education that might threaten the existence or continued faith-based identity of Christian colleges and universities. These threats have

been noted by other writers and have resulted in the secularization of a number of previously Christian institutions in past decades. These same trends continue to threaten Christian higher education today. But in addition, we see a new threat: that faith-based institutions increasingly shaped by cultural and political forces may eventually redefine their religious identity in secular terms.

In the long run, Christian colleges may be forced to choose between using faith-based criteria in their selection processes or accepting federally supported loan and grant resources. Similarly, Christian colleges may eventually face accrediting bodies that refuse to accredit colleges that use faith-based selection decisions.

This is not, however, the current situation. The Supreme Court has consistently protected an association's rights of speech. The Supreme Court, in *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* (2000), argued that the Boy Scouts could refuse to hire gay troop leaders as an expression of its associational beliefs.¹⁷ The Court today shows no signs of moving away from this decision. In a notable concurring opinion for *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (2012), conservative Justice Samuel Alito and progressive Justice Elena Kagan argued for an expansive perspective of religious liberty in light of America's increasing religious diversity.¹⁸

Nonetheless, explicit legal or accreditation threats to mission are not the only concerns Christian colleges and universities face. They also face implicit pressure from the culture; the mission of the Christian institution is regularly evaluated in the court of public opinion. Consequently, most Christian colleges and universities are attuned to the ways in which those in surrounding communities—faith based or not—view them.

This has led to a new and different type of threat, in which the institution's mission is redefined in faith-based language to comport with cultural or political ideologies that hold sway in a given context. In an extreme situation, these institutions could become places that are openly antagonistic to their founding traditional religious beliefs. Because they continue to identify as faith-based institutions, they could actually discriminate against those who

they were initially established to serve: orthodox Christian students. This path is not possible for state universities, which are not allowed to discriminate based on religion.

To consider one potential path as to how this could occur, consider critical race theory (CRT). CRT proponents contend that race and racism are the primary forces underlying all institutional actions and structures. Color-blind theories of equality are necessarily racist because they fail to acknowledge the racism that is systemic throughout society. Racial oppression can be combined with other forms of oppression, and to understand these various intersectionalities, it is necessary to understand the particular experience of each oppressed person.

Through the lens of CRT, experience becomes an epistemological approach to knowing whether oppression has occurred, and storytelling becomes a vital way to combat entrenched majority racism. "Narratives provide a language to bridge the gaps in imagination and conception that give rise to" different conceptions of justice.¹⁹ At the same time, many CRT advocates are deeply suspicious of procedural rights, for these rights are designed to protect the accused but may do less to protect the rights of the victim or the community at large where others may be victimized in the future.

Indeed, in a situation of "he said, she said" with no additional evidence, a system predicated on "innocent until proven guilty" will favor the accused. In contrast, the current emphasis on "social justice" in many college and university settings may be an effort to shift away from a procedural rights approach that protects an accused who may be guilty and toward a system in which the benefit to the community trumps the individual's rights. While the potential error in the first approach is that a guilty person may be exonerated and a victim disbelieved, the potential error in the second is that a "victim" and the community are protected at the expense of an innocent person. A social justice approach may in fact provide relief to those who have traditionally and historically been marginalized, but it may do so at the expense of individuals who had previously been protected by a strong norm of procedural

rights. An approach in which stories are elevated as a primary way of knowing will work in opposition to procedural rights.

One can see how Christian colleges could be intrigued by CRT. These institutions have a historic mission to serve those on the margins of society. Also, their faith missions are not limited to Enlightenment epistemologies. That is, CRT could easily be viewed as consistent with, and eventually as a replacement for, the traditionally orthodox theology undergirding the religious institution.

CRT can become institutionally dangerous when its epistemological assumptions prohibit alternative epistemologies or ways of understanding the world. For example, many CRT proponents argue that the experience of the oppressed provides truer “knowledge” than traditional ways of knowing, including both social scientific methods and orthodox theology, both of which may be viewed as perpetuating systemic oppression. When this viewpoint is taken to an extreme, all disciplines are required to be reinterpreted in light of this new wisdom, and opposition becomes heretical. CRT as a philosophical approach then becomes a remarkably easy substitute for traditional theology.

CRT activists have been frustrated by the courts striking down hate speech codes for violating students’ free speech rights. However, these rulings apply only to state universities that are constitutionally required to be content neutral in their administrative policies. Because state universities are an arm of the government, speech codes directly violate the First Amendment. However, private colleges have an associational right to restrict individual rights, as long as those restrictions are made clear to incoming students as part of their mission.²⁰ How might this happen?

Faced with pressures from the government, accreditors, or the culture at large, many religious colleges may choose to change their rules on sexuality and gender. For many this will be difficult in light of their historic Christian understandings, so their traditional interpretations of faith must be redefined to comport with accepted cultural and political dogma. Such redefined faith commitments would likely include justice for marginalized groups and care for each person as a unique reflection of the *Imago Dei*;

these commitments are consistent with a Christian commitment to justice.

However, when such commitments are prioritized over any other Christian virtue or value, when the definition of marginalized groups expands to include anyone who perceives themselves to be oppressed, when any judgment of behaviors that are contrary to traditional and orthodox Christian morality are viewed as a personal attack on the person engaging in the behavior, and when opposition to any particular perspective or viewpoint is understood to be an expression of cruelty to the person who holds the view, then the newly redefined faith commitment of that faith-based institution might mark as modern heretics those who hold to traditional Christian views. CRT as a philosophical approach then becomes a remarkably simple substitute for traditional theology.²¹ Paradoxically, these faith-based institutions would legally be allowed to silence the voices of those who may at one time have been the institution's primary constituency in ways that state universities could not.

Christian universities facing traditional institutional pressures could easily see redefining their faith statements as an ideal solution. By changing their associational mission to fit contemporary political and cultural expectations, Christian colleges could see themselves as avoiding the legal and cultural dangers discussed earlier. Furthermore, they could see themselves as increasing their potential student population, thereby ensuring long-term economic viability.²²

Notes

1. The classics in this scholarship remain James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges & Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 1998); George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds, *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1992); and George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press,

1994). Christian scholars have continued to examine the issue, as seen in Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan Alleman, and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017). Given the issues currently facing today's Christian colleges, this essay will substantially rely on Burtchaell's book, which describes colleges facing similar challenges. Marsden has long been interested in why the post-1950s evangelical college world was so weak. See George M. Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nichols Wolterstorff (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219–64.

2. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*.

3. Rick Seltzer, "Days of Reckoning," Inside Higher Ed, November 13, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/11/13/spate-recent-college-closures-has-some-seeing-long-predicted-consolidation-taking>.

4. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 562.

5. Jon Marcus, "College Enrollment Has Plummeted, and Private Universities Are Scrambling," *Business Insider*, June 29, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/private-colleges-worried-over-plummeting-college-enrollment-2017-6>.

6. Western Governors University is but one example of this educational model. Western Governors University, "How We Do It," https://www.wgu.edu/tuition_financial_aid/tuition#.

7. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 589.

8. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 601.

9. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 601.

10. President Barack Obama's Equal Opportunity Employment Commission began making this case in 2015. Emma Green, "Trump's Battle over LGBT Discrimination Is Just Beginning," *Atlantic*, July 28, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/07/title-vii/535182/>.

11. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 758.

12. David French, "Gordon College Keeps Its Faith and Its Accreditation," *National Review*, May 1, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/417788/gordon-college-keeps-its-faith-and-its-accreditation-david-french>.

13. For example, the American Psychological Association's requirements for graduate school accreditation include nondiscrimination

based on gender identity when hiring for faculty positions. See American Psychological Association, *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology (G&P)*, 2006, <https://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/about/policies/guiding-principles.pdf>.

14. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 836.

15. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 628.

16. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 821.

17. *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, 530 US 640 (2000), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/99-699.ZS.html>.

18. *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 483 US 327, 336 (2012), https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/10-553#writing-10-553_CONCUR_5. Marc Stern discusses the issues in conversing with those who see religious exemptions for gender issues as simply a first step toward undermining racial civil rights. Marc D. Stern, "Same-Sex Marriage and the Churches," in *Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty: Emerging Conflicts*, eds. Douglas Laycock, Anthony Picarello Jr., and Robin Wilson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 28, 29.

19. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York, New York University Press: 2012), 52. For an example of CRT essays, see Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia, PN: Temple University Press, 1999). The CRT movement has largely split into different groups, each writing about its distinct form of oppression. Regardless, the initial essays show the template that the different gender and racial groups use when discussing their oppressive experiences. For counterarguments, see Charles R. Kesler, "The Old New Left and the New New Left," *Claremont Review of Books* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 31–37, http://www.claremont.org/download_pdf.php?file_name=7575Kesler.pdf; Douglas Litowitz, "Some Critical Thoughts on Critical Race Theory," *Notre Dame Law Review* 72, no. 2 (1997), <http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1844&context=ndlr>; and Dan Subotnik, "What's Wrong with Critical Race Theory?: Reopening the Case for Middle Class Values," *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 683 (1998), <http://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=scholarlyworks>. Jonathan Haidt has argued that focusing on racial differences can be counterproductive

when seeking racial reconciliation. For a popular overview, see Jonathan Haidt, “Hard Truths About Race on Campus,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hard-truths-about-race-on-campus-1462544543?mg=prod/accounts-wsj>. For an aggressive but fun overview of some underlying thinkers behind CRT, see Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

20. Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, “State of the Law: Speech Codes,” <https://www.thefire.org/in-court/state-of-the-law-speech-codes/>; and Brett A. Sokolow, Daniel Kast, and Timothy J. Dunn, “The Intersection of Free Speech and Harassment Rules,” *Human Rights Magazine* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2011), https://www.americanbar.org/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/human_rights_vol38_2011/fall2011/the_intersection_of_free_speech_and_harassment_rules.html.

21. This can easily be portrayed as a Christian university’s speaking “prophetically.” It is fascinating how nicely these prophetic statements match both the content and interest of the *New York Times*’ editorial pages. One might suspect that those editorial pages effectively play the same role that the magisterium plays in Roman Catholic theology: providing guidance as to correct thinking. The Christian colleges simply add some baptismal water, and the mainstream progressive thought is now a prophetic utterance. Of course, the concern that churches would exchange theology for politics is not inherently new. “A pessimist might suggest that Protestant theology has simply collapsed into a series of ‘modernisms,’ defined as Christian glossing for convictions rooted substantially in some other contemporary absolutism.” Mark Noll, “Introduction to Modern Protestantism,” in *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, & Human Nature*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 277–78. An institution’s fear of being viewed as fundamentalist can easily lead to that institution exchanging traditional fundamentalism with progressive fundamentalism.

22. See the next section for a proposed model that presents different strategies for dealing with institutional change.

Whither Christian Higher Education?

Future Trajectories

Bradley Murg, Denise Daniels, and Caleb Henry

Christian institutions of higher education are facing substantial challenges. As discussed in the prior section, Christian colleges are facing increased market competition, cultural disdain, and political antagonism. Some Christian institutions may consider replacing traditionally orthodox doctrine with a more culturally palatable and politically acceptable mission statement. We suggest that the political economy can provide a framework for understanding the process of institutional change in Christian colleges and universities. And finally, we discuss some ways that Christian colleges and universities might retain their identity and thrive in the current context of a changing higher education landscape.

Our approach will conceptualize universities as institutions. We assume that colleges and universities are “building blocks of social order: they represent socially sanctioned, that is, collectively enforced expectations with respect to the behavior of specific categories of actors or to the performance of certain activities. Typically they involve mutually related rights and obligations for actors distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate, right and wrong, possible and impossible actions, and thereby organizing behavior into predictable and reliable patterns.”¹

The university, in this sense, serves as a governing institution for its members—setting out expectations for behavior with a particular set of incentives and sanctions that it can enforce. At the same time, assuming that administrators act rationally based on the need to balance budgets and “keep the doors open,” the primary feedback mechanism supporting institutional continuity is student

enrollment numbers—with many Christian universities relying on a historic local or regional base of churches and Christian secondary schools serving as a pipeline to matriculation.

The literature on the political economy of institutional change has burgeoned in recent years. Kathleen Ann Thelen and Wolfgang Streeck make institutional development a central theme by looking systematically at periodic political realignments and negotiation in a way that invites comparative analysis over long periods spanning many decades.² Consistent with Avner Greif and David Laitin's call to move beyond models of change that "draw too sharp a line between stability and innovation, but understand that many key sources of change are endogenous,"³ this approach can be useful in understanding change in Christian higher education, in which no single critical juncture can be identified as the moment when an institution "flipped" from orthodoxy toward either a secular or "politicized mission" approach. That is, it is a gradual transformation that ultimately results in a new order within the institution.

Five Types of Institutional Transformation

Thelen and Streeck identify five types of institutional transformation: displacement, layering, drift, conversion, and exhaustion (see Table 1). Organizations going through change may experience one or more of these types of change over a relatively long period of time. We will use these types to discuss the ways in which Christian colleges and universities might experience change; ultimately, we will use this model to discuss how university leaders might intentionally approach change in their institutions.

Displacement. Streeck and Thelen focus on whether the fringe ("progressive" reformers) and the core can coexist and whether sufficient defectors from the core to the fringe can displace the former. As illustrated by Burchaell, layering through the establishment of new programs, institutes, codes of conduct, and course curriculum is one potential model; however, other types of change (conversion, drift, and replacement) are also valuable in highlighting

Table 1. Streeck and Thelen's Five Types of Gradual Transformation

	Displacement	Layering	Drift	Conversion	Exhaustion
Definition	Slowly rising salience of subordinate to dominant institutions	New elements attached to existing institutions gradually change their status and structure	Neglect of institutional maintenance in spite of external change, resulting in slippage	Redeployment of old institutions to new purposes; new purposes attached to old structures	Gradual breakdown of institutions over time
Mechanism	Defection	Differential growth	Deliberate neglect	Redirection; Reinterpretation	Depletion
Elaboration	Institutional incoherence opens space for deviant behavior	Compromise between old and new slowly turning into defeat of the old	Rules remaining unchanged in face of new external conditions	Gaps between rules and enforcement due to limits to design, ambiguity of rules, and so forth	Decreasing returns as generalization changes cost-benefit relations; Overextension

Source: Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Ann Thelen, *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Table 1.1, 31.

how Christian colleges are likely to evolve over time. Institutional conversion is particularly relevant.

Layering. As Streeck and Thelen point out, institutions may be subject to increasing returns and lock-in effects—in other words, institutions *can* remain remarkably consistent over time despite existing in the midst of rapid social change. However, this does not necessarily preclude institutional change, as reformers can work around those elements of an institution that have become “unchangeable.”⁴ Such reform is referred to as “layering.” Streeck and Thelen argue that this process of layering can set in motion path-altering dynamics through differential growth.

For Streeck and Thelen, layering involves “active sponsorship of amendments, additions, or revisions to an existing set of institutions. The actual mechanism for change is differential growth; the introduction of new elements setting in motion dynamics through which they, over time, actively crowd out or supplant by default the old system [in this case, Christian orthodoxy] as the domain of the latter shrinks relative to the former.”⁵ In Christian higher education, this could include revising student codes of conduct and faculty handbooks and gradually adding students from a secular background to the campus.

While the revision might appear to be relatively minor on the surface, it can play havoc with existing institutional feedback mechanisms—for example, student enrollment numbers. As the historic student base begins to look for the exits (or simply decides not to apply), support for the Christian university’s traditional mission declines. This is then exacerbated by recognition that enrollment numbers are declining and that the school needs to more strongly appeal to a “new base”—a base that is not committed to Christian orthodoxy—thereby incentivizing further changes to appeal to a secular student population to stem the collapse in application numbers and the financial threat to the school’s viability.

Drift. Institutional drift is understood as the neglect of institutional maintenance resulting in slippage in institutional practice on the ground. In other words, external conditions matter, and institutions must “keep up” with these changes.⁶ Institutional displacement derives from the increased salience of subordinate institutions due to institutional coherence or the active cultivation of a new “logic of action” in an extant institutional setting.⁷

In this sense, institutions that adhere to traditional understandings of gender and sexuality find themselves confronted by a world that has shifted far from Christian orthodoxy. Having not confronted this reality nor built the requisite internal structures to maintain their traditional standards, “slippage” occurs, and the institution finds itself in an exceedingly difficult position. All incentives for the administrator encourage secularization, and absent a

sanctioning body—for example, a board of trustees majority from an orthodox Christian denomination—the institution abandons any pretense of orthodoxy.

Conversion. Institutional conversion occurs when institutions are directed to new goals, functions, or purposes. For Streeck and Thelen, political contestation driving change through conversion is made possible by “gaps that exist by design or emerge over time between institutionalized rules and their local enactment.”⁸

In Christian higher education, we see this in codes of conduct and other guidelines for student life that exist on paper but generally go unenforced or are actively ignored by administrators who want to avoid any perception that their institution is “out of sync” with prevailing mores and the attitudes of the surrounding culture. The university’s mission (as expressed in mission statements and so forth) in this case is redeployed in the service of new goals, such as in the example discussed in the previous section, those professed by critical race theory—in which “social justice” and “intersectionality” serve as an all-encompassing mission, ultimately crowding out orthodoxy.

Four sources of such gaps are highlighted by Streeck and Thelen: (1) the cognitive limits of institution builders, (2) unintended consequences of actions, (3) ambiguities in the rules that define institutionalized behavior, and (4) the redeployment of rules by marginalized actors. The cognitive limits of institution builders and the concomitant unintended consequences they note are illustrated by a mission ostensibly designed for promoting orthodoxy but taken up as a tool or focal point for promoting a secular political agenda. Ambiguities in the rules that define institutionalized behavior provide space for political contestation over the interpretation of said rules, which can be seen through the lack of enforcement of codes of conduct. Finally, marginalized actors redeploying rules is depicted through reframing the college’s mission as “social justice” and requiring all faculty to demonstrate their allegiance thereto.

Exhaustion. This may be the most obvious category of social change. The leaders of Christian colleges can easily fall prey to Elijah's complaint: "I alone am left."⁹

Concerns regarding institutional exhaustion of Christian colleges are not new. George Marsden described the evangelical academic community of the 1950s: "Evangelical academia, if noticed at all, seemed from the prevailing liberal humanist perspective the vestiges of a lost civilization."¹⁰ The then-widespread confidence in an increasing secularization was apparently confirmed by the struggles of the evangelical academy. From this perspective, Christian higher education no longer serves a unique need and will eventually exhaust its capital base.

Now What?

In the previous section, we reviewed the historic challenges associated with colleges and universities maintaining their Christian identity over time. We also raised the possibility of a new threat to the Christian institution of higher education—namely, the pressure to redefine its identity to comport with social changes in the larger culture and baptizing such changes in Christian language. On the one hand these institutions are protected from objections to a shifting identity on the basis of First Amendment claims of free speech due to their historic religious mission and ongoing faith-based language; on the other hand, while the particularized view of truth that is promoted in these institutions may run counter to historic Christian commitments, objections to it may be viewed as a new heresy. Finally, we discussed the ways that a neo-institutionalist understanding of change in organizations can be used to identify the mechanisms and outcomes of likely change in Christian colleges and universities.

We now turn to ways that Christian colleges and universities might retain their orthodox faith-based identities while competing in a rapidly changing landscape of higher education. We believe that successful Christian institutions of higher education will:

- (1) focus on their theological or faith mission, (2) integrate the

liberal arts throughout the curriculum, and (3) reinforce ideals of free speech and academic freedom across campus.

Emphasis on the Christian Mission. Staying true to their historic theological commitments might be the only viable niche available to many Christian schools in the US today.¹¹ As the number of traditional college-age students declines, many schools are looking to expand their student demographic beyond the Christian communities from which they have traditionally drawn students. However, such an approach often weakens the institution's Christian identity as its leaders downplay the school's faith-based commitments and requirements to attract non-Christian students and as the number of non-Christian students in the institution begins to rise. In the previous section, we discussed this process as one of "layering."

Slowly the ethos of the institution begins to change, and once this change occurs it is hard to reverse. At some point, the Christian college or university becomes nearly indistinguishable from its secular counterparts, resulting in a more intensely competitive landscape for the now nominally Christian college. To increase the number of prospective students it might attract, the college has unintentionally increased the number of institutions with which it must now compete.

The alternative is to focus clearly and explicitly on the school's faith-based identity. Colleges should not try to be all things to all people. In contradistinction, colleges should develop both the spiritual and intellectual lives of students from a particular faith tradition. This is simply more likely to retain a core group of prospective students who will consider that institution to be an attractive college option. While the potential pool of students may be smaller, the specific niche that the Christian college fills is more likely to attract such students.

Integrating Liberal Arts. A second area that is important for Christian colleges and universities to emphasize is that of the liberal arts, with particular focus on developing students' analytical, critical

thinking, and communication skills. This emphasis is important for the private religious institution for two primary reasons.

First, as more state-funded community colleges, technical schools, and universities seek to prepare job-ready students, Christian institutions will struggle to effectively compete with subsidized programs. Furthermore, private industry is also contributing to the development and support of professional and technical programs in colleges and universities. However, most secular companies subsidizing such programs are reluctant to contribute organizational funds toward programs housed in explicitly faith-based institutions. Ultimately, offering such programs will become too costly for the Christian college or university that relies on tuition income. Students who are attracted to technical or professional education will typically find such programs to be less expensive and often higher quality in state- or business-subsidized universities.

A liberal arts education provides benefits to the Christian college or university beyond its cost-effectiveness, however. The second reason this emphasis is important for Christian higher education is that such an education is more likely to give graduates a long-term career trajectory that surpasses that of someone who has simply received specialized technical training. Even in the world of high-tech and data analytics, clear advantages accrue to those with a broad liberal arts background.¹²

Some argue that a major in the liberal arts is less attractive to students from poor families or first-generation college students. That is, these students may be more likely to pursue majors that are “practical” and that can be immediately parlayed into an income after graduation. The Christian college or university’s response to such students must be threefold.

First, the college must continue to communicate the long-term value of the liberal arts. Examples of how and why a liberal arts background can lead to success—particularly for first-generation students—are key.¹³

Second, Christian institutions must help students develop the job-search skills that may have been assumed among previous generations of college students. Emphasis on career planning,

networking, interviewing, and internships must become part of a Christian liberal arts education.

Third, Christian liberal arts institutions do not have to limit their major offerings to the arts and sciences. They can and perhaps should provide opportunities for professional and technical skill development, but with some caveats: Such programs should have a significant foundation of and integration with the liberal arts. The multidisciplinary perspective a business, nursing, or computer science major gains from studying philosophy, English, physics, and international relations pays dividends in ways that most people do not initially recognize or expect.¹⁴ Christian institutions in particular should be creative in thinking about how such integration could occur. Christian education leaders typically assume that theological commitments are interwoven with other curricular content. Might they not also expect that history would inform medicine, the arts would inform accounting, and social science would inform computer science?

Upholding Free Speech. In recent years, the general value that our culture has placed on free expression appears to be declining. On college campuses there is increasingly a tension between free speech rights and perceptions that some speech is “unsafe” or threatening to those who are marginalized.¹⁵ While free speech advocates 50 years ago tended to be politically left of center, today’s advocates are more likely to be conservative.

Increasingly on college campuses, the right to free speech is subjugated to other community values. Paradoxically, one of these values is “diversity,” yet the outcome of this value in the context of free speech is less diversity in perspectives allowed in the public sphere. The evidence in various domains shows that singularity of viewpoints tends to result in flawed decision-making and poor long-term outcomes for organizations.¹⁶ That is, dissent is often a functional process resulting in positive organizational outcomes. Our current cultural shift away from the diversity of opinions that free speech engenders may be hazardous to organizational health.

To thrive in the future, Christian colleges and universities should emphasize the importance of free speech and academic freedom in the context of the institution's faith commitments.¹⁷ Obviously, the right to free speech is never without limitation. Yelling "fire" in a crowded theater is not protected, nor are explicit threats against another person. Today's debate is over how to understand such limitations.

Because Christian institutions historically have had to define their theological positions, they have practice at defining boundaries and simultaneously holding diverse perspectives in tension. William Ringenberg writes that academic freedom is particularly important and valuable for the Christian college because it reflects the Christian values of seeking truth and living in community and, ultimately, because it reinforces a commitment to the virtues of honesty, humility, and love.¹⁸

When diverse ideas are shared in a community that is predicated on a commitment to God's truth, and that values the *Imago Dei* of each individual, there will still be conflict. But this conflict is less likely to be experienced as relationship conflict (disagreements that result from a negative view of the other) than as a disagreement of ideas (referred to in conflict literature as conceptual or task-based conflict).¹⁹ The latter type of conflict can be good for organizational outcomes, whereas the former is nearly always destructive.

Considering the process of institutional change discussed in the previous section, one of the best ways to avoid unintentional shift away from an institution's mission is to encourage the participation of numerous voices providing a variety of perspectives. As long as the individuals holding to different perspectives are not denigrated for their views, the perspectives themselves can be evaluated in light of each other. It is in such an "iron sharpens iron" context that truth can be pursued.

Christianity from its beginning has been a culture-forming religion. At the same time, Christianity has adapted and interacted with non-Christian ways of thought.²⁰ Christians have always struggled between applying traditional orthodox doctrine in new situations and simply denying orthodox belief. Today's Christian college

leaders face a new twist on this challenge, for they must navigate these adaptations along with increasing market competition, cultural disdain, and political antagonism. Secular academics continue to view Christian colleges as evincing the late stages of institutional exhaustion. As Christian academics, we instead believe that these challenges create an opportunity for a more vibrant Christian academy and hope that this analysis can contribute to that academy.

Notes

1. Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Ann Thelen, *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31.
2. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*.
3. Avner Greif and David Laitin, "A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change," *American Political Science Review* 98 (2004): 633–52.
4. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*, 22.
5. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*, 24.
6. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*, 24.
7. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*, 21.
8. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*, 26.
9. I Kings 19:10 (New American Standard Version).
10. George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219.
11. James Burtchaell argued that Christian universities often mistakenly replace theological doctrine with moral platitudes. He particularly stresses the dangers that come when universities rely on devotional piety to maintain their Christian identity. James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges & Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 838–46.
12. J. M. Olejarz, "Liberal Arts in the Data Age," *Harvard Business Review*, July/August 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/07/liberal-arts-in-the-data-age>.
13. George Anders, "The Unexpected Value of the Liberal Arts," *Atlantic*,

August 1, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/08/the-unexpected-value-of-the-liberal-arts/535482/>.

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US Higher Education in an Exponential Era

Kevin Brown and Stephen Clements

In 1990, a team of researchers launched the Human Genome Project—a 15-year collaborative effort to identify the sequence of the genome. Halfway into the multibillion dollar undertaking, only 1 percent of the genome had been sequenced, leading many to label the effort a failure. At this rate, some said, it would take a century to approach completion. However, author and scientist Ray Kurzweil had a different interpretation: The project was actually *ahead* of schedule. He writes: “The project had been doubling in price-performance and capacity every year, and at one percent it was only seven doublings (at one year per doubling) away from completion. It was indeed completed seven years later.”¹

What did Kurzweil understand that other experts did not? The answer is exponential change. A linear, or straight line, is additive, changing at a constant *unit*. (Think of a straight 45-degree line.) Exponential curves are multiplicative, changing at a constant *rate*. (Think of a “hockey-stick” shaped curve.)

The distinction is important, as today we find ourselves in a period of exponential change, increasingly characterized by the “exponential organization”—a term popularized recently by Singular University’s Executive Director Salim Ismail. An exponential organization (ExO) is a firm whose “impact (or output) is disproportionately large—at least 10x larger—compared to its peers because of the use of new organizational techniques that leverage accelerating technologies.”² Ours is an age of information, notes Ismail, and information facilitated through technology grows at an exponential rate. This has been established in the oft-cited

Moore's law or, more recently, Ray Kurzweil's "Law of Accelerating Returns." For example, when households enthusiastically signed into AOL in the early 1990s, a mere handful of websites were available to browse. By the end of the century, the number was more than three million and has since eclipsed one billion.

Moreover, when information grows at an exponential rate, costs also decrease in a similar manner. Ismail points out that the first human genome was sequenced in 2000 at a price tag of nearly \$3 billion. Recently, the largest producer of DNA sequencers, Illumina, announced its goal of a \$100 price point in the foreseeable future.³ This trend makes sense, particularly in a digital age, where the marginal cost of delivering a host of "information goods" is nearly zero.

You might say that the nature of change is, itself, *changing*. This phenomenon, the rate of change, has significant implications for existing "linear" institutions. To date, the information revolution, and the emergence of exponential organizations, has prompted mass disruptions across numerous industries in the US. For example, just five information-technology-heavy companies, only two of which existed when AOL launched—Apple, Alphabet (the Google parent company), Microsoft, Amazon, and Facebook—are currently valued at nearly \$3 trillion and are transforming how many firms do business.⁴ Industries such as journalism, the music and entertainment fields, and telecommunications have been almost completely remade in the internet era. Retail companies have either adapted to the information age requirements or, consequently, have failed. Manufacturing and service companies have fundamentally altered how they market themselves, how their logistics mechanisms function, and even how they relate to employees.

A key question for faculty members in the Values & Capitalism network, obviously, is how the ExO phenomenon will affect higher education. Indeed, colleges and universities are perhaps the archetypal linear institutions that traffic in information. They are notoriously hierarchical in their organizational structures, exhibit low-risk decision-making, innovate from within, operate with high human capital and high fixed assets, and—perhaps above all—tend

to rely on additive, linear thinking (1 building = 400 students, 2 buildings = 800 students, etc.). A typical higher education approach involves strategic initiatives related to enrollments, capital expenditures, academic programs, and budgets—sequentially mapped out in one-, five-, and 10-year blocks and often associated with fundraising campaigns. Such initiatives aim toward growth, and with growth comes scalability and sustainability, the “raison d’être of the linear organization.”⁵

The problem with this approach, suggests Ismail, is that if you are an information-enabled organization you will, bluntly put, slide “at breakneck speed into oblivion” if you fail to become an ExO.⁶ Exponential organizations are the structures “best suited to address the accelerated, non-linear, web-driven pace of modern life.”⁷ Given the information-based nature of higher education, this is an important, and relevant, claim. Yet academic institutions tend to be sluggish, inflexible, and reactive to exogenous changes in the markets they inhabit. The imagery is ominous. Like a recalcitrant, veteran professor doggedly clinging to an overhead projector and handwritten yellow legal pad notes, institutions of higher education are more likely to defend the status quo than embrace dynamic change.

Of course, emerging technologies have clearly affected higher education. Most universities and colleges have added online courses and programs to their repertoire. Such courses and programs have helped universities maintain revenue flow from (usually) nontraditional distance education students, even when traditional campus-based enrollments have declined. Some universities have “gone big” with online efforts, enrolling tens of thousands of students in such programs via national marketing campaigns. It is arguable, however, that to date the addition of online, technology-infused programs have had only a marginal impact on most colleges and universities in the US, and for the most part the long-standing budget model for many institutions remains firmly in place. In other words, the much-heralded warning that the information revolution would massively disrupt all but the wealthiest and most prestigious colleges and universities has yet to fully materialize.

So what are we to make of the fact that information technologies have so far only unsettled higher education at the margins, while broader economic changes suggest that we are indeed in the era of the ExO? What might the eventual impact of the ExO be on colleges and universities going forward? If a university is “the ultimate information-based organization” as Georgetown University Provost Robert Groves writes, how might the ExO disrupt, or even displace, the long-standing organizational architecture of colleges and universities?⁸ What vestiges of the academy will be left behind when postsecondary education hits an information inflection point?

As we address these questions, it is useful to step back and reflect briefly on higher education’s place in US society: its features—both good and bad—and its function and value. After all, colleges and universities in the US are not simply business firms reflecting the latest in consumer preferences and technologies. Rather, while universities do operate using widely accepted business models, they are also historic *institutions* in our social order, serving not simply a job-preparation function but helping form the character of the young Americans who will shape our economy and social order in years to come.⁹

In the paragraphs that follow, we touch on the broader role of academia in our society. From here, we consider how these institutions might thrive in a dynamic, ever-changing, and unpredictable future.

American Higher Education: What the Traditional Model Hath Wrought

American universities continue to find themselves the locus of many important debates about the shifting nature of our society—and they generally operate out of the same model, with each campus functioning as its own city-state, so to speak. Indeed, American universities are arguably the most cross-pressured institutions in the nation, embodying the pluralism that is the global commercial order and accommodating students and

faculty who reflect a host of different ideologies, religions, languages, and racial groups.

This model is not without its challenges. At research-intensive institutions, faculty often avoid campus and students as much as possible, in the quest for externally funded projects and teaching buyouts that enable them to churn out publications necessary for tenure and promotion, while classes are taught by low-paid graduate students or adjuncts.

Non-research-oriented institutions have different sets of problems. Regional state universities educate the bulk of American undergraduates but have suffered greatly from tightening state budgets, a shift in spending priorities over time, and curricular weaknesses of many secondary schools. Private institutions, save for a modest number of well-endowed elite colleges, face recurrent existential crises as enrollments—on which they are heavily dependent—wax and wane (a threat complicated by the federal government as it tinkers with financial aid policies). Meanwhile, the nation's community college system, designed as a low-cost “on ramp” for higher education, suffers massive student attrition problems due to unprepared, distracted, and impoverished students.

Among other lamentable outcomes, this model has failed to place sufficient downward pressure on institutional costs. Given the relatively inelastic nature of demand for colleges and universities, cost increases have led to a considerable spike in student loans, most recently eclipsing \$1.3 trillion dollars in outstanding debt.¹⁰ The upward trend in student debt has continued over the past quarter century, with no apparent halt in the foreseeable future.¹¹

In a recent poll of college and university chief financial officers facilitated by Inside Higher Ed and Gallup, less than a quarter of participants were “strongly confident” in their school's business model sustainability over the next five years. Even less, 13 percent, were “strongly confident” over 10 years.¹² This consensus suggests that colleges and universities find themselves in new territory.

After the 2015 announcement that Sweet Briar College in Virginia would be closing due to financial unsustainability, College President James F. Jones Jr. questioned the solvency of the existing

model. “I think the whole of American higher education is on the cusp of a state of flux that we have never seen.”¹³

In spite of these legitimate concerns about the higher education system, one cannot help but be struck by otherwise promising and constructive features.

For example, even amid change over time, the American university model, in nearly all its forms, has endured. Characterized above by the city-state metaphor, the model features a discipline-oriented, research-trained, peer-managed faculty—organized in schools or units roughly commensurate with the division of labor across the economic and social order that works collaboratively to educate students who have gathered in a geographic location to be part of these teaching and inquiry endeavors. The infrastructure of a given university—no matter how sprawling, gaudy, modest, or poorly executed—is designed to support the gathering and interaction of educated and inspired faculty with interested students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.¹⁴

Further, American universities and colleges, whatever their shortcomings, continue to be the primary source of human capital development and credentialing for our economy. According to statistics from the US Department of Education, nearly every year our institutions produce some 178,000 doctoral degree recipients, 750,000 master’s degrees, and almost two million bachelor’s degrees in fields such as business, computer science, engineering, education, allied health, and the sciences.¹⁵ By our estimate, higher education is a half-trillion dollar industry, representing about 3 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product.

Universities also remain the institutions most clearly committed to open, empirically based, theoretically driven inquiry that builds on history, tradition, and the principles of free expression and robust argumentation.¹⁶ Given the heightened levels of political polarization and blood and soil populism in the US right now, and the apparent spread of illiberalism abroad, the decline of American universities would be a troublesome development when considering the necessity of an educated, articulate, and critically minded populace. As John Cassidy writes, “If there is one thing

most Americans have been able to agree on over the years, it is that getting an education, particularly a college education, is a key to human betterment and prosperity.”¹⁷

To summarize, the vast array of American universities and colleges may indeed reflect many problems of culture and practice. But the model of gathering, teaching, and learning that drives these institutions remains robust, implying that higher education is about more than knowledge dissemination and will likely endure. This is an important insight as we consider the future of colleges and universities in an age of the exponential organization.

The Future of Higher Education

History reveals that universities, while sluggish in nature, do tend to adjust to organizational or technological changes over time and, consequently, emerge stronger. But in the age of the ExO, what might we expect to see?

As Ismail describes it, the traditional, linear organization reflects a familiar blueprint. According to this model, an organization possesses some asset (good, service, etc.), a workforce, and a legal structure to protect it—all of which allows it to “sell access to scarcity.” What scarce good or service, though, is higher education selling access to? If the answer to this question relates to information and its dissemination, then the implications are significant. Specifically, professors, and the colleges and universities they inhabit, are no longer gatekeepers of knowledge and information. That is, knowledge is no longer scarce—it can be tapped by nearly anyone, anywhere, anytime, at a low cost. Put differently, what does it mean when the supposed “scarcity” you are selling is no longer scarce?

For the ExO, primacy is given to abundance, not scarcity, and to access, not ownership. As Ismail writes, “If your asset is information-based or commoditized at all, then accessing is better than possessing.”¹⁸ In other words, if a low-cost model for acquiring educational content already exists, why not access it (as opposed to producing your own)? Consider the myriad schools, for example,

that have begun to outsource basic math lessons to Kahn Academy—not their local teacher. This is not merely a complementary resource. Indeed, the marginal cost to deliver preexisting and digitally accessible content is effectively zero. Moreover, such resources can be scaled in a manner that bypasses traditionally linear constraints. One teacher can only service so many proximate students, but a digital resource transcends constraints relating to oversight, geography, time, and cost. In addition to outsourcing, schools may opt to create their own pool of information content that can be accessed, scaled, and replicated at a low cost. A recent example comes from Georgia Tech, which may significantly expedite the time period to acquire a bachelor's degree for residential students by moving several of their introductory courses to an online format.¹⁹

These ExO features are promising and are of consequence when we consider some of the more commonly lamentable dimensions of the higher education status quo. For example, when knowledge acquisition simply relates to the reception, understanding, and application of information—what we might call “hard skills”—accessibility of existing digital content could be a significant pivot from the otherwise linear model. Content can be transmitted by experts with infinite availability at increasingly lower prices, allowing professors to concentrate their efforts on research, publications, or other projects—a trade-off that does not necessarily have to come at the expense of the student's quality of education.²⁰ Further, the accessibility model would likely discourage the proliferation of capital expenditures on campus—high-tech buildings, luxury dorms, or other fixed-expense amenities—and encourage more sensible space use through multiuse facilities or even collaborative ventures among institutions. Indeed, knowledge sharing and accessibility models alter otherwise existing conceptions of course delivery, classrooms, and learning in general.

While much more could be written about the various manifestations of colleges and universities in an ExO era, the possibilities are hopeful and open imaginative space for a more efficacious and dynamic future for colleges and universities.

Yet the age of the ExO invites a second line of inquiry. Specifically, if information at a given college or university is no longer scarce, is there a dimension of a student's educational experience in the traditional model that is? While many schools will naturally advertise their educational credentials (programs, rankings, job placement, etc.), often a school's value proposition lies not in the degree but the experience of acquiring it. Students self-select into institutions for a variety of reasons, many of which are irreducible in nature and cannot be transferred. For example, students may opt for a historically African American institution over a better credentialed, and perhaps more affordable, state school. Other students may desire the traditions of a religious institution, the experience of an education abroad, or the expertise of a particular professor. (When considering Ph.D. work, students are often advised to apply to *professors*, not schools.) Similarly, students will continually seek to *gather*—self-selecting into proximate arrangements with peers, professors, and other college and university personnel as a formative part of their educational experience. Physical space matters, and only so much of what is “learned” transmits through asynchronous, non-proximate means. The aforementioned characteristics have value—the kind of value that is not easily outsourced.

Here's the point: Even in an exponential age, attributes of colleges and universities are legitimately “scarce”—thus inviting students to potentially unique experiences and affording the institution the opportunity to continue selling “access” to these experiences. In the ExO era, schools will have to be clear on what makes them distinct and unique—their irreducible, nontransferable qualities.

As a brief but illustrative example, consider colleges and universities understood as Christian in nature, or “Christian higher education.” Generally, these schools often mirror their non-Christian counterparts: dorms, athletics, student life, liberal arts, professional schools, and the common suite of undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, a close inspection reveals a more nuanced approach to the educational community—one that can hardly be captured in the mere acquisition of knowledge. Faith-based schools

seek to educate the mind, but their ultimate aim is formational—that is, developing and orienting students toward character, moral excellence, acute spiritual sensibilities, and meaningful societal contributions.

The formational ethos of Christian schools has embraced and supported both a social and a personal dimension. With respect to the latter, a faith-based educational ethos is not merely concerned with what Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc refer to as “the self-authoring mind.”²¹ Rather, and in a more classical sense, Aristotle believed that education should be aimed toward rightly ordered affections, desires, and impulses.²² Ordinate affections are at the heart of a prosperous, virtuous life. “The good life,” write Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, “is not simply one of satisfied desire; it indicates the proper goal of desire. Desire is to be cultivated, directed to the truly desirable. Moral education is an education of the sentiments.”²³ For the faith-based institution, “educating the sentiments” is a holistic notion, inculcated across a variety of university dimensions through repetition, experience, and relationship.

Given the traditional aims of Christian education, it is little wonder that such values are manifest in larger social, political, economic, and cultural ways. For example, the first college chartered to grant degrees to women was Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. Oberlin College, originally founded to promote Christian values, was the first US institution in higher education to admit students of all races and, consequently, graduated the first African American student in 1844. David Brooks has written about Frances Perkins and her college experience at Mount Holyoke, a Massachusetts seminary for women where character and service were preached as values necessary to live life well.²⁴ Moreover, Christian colleges and universities cultivate and refine the vocabulary to articulate the moral animus of its members. These attributes supersede knowledge, aiming for capacity and character, since “a good doctor is also a good poisoner.”²⁵ Christian higher education’s formative development of mind and heart, cultivation of virtue and excellence, and refining process culminating in preparation, application, and maturation

naturally spills over into a wider social, political, economic, and cultural realm. “The robust Christian thought that is fostered and embraced at [Christian colleges and universities],” writes Barry Corey, “is not just good for Christianity; it’s good for society.”²⁶

While this brief description hardly captures the breadth and multidimensional complexity of faith-based schools and universities, it does illustrate that Christian higher education aspires to more than knowledge acquisition, credentialing, and career preparation. As Kathleen Norris describes it, people of faith “traffic in intangibles.”²⁷ It would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine such “intangibles” being effectively absorbed in the ExO model. Indeed, when a student’s unique, and perhaps life-shaping, experience can be considered an asset, such an asset can be considered “scarce.” Put differently, while the ExO may transform significant dimensions of the existing higher education architecture, there are still experiences unique to the higher education model that remain scarce, nontransferrable, and of enduring importance and value. The challenge for Christian institutions will be determining how to sustainably offer such valuable experiences even as ExO dynamics exert downward pressure on costs.

Conclusion

We find ourselves in an age of information and rapid technological expansion. Indeed, ours is an exponential age. This has touched, or even transformed, multiple dimensions of society and culture—and long-standing institutions in higher education are no exception. While this may permanently change elements of the educational realm, it need not be an ominous prospect. We further submit that where schools can capitalize on unique, nontransferable educational experiences, their core identity, and mission, will remain. The age of the ExO is not so much a threat as it is an invitation to consider the value proposition schools provide to the student, community, and larger society. Value emerges in a market-oriented arrangement. Even amid exponential growth, this phenomenon will never change.

Notes

1. Ray Kurzweil, “Ray Kurzweil Responds to ‘Ray Kurzweil Does Not Understand the Brain,’” Kurzweil Accelerating Intelligence, August 20, 2010, <http://www.kurzweilai.net/ray-kurzweil-responds-to-ray-kurzweil-does-not-understand-the-brain>.

2. Salim Ismail, *Exponential Organizations* (New York: Diversion Books, 2014), 18.

3. Matthew Herper, “Illumina Promises to Sequence Human Genome for \$100—But Not Quite Yet,” *Forbes*, January 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/matthewherper/2017/01/09/illumina-promises-to-sequence-human-genome-for-100-but-not-quite-yet/#47fie6do386d>.

4. Jeff Desjardins, “Chart: Here’s How 5 Tech Giants Make Their Billions,” Visual Capitalist, May 12, 2017, <http://www.visualcapitalist.com/chart-5-tech-giants-make-billions/>.

5. Ismail, *Exponential Organizations*.

6. Ismail, *Exponential Organizations*, 15.

7. Ismail, *Exponential Organizations*, 45.

8. Robert Groves, “Labor Economics, Exponential Organizations, Mentors, and Well-Being,” Georgetown University Provost’s Blog, June 11, 2015, <https://blog.provost.georgetown.edu/labor-economics-exponential-organizations-mentors-and-well-being/>.

9. We might also add that universities operate at a distance from marketplace mechanisms and can thus remind us of where our current social, economic, and political struggles fit in historical, philosophical, and even theological context.

10. Zack Friedman, “Student Loan Debt in 2017: A \$1.3 Trillion Crisis,” *Forbes*, February 21, 2017.

11. The bulk of the debt load is held by middle- and lower-class students—therefore potentially contributing to inequality.

12. BKD National Higher Education Group, “2017 Annual Higher Education Outlook,” 2017, <https://www.bkd.com/docs/pdf/2016-Higher-Education-Annual-Outlook.pdf>.

13. Mark Toner, “The Highly Endangered Higher Education Business Model (and How to Fix It),” *American Council on Education*, June 12, 2015, <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/>

The-Highly-Endangered-Higher-Education-Business-Model.aspx.

14. Parents and politicians may lambaste universities as bloated, overpriced, or excessively political. But when their sons and daughters are accepted to the university of their choice, they will often move heaven and earth to enable those children to have the university experience they desire. To the last point, leaders from top colleges and universities recently collaborated to produce “Turning the Tide”—a comprehensive report attempting to reframe the admissions process in a manner that discourages overcoaching from enthusiastic parents in the college application process. See NewsEditor, “Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others and the Common Good Through College Admissions,” Harvard Graduate School of Education, January 20, 2016, <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/collegeadmissions>.

15. These data are for 2014–15, as offered in Tables 322–10, 323–10, and 324–10 from National Center for Education, “Most Current Digest Tables,” accessed November 24, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/current_tables.asp.

16. On the surface, this notion might seem open to challenge, given that purportedly controversial speakers have been met with intense acrimony and even violent opposition at colleges and universities across the country. Mary Eberstadt, for example, refers to the recent spate of campus toxicity as “victimhood Olympics.” That is, universities are understood as safe havens from a menacing, antagonistic world—not a space deliberately set aside to incubate the validity of ideas and their societal expression. However, such reactions must be understood as exceptions to the general rule and typically focused on elite institutions rather than the non-elite universities that educate the vast majority of undergraduate and graduate students. See Mary Eberstadt, “The Primal Scream of Identity Politics,” *Weekly Standard*, November 6, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-primal-scream-of-identity-politics/article/2010234>.

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insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/08/09/georgia-tech-plans-extension-undergraduate-online-computer.

20. It is worth noting, however, that higher education administrators will likely conceptualize cost savings in terms of cutting back faculty costs—and not necessarily as providing opportunities to free up faculty for scholarship.

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25. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1988), 245.

26. Barry H. Corey, “Christian Colleges and Universities Are Good for Society,” Amazon Web Services, 2016, http://lpc-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/lpc_docs_BarryCorey_op-ed.pdf.

27. Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 22.

About the Authors

Kevin Brown is an associate professor in Asbury University's Howard Dayton School of Business, where he directs the master of business administration program and teaches courses in ethics, business, and economics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Steve Clements is an associate professor at Asbury University, where he is program director of political science and also serves as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Denise Daniels is a professor of management in Seattle Pacific University's (SPU) School of Business, Government, and Economics, where she has also served as the associate dean and interim dean. Her work has been published in numerous academic and professional journals, and she has been recognized as both the Teacher and Scholar of the Year at SPU. Daniels regularly consults and provides executive coaching services and leadership development training. Her primary interests are in the areas of meaningful work, Sabbath, leadership, and motivation.

Caleb Henry is an associate professor of political science at Seattle Pacific University. He teaches a combination of American government and political theory courses, while also serving as the prelaw adviser. His research interests include American political thought, constitutional law, and Catholic social teaching.

Peter C. Meilaender is a professor of political science and the chair of the department of history and political science at Houghton College. He is the author of *Toward a Theory of Immigration* (Palgrave, 2001).

Bradley J. Murg is assistant professor of political science and director of global development studies at Seattle Pacific University. He is also affiliate professor of Russian politics at the Ellison Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies at the University of Washington. His research concentrates on the political economy of foreign aid, specifically Chinese and Russian foreign aid policy with a particular focus on Southeast Asia. Murg is a senior research fellow at the Cambodia Institute for Cooperation and Peace and a founding director of the Greater Mekong Research Center, a classical liberal think tank in Phnom Penh.