


Summer 2016

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Nicholas, Arlene J., "Mercy and Business: A Partnership for Catholic University Business Students" (2016). *Faculty and Staff - Articles & Papers*. Paper 66.

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Mercy and Business: A Partnership for Catholic University Business Students

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Abstract

Can a respected university mission that reflects mercy and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition be integrated into business courses? This author's wholehearted answer is yes. Critical to this integration is the willingness of students to embrace concepts such as fairness and mercy, as part of their lives beyond academia; that caring for others is inclusive in business and private life. Espousing the merits and obligations of service to the poor and marginalized to business students is exemplified in many forms. For management courses – the protection from harassment or disenfranchisement of any ethnic, economic or lifestyle differences of employees and co-workers. In human resources – outreach for diversity, fairness of applications, interviews and testing, and opportunities for training and promotions. In business communication courses – the tenets of Aristotle's logos, ethos and pathos are accentuated as methods of logical organization; ethical writings with credible research; and empathy and passion toward others and confidence in your service or product. In all business courses, the understanding of cultural dimensions and respect for the backgrounds and beliefs of others are emphasized.

Introduction

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition gives students and faculty the “opportunity to reflect on how faith traditions might provide a robust and profound intellectual and cultural resource which can inform commitments to justice while working in any career” (Uelmen, 2004, p. 923) and their personal lives. Salve Regina University and its faculty model this tradition through supportive social events, community service, and commitment to improving the lives of people

on and off campus. This paper will explore the connections to the mission of mercy based concepts and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as it relates to students preparing to enter the world of business.

Onset of Catholic Intellectual Tradition

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is steeped in history from monasteries and medieval European universities with the teachings of theology, philosophy, medicine and law (King, 2000). Business teaching also became part of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as early as the industrial age as a social teaching effort regarding political, cultural and economic problems. The papal encyclicals from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labor)* 1891 addressing the right to property to Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus (Hundredth Year)* 1991 denoting that organizations are communities of people who must also be at the service of society (Costa & Ramos, 2011) have re-enforced the social teaching in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Guidance for business decisions have been reflected in many of the papal encyclicals

In her recent research on Catholic education, Tracey Rowland (2014) refers to the encyclicals¹ of the former pontiff Benedict XVI that indicate transformative love along with professional competence should differentiate the work in Catholic institutions from others (p. 8). Amelia Uelemen's (2004) article on Catholic law schools noted the "rich heritage of social justice and service to the marginalized" (p. 923) of these institutions and their encouragement of students to help the public.

¹ *Deus caritas est (God Is Love)* February 25, 2006, *Spe Salvi (Christian Hope)* November 30, 2007 and *Caritas In Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth)* June 29, 2009.

Business Theories and Catholic Social Tradition

Business students are encouraged to be of service to the public in courses including management, finance, economics, marketing, accounting, law and ethics that all support the Stakeholder theory of the importance to consider any effect on workers, owners, customers/clients, community (Brower & Mahajan, 2013). This is part of Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, (Russo, & Perrini, 2010) another expounded theory of justice that is part of the lessons for Salve Regina business majors. CSR is explained as the “voluntary initiatives taken by companies over and above their legal and social obligations that integrate societal and environmental concerns into their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders” (Brower & Mahajan, 2013, p. 313).

Another similar theory and concept is the Triple Bottom Line that gives a hierarchy to people and environment, followed by profit (Schroeder & DeNoble, 2014). This is not to say that capitalism is no longer a viable business model. But it redefines any organization that opposes profit-making from sweat shop labor or at the cost of harming others with unsafe working conditions, or polluting or destroying the environment; practices that are, unfortunately, still in existence. The Salve Regina mission is apparent in business courses in which students learn about respect for people, places and the possibility of capitalism with a heart.

A Caring Business; Not an Oxymoron

The entire curriculum at Salve Regina University upholds the dignity of humans and the preservation of the environment. In the business department there is even a course in the undergraduate and graduate programs, *Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises*, that exposes students to a variety of working organizational models, for-profit, non-profit and hybrids, that care for people, society and the environment. For example in the for profit sector,

Better Shred (www.bettershredri.com) is a secure document disposal company that was created from a non-profit CranstonArc, that supports Rhode Islanders with developmental disabilities and gives them jobs. And there is Glee Gum (www.gleegum.com) that produces a natural based gum with chicle that enables the employment of people in developing countries and sustainable practices for the rainforest.

So business students learn that you can ‘do good’ in many forms of businesses where rather than maximization of profit, social outcomes are maximized. In fact, even if costs seem higher to create such a conscientious organization, in time it can become more successful because of its outlook (Schroeder & DeNoble, 2014). Whether locally or globally, students are encouraged to think with their hearts as well as their minds to create or work in business ventures that respect the dignity of humans and the beauty of the earth. This is in keeping with Catholic social tradition and teaching that transcends the spiritual by addressing, as in the Old Testament, the need for people and society to be committed to charity and justice – the common good (Garvey, 2003).

Mercy Mission

Salve Regina University’s mission inspires others for the common good and guides faculty, staff and students with an awareness of the “Catholic institution, founded by the Sisters of Mercy that seeks wisdom and promotes universal justice . . . for a world that is harmonious just and merciful” (Mission Statement, 2014). The Mercy core values of justice, respect, integrity, service, and compassion (Georgian Court, 2014) are integral to teaching business courses at Salve Regina.

Students are asked to analyze business cases, such as in Human Resources Management, Managerial Accounting, Investment Planning, Management and Organizational Behavior,

Business Law and other business based courses, with evidenced based research to support their thoughts and reflections on lessons from classes, readings, experiences or simply how they would want to be treated in a situation. Long before the scandals of Enron, Tyco, and mortgage frauds, Business Ethics has been a required course for undergraduate and graduate business students. The scholarship in all these courses is enriched by the reflection which “helps to inform and guide the human quest for knowledge and truth” and that “students understand their moral responsibilities to humankind and are prepared to search for Truth throughout their lives” (Misto, 2014, p. 1). Finding relevant research, reflecting on experience from profession/personal experiences, connecting classroom or online discussions to business scenarios can inform future practices of effective leadership (Callahan, 2013).

The establishment of Salve Regina University by the Sisters of Mercy is itself an example of benevolence and leadership. A mansion built by a corporate tycoon given to an order of nuns for a school. An order of nuns that was founded by a keen businesswoman, Catherine McAuley, who transformed the lives of poor women in Dublin, Ireland by providing shelter and education with an inheritance she had received from her childless employers. After the house for homeless girls was established Catherine founded the Mercy order and inspired others into lives of service and education (“Foundress,” 2014). Students are oriented in this back story and faculty are reminded of this altruistic heritage through workshops and collegiums.

Business and Meaningful Life

Another way students gain a better understanding of mercy and business is from examples in school life. For instance, the school has charity and blood drives, a VIA (Volunteers in Action) program, community service requirements and trips, and speakers from all faiths for presentations on global social issues. Faculty demonstrate the mission through caring for

students, volunteering in community work, and enlisting students to join them. Faculty also create student based outreach programs through clubs or academic enhancement of lessons. Additionally, many university staff along with faculty work in campus or personal community-based social enrichment projects including environmental initiatives. It is a spirit of compassion genuinely felt by campus colleagues.

Inspiring Students to Do Good

There are many connections for business to enrich the lives of workers and improve the community and society. “Teachers need to inspire their students to discover the good which is within them and to follow the call they have to use their professional skills and judgment as a force for good in the world” (“Vocation of ...”, 2011, p. 25).

In 2013, the graduate program is required *Business Ethics* course name was changed to *Social Justice and Business Ethics* to encompass, even in the title, the objectives and concerns for others in the business world. Ethical principles for business can be based on two principles: Human dignity - as every person is of value; and the common good - acting purposely together for a shared goal (“Vocation of ...”, 2011). Salve Regina’s mission resounds in the shared goal for a just, harmonious and merciful world. Faculty, Catholic and non-Catholic, are or should be committed to the mission of Salve Regina to manage the connected knowing of the Catholic intellectual tradition to “manage the formal educational process so that it nurtures the kind of learning that is needed” (Cernera & Morgan, 2002, p. 211).

Closing

As a former student, staff member and as a current faculty member of Salve Regina University, I personally have witnessed this mercy-missioned university’s sincerity and encouragement as it “embraces all who are dedicated to learning from one another, and remains

open to contributions that may come in a range of ways” (Catholic Intellectual Tradition, 2010, p.6). All backgrounds of students, faculty and staff are respected and supported. My mission as a business faculty is to continue in this tradition and embed this love of learning, of people, and of the earth to students who will take seriously their social responsibility to care for, cherish and encourage others.

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