

Salt and Light

A Paradigm for the Christian Business Program

The following article by Dr. Ken Armstrong, former dean of the Falls School of Business at Anderson University, and Dr. Mike Wiese, professor of marketing, was published in the national publication *Faculty Dialogue* in 1992.

If church-related colleges are to have a prominent role in American society, they must do more than replicate the work of nonchurch colleges and universities. This sentiment has been a common theme of many impassioned speeches and thoughtful articles over the past decade. Yet, in spite of all the good intentions, the model guiding the day-to-day organization and operation of the educational mission in most Christian colleges is less than distinctive. The time has come for Christian educators to envision the educational task in a new way. The purpose of this effort is to construct an educational paradigm which will advance our Christian educational mission. The question guiding this process is: How can education in a Christian institution be more effective in the training of persons who are committed to Christ to be His "salt and light" in this day?

This article offers a new conceptualization of instruction within an academic unit of a Christian college. The model is a product of a reexamination of the presuppositions and assumptions which have shaped the organization of instruction in Christian colleges and universities in the past. It comes from two business instructors who are challenged to explore new ways for our department to fulfill the mandate in our institution's mission statement "to be an institution of Christian higher education at its best ... which will enable each member of the campus community ... to purposely adopt a style of servanthood in all of life." The thoughts are shared with an invitation to dialogue. While the comments reflect our background as business faculty, we hope that the paradigm of Christian higher education will enlarge all of our visions of what is possible in the Christian college.

The Current Paradigm

Earl McGrath (1983), tracing the history of higher education in the United States, finds that the university is one of the many products of the paradigm of modern science (pp. 1-34). This paradigm sees "the world as closed, essentially completed and unchanging, basically substantive, simple and shallow, and fundamentally unmysterious — a rigidly programmed machine. ... Moreover, it was thought that since nature was without doubt rigidly deterministic there could be no radically new developments or genuine surprises" (Schillings, 1973, pp. 44-45). Through this view of reality it becomes possible for the world to be explained, even conquered, by the examination of man. The resulting methodology for inquiry calls for the dissection of

the known so that the unknown can be explained and controlled. Through the tools of the scientific method, man is able to explain the universe, piece by piece. According to this paradigm, objectivity in the research process is essential for truth to be discovered. Importantly, freedom from the bias of personal values and beliefs is crucial.

The positivistic, objectivistic, value-free paradigm of science has shaped the American university (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Dejong, 1990; Rudolph, 1962; Veysey, 1965). This paradigm has made great discovery and explanation possible, and the research university has become the exalted institution of higher education. Operationalizing this paradigm demands that inquiry be divided into academic departments. The total of knowledge must be organized into parts to facilitate efficient examination. Specialization becomes the aim of the academic career. The ultimate outcome of study is a person's contribution to the puzzle of knowledge. Dissemination of knowledge becomes less important than the creation of knowledge. The instructor stands as the expert, detachment from the student necessary to retain objectivity. Modeling personal character and the mentoring of students becomes incompatible with the goals of scholarship. Furthermore, the professional must keep personal any expressions of spiritual faith, for such beliefs may cloud the serious search for truth.

The paradigm of science has been tremendously successful. Many, if not most, of the scientific feats of our day have been made possible by this paradigm of explanation. Yet the paradigm which gave birth to the modern university has its critics. The following expression of Sir Geoffrey Vickers captures the essence of the concern.

"Western culture bears many peculiarities and limitations which reflect the larger unintended influence of science. These arise largely from carrying over into the psychosocial field ideas derived from the physical sciences. Thus, our culture tends too readily to accept as a condition of knowing and learning that separation of observer from observed which has yielded such spectacular results in the physical sciences. This tends to obscure the fact that in the relations of men with men, which are the most important concern of men, the relation of observer and observed has little place, except in war. Men learn about each other and about themselves not by observing but by communicating. They change each other and themselves by the

same process. The detachment which is a condition for the physical scientist is inconsistent with the participant relation of men with men. And although both attitudes have something to contribute, the predominance of the one tends to depreciate and obscure the role of the other" (1970, pp. 111-112).

The Need for a New Paradigm

To a large extent, the model shaping instruction in the Christian college or university has been the same paradigm which has guided higher education in general (McGrath, 1983; Dejong, 1990). Thankfully, the weaknesses of the paradigm of science, while still legitimate, are less evident at the small, predominantly church-related colleges (Astin, 1977; McGrath, 1983). Warren Bryan Martin claims that these colleges are best positioned to break away from the paradigm of the elite university and offer an education which places priority on the formation of student character (1984, P. xix).

As business programs developed in Christian colleges and universities since the 1950s, the primary and, more often than not, the sole emphasis was on the one-dimensional instruction of the subjects of business. The faculty member was seen as the primary filter for what information was necessary and useful. Often these instructors were businesspersons, not necessarily educators, rarely research scholars. They were recruited by their church college to serve the growing demand of students desiring an education in business. These individuals saw teaching as a way they could serve their church. Lectures were rich in business content, from a practical perspective. A Christian touch was added by a pre-lecture prayer and an occasional testimony of faith. Figure I illustrates this model of education.

While the student saw the professor "on the classroom stage," the student rarely was allowed to come close to the professor on his (seldom her) world. The instructor's role was to instruct. Most students did not question the competence or faith of the faculty member, but neither was the student allowed to see witness of competence or faith out of the classroom. The paradigm did not call for this dimension of education. Students therefore seldom had encounters with business or other societal elements prior to graduation; and while departmental faculty often had jobs in the business community in addition to teaching responsibilities, these were not looked on as "departmental" contacts with the community. Both the paradigm and the dual career situation of many instructors made it difficult for students to interact personally with the faculty member. The teacher was admired, but from afar. This system was amazingly efficient at meeting the needs of that time, and many look back to some of the "pioneers" in our institutions with a deep reverence and respect.

Today, even though research and inquiry are seldom high on the agenda of the business faculty member in the Christian college, the model guiding our actions is still very much a product of the

paradigm of science. Arthur Dejong criticizes this paradigm for its two concepts of separation and isolation. The attitudinal separation is not only evident between faculty member and student. It often extends to a situation of isolationism inside the institution. While this attitude was encouraged by the "stepchild" mentality toward more applied business departments in many Christian liberal arts institutions, it is also fair to say the business department is often less than proactive in building bridges between the department and the rest of the academic institution.

The belief that learning while in the business department is separate from that experienced in general education is especially prevalent among the students. Unfortunately, many business majors come to the study of business thankful that the liberal arts curriculum is finally out of the way. All too often, the business department obliges this attitude by not building connections. Even within the business field, students are awarded a degree for the completion of a series of technical courses, not necessarily organized into a coherent whole. Fragmentation, separation, and isolation are a natural product of the old paradigm.

As we look to the role of business departments in the 90s and beyond, we see a need for something different. Several reasons can be put forth as contributors to this new set of challenges and opportunities. Among the more important ones are:

1. The increase in the number of students coming to Christian institutions with the desire to study in the business departments since the 1970s.
2. The increased acceptance of business and other applied professional programs as legitimate fields of study in the Christian liberal arts setting.
3. The complexity of business skills and the advancing levels of sophistication of these skills required by employers.
4. The sometimes less than adequate administrative skills that are exhibited in operating the local church.
5. The concern, both inside business and out, for higher values and standards of conduct.
6. The rapid growth experienced by many not-for-profit organizations, including the church, and the resultant awareness of the need for more refined administrative skills within these organizations.
7. The expanded emphasis in many areas of our universities for hands-on experience as part of the education process.

As a direct result of these and other forces, business departments have been pushed from the background to the limelight in many Christian colleges and universities. However, this favored position has often brought with it negative reactions from some elements of the university community. At our very first day of faculty meetings at our own institution, for example, the business department was publicly chastised twice by other faculty members because their false impression was that our primary message was one of greed and self-interest.

Today the instruction in business within the Christian college or university is rarely different from that offered in secular institutions. Some will say that the Christian instructor will strive to find ways of integrating her or his faith into the discussion of the subject. In some cases the instructor may even inform those students amassing at the institution door to major in business administration that the word “administration” means “to serve” and challenge the students to examine their motives for aspiring to study business. But even if this is being done, is it enough? While most church-related colleges and universities have the word “serve” or “service” as part of the mission statement, how active have members of the business department been to make the study of business a point of service? How do we train business students to be “salt” and “light” in this day? To do it, we must reexamine our paradigm.

A Paradigm for the Christian Business Department

“Structurally the Christian college does the same three things its secular counterparts do: teaching, research, and service.” (Dunn, p. 113.)

This seems to lend credence to the idea that the primary difference will not be in the classroom. Sam Dunn goes on to say that:

“In reality, however, the Christian college has an ultimate agenda quite different from its secular counterpart.

“In their desire to influence the greater society for good, Christian colleges establish programs or disciplines which prepare students for leadership in the general society. While it may be dangerous to develop and publish lists of the most influential professions in a society, institutions do, in fact, formally or informally, determine for themselves the most influential occupations at a given time in a given society. Colleges desiring to influence the greater society try to place well-prepared Christian graduates in those influential occupations for the purpose of influencing those occupations for good and to do good.” (Dunn, p. 114.)

Dunn identifies business as one of six influential occupations that are of strategic importance to the Christian college.

“Finally we come to the business department. The business department is created in the Christian college to prepare individuals to move into positions of influence in business. Business leaders have an important role to play as they help shape the economic future of the country, as they provide working environments for their employees, and as they become social leaders in their communities. As these business leaders influence their companies, their communities, and their industries for good, they are helping the Christian college meet its ultimate goals.” (Dunn, p. 114.)

In our attempt to deal with how to develop the right kind of leaders in business — leaders who will be salt and light and make a difference — the following model has been developed. The writers certainly view it as a working document at this time. For us it is at least as much prescriptive as descriptive, setting the course that we hope to follow at Anderson University.

At the center of the model is the faculty of the business department or school. This is not to suggest that the student is no longer the primary focus of our efforts. Rather, it reflects the critical role that the faculty member has as the catalyst in the entire process.

The authors strongly feel that if our students are to understand what it means to be “salt” and “light,” they must see it modeled, and that this modeling can be most effective if it includes (but is not limited to) as primary models the faculty members where the student is receiving his professional training.

Consequently, the model actually is an attempt to visualize how business departments and individual faculty members can live out their responsibility to become “salt” and “light.” In the opinion of the authors, there are three natural and necessary points of interaction.

Students

The writers firmly agree that the educating of students must continue to be the highest priority of the Christian business school or department. We do feel, however, that a reevaluation of what that should entail is appropriate.

Excellence in teaching is absolutely necessary. If, as mentioned earlier, the technology of our profession is the same regardless of type of institution, we must know and perform our craft well. We cannot successfully preach excellence while we model mediocrity. Excellence in teaching today requires that business faculty are very sensitive to the dual demands of the marketplace for both better specialists and for better generalists.

In addition, departmental faculty must be responsive to our liberal arts colleagues who are rightfully concerned with maintaining the spirit of the broad based liberal arts education. We should strongly believe, and be actively promoting, the idea put forth by Samuel Dunn that “the business disciplines may be viewed as applied liberal arts, as they are direct applications of psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy, mathematics, and religion.” (Dunn, p. 116.) With this in mind, we should be open to the questions and challenges of our colleagues and take the lead in developing new, creative, hands-on, and integrative approaches to teaching strategies and curriculum development.

Though excellence in the classroom is our foundation, however, it is not what sets us apart. Our primary uniqueness as Christian business departments, while including the presentation of Christian values in the classroom, involves what takes place outside the classroom. That is where students are evaluating the reality and relevance of what we say in our impassioned lectures. This is where the Christian business department must offer a contrast to other institutions, and this is also where a new paradigm is needed. We must be willing to give of ourselves, to be “salt” and “light” to both our students and the wider society around us, if we expect our students to truly understand the Christian principles we are trying to instill. The new paradigm expects, indeed demands, this modeling through involvement of individual faculty members.

Community

Two primary elements of community concern business faculty. The first is the business community. In any discipline, part of the stewardship of the teacher is to remain “dicurrent” or “on top of” the latest developments in his/her field. In the case of business, the best way to do this is a combination of intensive reading, rigorous research, and a systematic approach to keeping in contact with business professionals. The caution here is that our purpose is primarily to improve ourselves professionally, not personally. We are fortunate to be a part of institutions that call us to higher goals. As faculty, then, we should view our activities as “institution building,” not “individual building.” This attitude will set us apart and will allow us to plan for the future.

The exciting possibility is that the very activity that enables us to improve our teaching also gives us the opportunity to be “salt” and “light” to the business community. The process of promulgating Christian values is a very real part of what we are called to do in this world. Any exchanges involving the discussion of human dignity, integrity, and justice with members of the business community are useful and to be encouraged. We need to understand their opinions, values, concerns, and the inconsistencies they feel exist between classroom theory and workplace reality. We then need to share these openly with students and work to formulate answers and solutions to their concerns. This approach will allow us better to prepare students for the challenges they will face, and to open a dialogue with business leaders that do not necessarily understand our value system. In a broader context we need to do this with the entire community. Business departments are too often seen as concerned with profit only. Personal stewardship demands that we become involved in areas of the community where need is present. Professional stewardship dictates that our students understand there is more than just “profit.” They must see that stewardship relates to all of life. Students need to see that a career in administration in the not-for-profit sector is also a worthy use of one’s skills. The bottom line is not personal gain, but service to God and one’s fellow man. This, in turn, calls for a willingness to provide avenues for students to become

exposed to and involved with both the business and the wider community. The Christian business department should not only be developing administrative and leadership skills, but should be helping our students to understand that their responsibility is to use those skills wherever they are needed to improve society.

Church

This is the area the writers feel received the least amount of emphasis under the old model. Nicholas Wolterstorff says:

“The most fundamental thing to say about the Christian college is that it is an arm of the body of Christ in the world. It is of and by and for the Church. It exists to equip members of the people of God for their life as members of that people — a people which exists not for its own sake but for the sake of all humanity and thereby to the glory of God.” (Wolterstorff, p. 41.)

Yet it seems as if there is little if any interaction between the church and the business school.

What is needed goes beyond the stewardship of the individual faculty member. If we are to “equip” students for their life as members of the church, as Wolterstorff claims, then we must take a proactive stance toward the equipping process. And we must also remember that our role as institutional representatives and as Christians calls for us to find points of intersection, areas where we can learn from the church, better understand the church, and contribute to her our expertise and devotion.

We live in a time when the administration and planning capabilities of the church are being stretched to the limit because of the great amount and variety of need that is present in our world. Everyone involved in Christian higher education should be actively involved in equipping students and contributing expertise where needed to the church.

Putting the Model to Work

Accepting this model as the guideline for the development of the business program in the Christian liberal arts setting provides a great deal of flexibility to the individual department. This is where an understanding of one’s personal opportunities and restraints must be combined with a commitment to “salt” and “light.” While the possibilities of how to put this kind of program into action are limited only by one’s ability to dream, Figure III is indicative of the kinds of ideas that might work in each of these areas.

Comments and Observations

Five observations or comments that the authors would like to make are:

1. Once again, this is an attempt to put in document form a philosophy that we are in the process of developing. As such this should be viewed as a working document, in need of a great deal more refinement, no doubt. It represents our collective thoughts and direction given our understanding of the needs of our discipline, the institutions of which we have been a part, and of Christian higher education in general.
2. The authors readily recognize that there is nothing new in the individual parts as they have been presented. Many are already involved in doing at least some of the things we have suggested. However, we feel that what the new model offers is a more systematic way of approaching the development of a business program. Our contribution, if we have one, is in putting the parts together as a greater whole. The emphasis is in purposefully developing the faculty as a catalyst in all three areas that were discussed.
3. It must be mentioned that this is a model for the entire departmental faculty — not simply a blueprint of how the individual faculty member should respond. The goal is to develop a faculty that can collectively address the issues we have raised. Teamwork is important, as is a respect for the varied talents that faculty members possess. The model, then, has implications for faculty recruiting and human resource development.
4. A natural result of the model is increased exposure for students to the other players in the model. This should serve to improve the hands-on practical knowledge of the student. It should also sensitize the student to the moral issues that are present in our society, and should open up avenues of dialogue for the student with the business and church communities as he/she struggles with lifelong priorities.
5. We believe that one of the greatest outcomes of adopting this model is the improved interaction between the business department and the publics to which we are responsible. As the department takes the lead in struggling with what it means to be “salt” and “light” to our publics, everyone is forced to examine what it means to be a disciple in this world. In doing this, the business department is truly participating in a liberal arts education for our students, and we are equipping our students for service to God and the church. Not only does this silence many of our critics, but it forges closer ties with our faculty colleagues, the communities of which we are a part, and the church we serve.

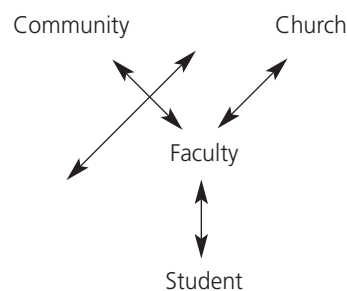
Conclusion

The authors are aware that we are setting a very high standard for Christian business departments. It is certainly not a standard we feel we have attained. But it is one that is worthy of our life’s work. We believe that Christian colleagues demand at least the same degree of excellence in the teaching process as other colleges demand. Achieving this gives us the credibility to be “more than” and “different from.” That difference comes from being scholars that are unashamedly value driven. We have the awesome opportunity to be the models for the individuals that the church is counting on to help change society.

— Kenneth Armstrong & Michael D. Wiese

FIGURE I

*Current Paradigm of Departmental Instruction
in the Department of Business*

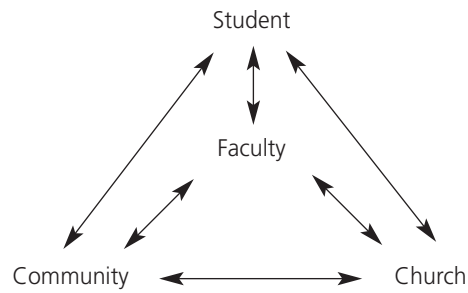


Role of Faculty Member:

1. Instruct content-lecture being the primary tool.
2. Testify to religious belief.
3. Guide student through sequence of courses leading to degree.

FIGURE II

A Paradigm for the Christian Business Program

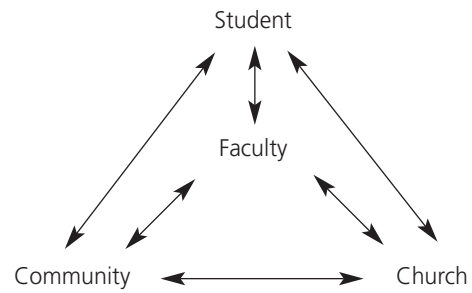


Role of Faculty Member:

1. Instruct content-use of lecture and other appropriate tools to engage the student with the subject matter.
2. Testify to religious belief and faith. Model being "salt and light" in professional and personal affairs.
3. Guide student through a purposeful curriculum designed to develop subject-matter competence and challenge student values and priorities. Facilitate learning interactions between student and various publics.

FIGURE III

Applications of the Paradigm



For Students:

1. Interactive case.
2. Use of spiritual leaders and liberal arts faculty in business classes.
3. Capstone course on integrating faith in profession.
4. Open discussion of issues where faith and practice seem to be divergent.
5. Internships in non-traditional areas

For the Community:

1. Seminars on Ethics, Justice, etc., in conjunction with local business community.
2. Internships in NFP & service organizations.
3. Forums on applying Biblical concepts (justice, shalom, etc.) in a capitalistic economic system.
4. Sponsor workshops with experts whose philosophy is compatible with Christian faith.
5. Seminars for small business owners and disenfranchised members of society.

For the Church:

1. Conferences for pastors on administration.
2. Market research for church.
3. Seminars for pastors and laity on application of faith to workplace issues.
4. Studies on similarities & differences between church & secular institutions in administrative arenas.
5. Departmental tithe of resources.

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