

## INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION

## INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

## ABSTRACT

*In the summer of 2013, Grand Canyon University initiated a sustained program to integrate the Christian faith with the content and methodology of teaching and learning at Grand Canyon University. The overall result is intended to strengthen the school's self-expressed Christian identity and heritage. This essay surveys the history, theoretical grounding, purposes, and content of the initiative during its first year of implementation.*

## HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

At its founding in 1949, Grand Canyon University (then Grand Canyon College) was envisioned as a Christian institution. Owned and operated by the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention from its founding until 2000, the institution saw itself as a Christian liberal arts college, operating from a Southern Baptist perspective (Grand Canyon College, 1982, p. 3; Grand Canyon University, 1993, p. 6). A member institution of the Southern Baptist Higher Education Commission, the school consciously attempted to live out its denominational identity, not in terms of a specific creedal statement but in terms of the personal faith commitments of faculty, who were expected and trained to integrate the insights of Christianity into their teaching in various subjects. The faculty was denominationally diverse in historically orthodox denominations of various types, including Baptist, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other Protestant denominational traditions.

After 1997, non-Southern Baptists were allowed to assume administrative roles at the institution, and the university began to reconceive its Christian identity more in terms of the scholar C.S. Lewis's sense of "mere Christianity" (Lewis, 1960, p. 6). A series of administratively-organized and faculty-led conversations began, which highlighted various denominational distinctives and unique contributions to the university's Christian identity. Several books concerning collegiate Christian identity and the integration of faith and learning were also discussed, and the university began to

revamp its general education requirements in light of these conversations and in pursuit of a grant from the Eli Lilly and Company Foundation. Though the pursuit of the grant was ultimately unsuccessful, the Canyon Experience, an attempt to integrate both principles of general education and Christian understandings of the academic disciplines, began to operate in 2002 (Grand Canyon University, 2005, pp. iii, 63).

In 2004, the university was purchased by a group of investors and became a for-profit entity, the first Christian for-profit university in the United States (Smietana, 2005, May 19). The complexities of that transition pushed issues of Christian identity and integration of faith and discipline into the background for several years. Attempts to revive the conversation over identity began again in 2008 and set the foundation for the current initiative. Initial attempts at crafting a doctrinal statement, constructing a foundational course in Christian worldview, and implementing a Christian identity in terms of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) were made. However, no final doctrinal statement was agreed upon, and the fruit of the Spirit initiative focused on primarily individual behavioral characteristics and did not specifically address the academic mission of the organization.

However, the participants in this process did outline, design, and craft a syllabus for a course in Christian Worldview, CWV 101. This course was designed to introduce incoming undergraduate students to the concept of worldview while focusing specifically on elements of a Christian worldview,

including Christian perspectives on the nature of knowledge and truth, Christian approaches to ethics, and the implications of living out a Christian worldview. This course was taught by members of the Christian Studies Department (later, faculty from the College of Theology), who were responsible for further developing content for the course.

Christian worldview was an element of university-wide assessment of mission statement objectives; as a university-wide mission statement objective, it was holistically assessed by rubric (Appendix A), using methodology developed by the Office of Assessment and the University Assessment Committee. Sample artifacts, selected by colleges, were read against the rubric to arrive at scores. The first two levels of the rubric (1-2) indicate that the author performed below the expected competence level in the area, the next two (3-4) indicate undergraduate-level expected competence, while the final two levels (5-6) indicate graduate-level expected competence in the area.

The results of university assessments done in 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 indicated some reasons for optimism and some opportunities for improvement. In an encouraging trend, the percentage of students demonstrating competency increased between the two assessment periods. However, the mean rubric scores of students decreased over the period between their freshman and senior years for all colleges. These results have implied an urgent need to improve in this core critical area.

## GENESIS OF THE CURRENT INITIATIVE

In 2011 a doctrinal statement was promulgated to the university community (Appendix B). The elements of this doctrinal statement roughly parallel the Nicene Creed in topics. During the academic year 2011-2012, the doctrinal statement was prominently displayed as part of an overall emphasis on campus spiritual life coordinated by the campus chaplain, Timothy Griffin.

On June 24, 2013, President Brian Mueller called the first of a series of weekly meetings on the integration of faith and learning (IFL). The Faith and Learning Committee group consisted of a number of "university stakeholders, including faculty and College leadership, student life, University leaders—over 40 participants" in all. The stated initial purpose of these meetings was to

"prioritize faith and learning dialogue[,] . . . focus on faculty instruction during 2013[,] and continue curricula[r] changes throughout 2013[,] culminating in comprehensive curricula[um] integration during 2014" (Grand Canyon University, 2013a, p. 1). This initiative was planned as the first step in a process of examining the university's mission and vision and was seen as vital to the university's future.

## THEORETICAL GROUNDING OF THE INITIATIVE

The educational materials of the initiative are grounded in a number of approaches, which are listed in the references. David Dockery (2000) and John Byl (1998), along with Daniel Ribera (2005) and James Arthur (2008), provide general overviews of the state of faith and learning from a worldview perspective in the academy, from both disciplinary and institutional points of view. Arthur Holmes (n.d.) presents a comprehensive list of approaches to integrating faith and learning from various methodological perspectives.

Robert A. Harris (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005) defines faith and discipline integration and terms related to it, and he answers objections to its practice in Christian institutions. William Hasker (1992) forwards a framework of three possible approaches toward integration of Christian perspectives with academic disciplines, which provides the grounding for some of the Round Three questions presented to collegiate meetings in Spring Term 2014. Nicholas Wolterstorff (2004) refines and critiques some of the elements of Hasker's framework.

Shifting from general frameworks to more personal issues of scholarly identity and apologetic purposes, Alastair McGrath (2001), J. P. Moreland (1996), Alvin Plantinga (n.d.), and Mark Noll (1995) contribute a number of insights. McGrath calls for a broad engagement of evangelical scholars (and conservative scholars generally) with academic and intellectual life in the academy, while Moreland points up the necessity for "epistemic justification" of the Christian worldview as a basic component of academic apologetics. Behind both McGrath and Moreland's assertions lies Mark Noll's critique of the intellectual foundations and activities of evangelicalism, *The scandal of the Evangelical mind* (1995). Foundational to all these analyses stands Charles Malik's pioneering treatment of the identity of the Christian scholar, "The two tasks" (1980).

Finally, the concepts of worldview in general and

Christian worldview in particular are foundational to the university's IFL approach. The required texts for CWV 101, the institutional course in Christian worldview, are helpful in explaining both Christian and other worldviews at a basic level and articulating the specific evidence that lies behind Christian worldview positions: Mark Cosgrove (2006), Lee Strobel (2000), and S. Wilkens and M. Sanford (2009). For a more in-depth analysis of the concept of worldview in the history of philosophy, David K. Naugle (2002) explores the inception of the term in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel and the debates surrounding the concept's centrality in subsequent twentieth-century philosophy, particularly phenomenology. For a popular, comprehensively-focused survey of various worldview perspectives, James W. Sire's *The universe next door* (2004), in its various editions, gives an excellent overview which strives for objectivity.

#### 2013-2014 INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

On August 13, 2013, all faculty attended an inaugural meeting, held in the university's arena, which included a panel discussion moderated by the president with panel representatives from the student body, parents, faculty, academic administration, the leadership of the College of Theology, and the Spiritual Life staff. Besides the panel discussion, a video presentation on the university doctrinal statement was screened, and a roadmap of activities for the oncoming year was put forward.

During the faculty orientation for Fall Term 2013, colleges held retreats and other meetings that in part concerned the integration of faith and learning. These opening activities were followed by a series of college-level presentations and discussion forums in three rounds over Fall Term 2013 and Spring Term 2014. The first round of college-level meetings, led by President Brian Mueller and College of Theology Dean Dr. Jason Hiles, began with the College of Nursing and Health Professions on October 7, 2013, and continued with the College of Fine Arts on October 16, the College of Education, College of Business, and Doctoral College on October 23, and the College of Arts and Sciences on October 25. These meetings consisted of a presentation by President Mueller on the history of faith and learning integration at the university, along with an explanation of the purpose of the initiative and its relation to the university mission (Grand Canyon University, 2013b). Dean

Hiles then gave a presentation on the concept of worldview (Appendix C), which presented the basic components of a worldview and included analyzed scriptural narratives related to worldview. Each presentation was followed by an open question-and-answer session.

The Round Two meetings were led by Dean Hiles and covered the scriptural narrative, organized around three themes: creation, fall, and redemption (Appendix D). The meetings themselves occurred between December 6, 2013 and January 8, 2014. The thematic presentation was connected to the preceding round concerning worldview and personalized in terms of closing questions. As with the first round presentation, a question-and-answer session followed the presentation.

Round Three meetings were held at least once for each college over the course of Spring Term 2014. These meetings, led by Dean Hiles and the respective college deans and associate deans, were interactive and required participation by the faculty. The first set of meetings, after a short presentation by Dean Hiles defining IFL, reviewed the importance worldview and outlined William Hasker's (1992) three strategies for disciplinary integration: compatibilist, transformationalist, and reconstructionist. Faculty groups, organized by discipline, discussed a set of questions related to disciplinary worldview and the IFL (Appendix E). A second set of meetings were held for some colleges during February and March 2014. These meetings were primarily aimed at getting feedback from faculty members about their current IFL activities and promulgating best practices of the IFL (Appendix F). Assessment data, in the form of surveys, online questionnaires, and interviews, were collected throughout the process.

#### PURPOSES OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative was undertaken, in part, because of persistent assessment results indicating that a core university competency at the undergraduate level in Christian worldview was not adequately manifesting in the learning of students. In addition, a number of barriers to the IFL were identified: the separation of human experience into separate realms of fact or knowledge and value or emotion; the general sense that the realm of knowledge is most significant, with the realms of emotion and value less so; and the perception that value statements are biased and knowledge statements are objective.

Further barriers to the IFL for faculty members were the training that faculty members had received at secular research institutions (in which the realms of faith and knowledge are separated), the fact that such training induces secularized perspectives and commitments and professional practices, and finally the conditioning in faculty members' mindsets that faith perspectives are biased and anti-intellectual (Hiles, 2013).

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

As the initiative progresses through the end of 2014 and into 2015, a number of goals and activities are planned. Faculty in all colleges will work within their own disciplines to integrate faith perspectives into the curriculum (Hiles, 2014); the university will sponsor faculty research on the impact of the faith and learning initiative (Grand Canyon University, 2013a); and deans will lead intercollege discussions about how Christian worldview perspectives can be integrated into classroom activities (Grand Canyon University, 2013c).

The research study presented in this publication represents the first result of the above-mentioned research into the IFL initiative. This study comprises three steps, one of which has been completed, and two of which will occur in early 2015. During the Spring Term 2014, self-selected participants conducted thematically-focused phenomenological interviews with other faculty members concerning their responses to the university's IFL initiative. Two further data collections are planned for late 2014 and early 2015: the thematic interview questions will be placed in an anonymous forum open to university faculty members for discussion, and a second round of interviews with the participants from the original interview round will be scheduled for Spring Term 2015 to assess the changes in perspective brought about from a further year of activity.

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# “WE ARE WHO WE SAY WE ARE”: Phenomenological Faculty Impressions of the Integration of Faith and Learning

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## INTRODUCTION

*Christian colleges and universities are viewed as separate entities from secular colleges and universities, due to distinctive characteristics which set them apart. Holmes (2000) stresses two characteristics which differentiate Christian colleges and universities. These distinctions include a religious presence in academics and a religious presence which permeates human activity. Correspondingly, Muntz and Crabtree (2006) assert that faculty members must be committed to the development of the whole person when educating youth. As well, faculty have been charged with preparing youth for careers upon graduation. Challenging youth intellectually as well as spiritually sets Christian colleges and universities apart from secular schools (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006).*

*Faculty are at the heart of ensuring students are prepared both intellectually and spiritually as they graduate. To ensure faculty is prepared for the challenge, training may be necessary to provide opportunities to develop professionally, personally, and in regards to academic discipline. Reeder and Pacino (2013) suggest continued faculty trainings to support a faith and learning initiative and ensure everyone is informed regarding the university's beliefs and expectations as well as to promote discussion of strategies and best practices regarding integration of faith and learning among faculty in similar disciplines. This will help to build confidence for faculty who find integration of faith and learning a challenge. Lack of confidence articulating beliefs into respective disciplines may cause discomfort as well as hesitation in faculty (Reeder & Pacino, 2013). Faculty can create and share activities and assignments*