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## ADDENDUM: Transformative Reimagination: A Framework for a Vincentian College of Business

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## **ADDENDUM: Transformative Reimagination: A Framework for a Vincentian College of Business**

**Cover Page Footnote**

ADDENDUM - Volume 7, Issue 2

# Transformative Reimagination: A Framework for a Vincentian College of Business

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## ABSTRACT

The mission identity and intellectual tradition of Vincentian schools of business affords a unique opportunity for these institutions to produce business leaders prepared to address systemic breakdowns in business ethics and corporate social responsibility. In order to achieve this goal, this paper proposes the HEET (Hire Encourage Equip Train) framework for mission integration. At the heart of the HEET framework is a recognition that successful mission integration requires college-level administrators who promote mission integration throughout the curriculum and center its importance within the strategic operations of the school of business. As every component of HEET centers on developing an industry-leading business curriculum strengthened by mission integration, this paper also surveys four case studies on embedding Vincentian mission within business classrooms. While these case studies individually touch on each of Sullivan's (1995) core tenets of Vincentian education, they commonly shared an emphasis on promoting education that is community-centric, innovative, and solution-oriented.

JEL Codes: A13, A20, Z12

Keywords: Vincentian mission integration, business education, curriculum development

## INTRODUCTION

As seen through the rise of the ESG (environmental social governance) movement and various calls for a more socially conscious capitalism, society and the business community

are reckoning with the consequences of marginalizing ethics from the commercial

domain. A key actor in responding to the systemic breakdown of business ethics are business schools. These institutions serve as incubators for business professionals. In this capacity, business schools are responsible for more than just the transmission of discipline-specific knowledge to their future alumni. Indeed, given the emphasis placed on societal impact and business ethics by leading international organizations of business schools, the duties of these institutions include the moral formation of community-minded and socially responsible corporate leaders.

While all schools of higher education are called to respond to these social crises, Catholic business schools are uniquely positioned to serve as thought leaders within this domain. Their duty to develop innovative approaches for transmitting business ethics and social consciousness stems from two legacies of the Church: first, the intellectual contributions of Catholic Social Teaching to the morality of market exchange; and second, the Church's integral role in higher education, particularly its charisms' emphasis on holistic, interdisciplinary education.

This paper posits a transformative reimagination of how Vincentian business schools can better serve society and their institutional stakeholders through reclaiming the potential of their Vincentian mission identity. To accomplish this goal, this paper begins by establishing the pernicious prevalence of business ethics failures and the role of business education in responding to this breakdown in section one. Section two lays out the unique social opportunity afforded to Vincentian business schools in drawing on their mission to re-envision both the importance and

presence of business ethics throughout their curricula. As a means of offering discrete examples of a Vincentian mission-informed curriculum, section three describes four case studies from Niagara University's Faculty Learning Community (FLC). The FLC empowered each of the authors of this paper to facilitate mission-centered curricular innovations in their business classrooms. Drawing on these experiences, section four offers a set of three guiding pillars – community-centered, innovative, solution-oriented – that synthesize common thematic elements of the FLC case studies and serves as a foundation for a mission-centered Vincentian business education. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for Vincentian business school administrators and faculty leaders in successfully facilitating a mission-centered curriculum. These recommendations, summarized by the acronym HEET (Hire, Equip, Encourage, Teach), focus on the critical need for mission-integration initiatives to be nurtured at the university, college, and departmental levels.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION AS CONDUIT FOR A REINVIGORATED BUSINESS ETHICS**

In recent years, cases of unethical business organizations have been dominant in the news. Extant interdisciplinary research has argued that the propensity of unethical conduct in organizations has reached 'crisis proportions' (Floyd et al., 2013, p. 753). A spate of corporate governance cases involving high profile companies in the past decade have shocked people worldwide at the prevalence of unethical behavior exhibited by business leaders in these organizations. One such instance is Volkswagen's diesel gate scandal, where they admitted to rigging their emission testing results. This violated the company's own mission statement and core values of 'integrity' ("we always strive to do the right thing") and 'accountability' ("doing it right the first time is not our goal, but our standard"), and led Volkswagen to pay millions of dollars in fines (Volkswagen, 2022; Ridley, 2022, May 25). A more recent corporate scandal was Elizabeth Holmes' conduct at Theranos, which has been described as "one of the most epic failures in corporate governance in the annals of American capitalism" (Waikar, 2018, December 17).

Following recent trials, Elizabeth Holmes and her partner Sunny Balwani were convicted of defrauding investors and other stakeholders of millions of dollars and putting patients' lives at risk. However, these incidents are by no means isolated in the business world. Research looking into ethical practices in businesses documents a significant proportion of businesses engage in unethical practices (McCabe, Butterfield & Treviño, 2006; Rahman, Hussein & Esa, 2016).

Proposing business education as a solution to reduce unethical behavior and prioritize corporate ethics, the UN created its Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative in 2007. PRME brought together business schools around the world to shape the skills and mindset of future business leaders. The mission of PRME is to "inspire and champion responsible management education, research, and thought leadership globally while promoting awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals and developing the responsible business leaders of tomorrow" (United Nations Global Impact, 2022).

Furthermore, ethics has recently been prioritized more in many business school curricula. This is best demonstrated by the requirements set by the two most prestigious international accreditation bodies for business schools in higher education: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). Both accreditation bodies require business schools to incorporate ethics into their curricula to attain membership. For instance, under the AACSB requirements, ethics education is required "as part of the general knowledge and skills portion of the standards for undergraduates, and in the management-specific portion of the standards for undergraduate and master's students" and requires competencies in the following subject areas: "(a) responsibility of business and society, (b) ethical leadership, (c) ethical corporate governance, and (d) ethical decision-making" (Franks & Spalding, 2013).

However, despite these efforts, the provision of robust business ethics education remains one of the most significant concerns for the business discipline (Holland & Albrecht, 2013). Recent

business ethics scandals emphasize the importance of faculty exploring novel, effective, and transformative pedagogical methods for ethics instruction in business school curricula to reduce the propensity of future unethical behavior (Adler 2002; Lau 2010). Speaking to the current pitfalls of incorporating business ethics into curricula, White (2020) observes that “courses on business ethics are really courses on business taming or business bashing” (p. 138). Arguing for a holistic adaption of business ethics throughout the curriculum, where students should be taught “how the technical skills that they learn... aim at the creation of value. Instructors of business ethics need to cultivate an idealism in their students for their chosen profession” (p. 194).

### **THE POTENTIAL OF CATHOLICISM'S CONTRIBUTION TO BUSINESS ETHICS**

One institution that is uniquely positioned to lead a curricular renaissance in holistic business ethics in higher education is the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the Catholic Church's primary intellectual contributions to commercial affairs has pertained to business ethics and the morality of market exchange. This is best witnessed intellectually through papal encyclicals devoted to questions of business ethics. Pope Pius XI's (1931) *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope John XXIII's (1961) *Mater Et Magistra*, Pope Benedict XVI's (2009) *Caritas In Veritate*, and Pope Francis's (2015) *Laudato Si* have all contributed to the development of Catholic Social Teaching on the morality of markets.

Alongside doctrinal developments, Pope Francis has recently advocated for the Catholic Church's unique ability to serve as an intellectual leader in this movement. In 2020, Francis formed an alliance with the *Council for Inclusive Capitalism* (n.d.). This is a partnership between business leaders and the Vatican to “make economies more inclusive and sustainable with a movement of bold, business-led actions that span the economic ecosystem.” Alongside bearing witness to the need to center ethics in commercial life, Roman Catholicism's extensive higher education mission uniquely positions the Church to serve as a leader in the conscious capitalism movement. The Church can promote

the importance of business ethics by virtue of its training many business professionals around the world.

### **CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION AND BUSINESS EDUCATION MODEL**

The primary tool for Catholic higher education's remoralization of commercial activity is its incorporation of ethics and values into the business curriculum. Rejecting the tendency to reduce business ethics to a standalone course, a mission-driven Roman Catholic business curriculum would weave ethics throughout each student's classroom experience. In doing so, Roman Catholic business schools can promote the distinctive mission promises of Catholic higher education identified by Cardinal John Henry Newman. Cardinal Newman, in his seminal 1852 text *The Idea of a University*, asserted that Catholic higher education was distinctive from the secular academy across two aspects of its mission orientation (1996). First, he asserts that Roman Catholic institutions are better equipped to promote holistic education. Just as Roman Catholic higher education recognizes the importance of the spiritual and sacred to many facets of human knowledge outside theology, it should draw on this insight to promote interdisciplinary inquiry. Second, Roman Catholic higher education is centered around the goal of social mobility and the promotion of human flourishing. Catholic higher education expands and transmits knowledge for its instrumental value in uplifting individuals and societies, rather than as an end in itself.

While Newman's dual mandate guides the mission of all Roman Catholic institutions of higher education, different charisms within the Church hold a comparative advantage for innovation within either mandate. As the primary charism associated with Catholic higher education, the Jesuit order's intellectual identity and mission best supports Newman's first mandate of holistic education. This follows directly from many tenets of the Jesuit educational model such as its commitment to “finding God in all things” and caring for the whole person (*cura personalis*). Both of these core Ignatian values follow from recognizing the intersectional nature of the human experience

and the inherent need for holistic reflection and inquiry to grapple with this complexity.

## **UNLOCKING THE OPPORTUNITIES OF AN AUTHENTICALLY VINCENTIAN EDUCATION**

Relevant for this paper's contribution, the Vincentian charism is ideally positioned for intellectual leadership on Newman's social mobility mandate. Per Sullivan (1995, p. 179), education was so central to the Vincentian mission that it was deemed as "the most far-reaching form of service since it enabled the poor to break the cycle of poverty, find meaningful employment and thus enhance their self-respect and confidence." Furthermore, education was seen as a means to transmit "vision of service to others" and be able to carry it forward in their own lives. As guiding principles for achieving this mission, Sullivan (1995) identifies eight core tenets of the Vincentian educational tradition. These include constructing an educational product that is holistic, integrated, creative, flexible, excellent, person-oriented, collaborative, and focused.

However, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac's legacy transcended simply extending the opportunity of a college education to those in underserved communities. Rather, "as Vincentian educators, we are advocates of education for social transformation. Our intent is to educate students who will be agents of change and catalysts in the transformation of society - not to create a class apart nor to perpetuate the vicious cycles that marginalize the poor" (Banaga, 2008). Achieving this goal will lead to the fulfillment of one of the main purposes of Vincentian higher education which is the "creation of a vast alumni who leave our institutions with a Vincentian heart, wanting to make a real difference in their communities" (Holtschneider, 2012, July 16).

Overarching the Vincentian commitment to social transformation is the papal document *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, written by Pope John Paul II in 1990. This document created norms that were to be followed by Catholic higher education institutions beginning with the 1991 academic year. The pontiff challenged these institutions towards:

(The) study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. (par. 34)

Involving more than just academic research, this commitment to social justice was to be instilled in the students:

The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. (par. 34)

Despite the pontiff's charge in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, there remains room for improvement. Naughton (2009) laments:

As a matter of mission, policy, or strategy, few schools of business in Catholic universities engage their courses with questions and issues within the Catholic social tradition and, in particular, a Catholic vision of the person and the just society. Individual professors may do so as a matter of personal choice, but few schools have taken the particular tradition on which their university was founded and strategically engaged this tradition with the business curriculum. (p. 29)

Therefore, the main contribution of this paper is to articulate a framework guiding Vincentian colleges of business with incorporating their charism and Catholic Social Teaching into their curriculum and cultures. We begin by first describing an initiative at Niagara University to help achieve this goal and the experiences of three professors who participated in this pilot program.

## **REIMAGINING VINCENTIAN BUSINESS EDUCATION: CASE STUDIES FROM NIAGARA UNIVERSITY'S FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Faculty are central to this mission, with a responsibility to not only impart content knowledge, but also “create” the next generation of Vincentian lay leaders. While the Vincentian mission of preparing change agents and empowering those at the margins of society applies to all its institutions’ graduates, this mission is particularly relevant to the role its business schools can play in promoting the value of ethical business practices.

Thus, it is crucial for business faculty to be willing to incorporate the Vincentian mission into their courses. One such model of how social transformation and ethics can be woven throughout a business curriculum can be seen in our series of case studies from Niagara University. Starting in Fall 2019, Niagara created its Faculty Learning Community (FLC) initiative. The FLC was directed to assist faculty with creating class elements focused on facilitating either a mission focused class component or a project-based service opportunity for students in classrooms across several disciplines. The goals of Niagara’s FLC were:

1. To further faculty’s understanding of Niagara University’s Catholic and Vincentian mission and its place in the curriculum.
2. To assist faculty in exploring how their disciplines address mission-related issues such as systemic causes of poverty.

The authors of this article participated in different cohorts of the FLC program. A management professor and an economics professor participated in the first 2019 FLC cohort while a second economics professor completed the program in 2020.

Our projects span a wide variety of topics and courses – both undergraduate and graduate. We each took a different approach to incorporating project-based learning and Niagara’s Vincentian heritage into our courses. While the first three case studies involved direct community engagement for the purposes of addressing social or economic need, the final project involved incorporating contributions from the Catholic intellectual tradition into the curriculum.

## CASE 1: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As part of the Fall 2019 Faculty Learning Curriculum, one of the authors of this paper (a tenure-track Management faculty member) opted to design a project for implementation in her Fall 2019 entrepreneurship course. She incorporated a community-centered project-based entrepreneurship project in cooperation with the Niagara University Impact Office/Levesque Institute.

The undergraduate business elective in entrepreneurship focuses on designing, launching and founding organizations that aim to create profit or foster social change through innovative solutions. This three-credit elective course with primarily junior and senior year undergraduate management students focuses on the foundations and key concepts of entrepreneurship. The delivery format of the class is primarily via in-class workshops with the instructor. Students work collaboratively with their self-selected teams each class to generate a conceptual business plan for their product (including innovation idea generation, developing a beachhead market, market segmentation, and product specification). Several teaching tools are employed to assist students in their projects such as guided lectures, interactive team exercises, relevant entrepreneurship video cases, guest lectures and a field trip. At the end of this course, students will have the necessary knowledge and skills to help identify the steps necessary to conceptualize and create an entrepreneurial venture.

The focus of the FLC project in entrepreneurship was on the topic of social entrepreneurship, which can be defined as “the pursuit of social objectives with innovative methods through the creation of products, organizations, and practices that yield and sustain social benefits” (Guo and Bielefeld, 2014). As part of the project, students participated in a social entrepreneurship field trip that centered on various community-based organizations that serve the needy in the Niagara Falls region. Based on a field trip, small, self-selected teams of two students complete their 5-6-page Social Entrepreneurship report. The report was based

on the *Social Entrepreneurship Opportunity Identification and Idea Generation Framework* that was developed by the author. In the report, teams first identified and analyzed a social problem (for e.g., low-income housing, primary school education, employment assistance, health care etc.) in the Niagara Falls region. Then using the steps in the framework, each team created a business idea based on a social innovation for a social venture to address the identified problem.

The FLC project in social entrepreneurship highlights several key Vincentian core values such as being holistic, “where Vincentian education seeks to respond to the intellectual, spiritual, moral and affective needs of the students—educat[ing] the heart as well as the head” (Sullivan, 1995, p. 178). The project also follows from the charism’s core value of focus, which emphasizes that “Vincentian education is ever viewed as central to the Vincentian mission of service to the poor” (Sullivan, 1995, p. 179). Through the ability of students to identify social needs in the Niagara Falls region, students were able to think beyond their own pursuits and focus on giving back to the community, finding solutions to better conditions for the underprivileged which is at the heart of the Vincentian mission. This sense of purpose is important to create more ethical and inclusive future business leaders who care not just about the bottom line and profit maximization but also place emphasis on addressing the needs of other stakeholders. These include customers, investors, partners, suppliers, and the community in which they operate as they pursue growth.

Another key tenet of Vincentian education demonstrated by this social entrepreneurship project is creativity. As Sullivan notes, “Vincentian education is ever seeking new and renewed ways to meet changing needs among the student population while maintaining a clear ‘sense of the possible’” (Sullivan, 1995, p. 178). Employing the *Social Entrepreneurship Idea Generation Framework*, students came up with unique social innovations to address existing issues. Traditional business school courses typically employ lectures and case studies that focus on existing theories and models to teach students business principles. However, a key

tenet of project-based learning is to allow students to think out of the box and actively participate in their own learning rather than merely gain information second-hand through the instructor and existing materials. In this project, students proactively researched an existing issue and engaged in root causes analysis by analyzing the past and current social, political, legal and economic factors impacting the targeted social problem. Students were then required to conduct primary research through interviews with community stakeholders and identify key barriers affecting the progress of their target social problem. Finally, students had to come up with a social innovation that can effectively address the problem identified and that is unique and different from existing products and services available. By exploring real-world problems and challenges on their own, students in this class were able to acquire valuable experiential knowledge that cannot be accessed through pursuing traditional learning methods.

There are a few key conclusions from this project. The first is the need for financial and administrative support to help instructors formulate such creative projects that allow students to gain first-hand experiential knowledge rather than resort to traditional classroom teaching methods. Without the support of the IMPACT Office at Niagara University and senior faculty and staff for the resources required for this project (such as transportation, key contacts of community services providers in the region, and guidance from local staff), this project would not have been feasible. This is particularly relevant for new professors who may incur steep learning and experience curves, in addition to lacking adequate knowledge of the community and resources to create such projects on their own. So, for project-learning initiatives such as this to be a feasible and sustainable part of the business school curriculum, there is a critical need for ongoing institutional investment that encourages and rewards instructors (through stipends and staff support) to sacrifice time and energy to create new experiences for their students. A second take-away is that creating learning that can impact students for a lifetime and re-orient the way they look at the world requires time and flexibility. To develop this



project, instructors and departments have to be willing to rearrange their scheduled course materials, work collaboratively, allow for last minute changes in plans such as losing class time that they may have planned for some other learning and be willing to work outside of the classroom to come up with new frameworks (such as *the Social Entrepreneurship Idea Generation framework*) that can effectively address new project goals. A final takeaway from this case study is that implementing such experimental and daunting changes to course curriculum cannot be heralded by the individual instructor alone. However, through the collaboration and support from various university and community stakeholders (department and university colleagues, administrators, staff, community partners, or other members of university governance), it is possible to transform a student's learning experience in a way that potentially creates ethical and conscientious business leaders of the future who can transform society for the better.

## CASE 2: ECONOMETRICS

Our second project-based learning case study offers another example of how course assessments can be intentionally designed to address existing needs within the broader community. As a primary component of the final exam for an applied econometrics class, the instructor asked a multistep question where students proposed recommendations after analyzing anonymized student records data from the university. This intervention took part in a cross-listed course composed of upper division business undergraduate students and both Masters of Finance and MBA graduate students. It was held during the Spring 2021 semester and was composed of 12 students in total. The class met in-person and met once a week for a 2.75-hour evening session.

This project entailed students applying their acquired econometric knowledge to indirectly contribute recommendations to Niagara University for incoming student class placement. In Spring 2021, Niagara University administrators contacted the econometrics class instructor and inquired if he would facilitate an assessment of the university's first-year class assignment protocols. Particularly, they were

interested if a superior course assignment mechanism could be designed to increase the probability of student success in first-year math courses, which would likely boost the retention rate of freshmen students. Administrators provided detailed historical datasets on previous cohorts of first year students to the instructor. These datasets included information on student demographics, high school academic performance, SAT scores, and performance in first year math or writing courses at Niagara.

Given the privacy and legal restrictions on disseminating student records data to other students, the instructor used the records data to run a logit regression. This regression aimed at estimating the correlation and its statistical significance between different student variables and the probability of successfully passing an introductory statistics course. Results from this regression could be used to consider how different components of a student's background translate into classroom success. It could also be used to determine the overall probability of a student successfully passing the class.

As implementing and interpreting logit regressions was covered in the second half of the applied econometrics class, questions on this topic were incorporated as a multipart short answer question within the final exam. Students were provided the aforementioned regression results and were asked a series of questions on interpreting these results. For example, these included questions on how important it was that students completed at least algebra 2 in high school or the benefit of being placed in a statistics section meeting four times per week (rather than three times). Their answers could then be passed along by the instructor to university administrators as an input to the broader question of redesign of Niagara's course assignment mechanism.

Based on both solicited student feedback and instructor perceptions, there are three primary takeaways from this econometrics case study. First, consistent with Sullivan's (1995) observation that integration is a key tenet of Vincentian education, students appreciated and were inspired by the ability to work on projects with real world implications. Unlike other exam questions, whose importance and impact are

constrained to the still important task of measuring student mastery and comprehension, the econometrics case study illustrates the potential opportunity of classroom assessments to transcend the classroom. This possibility offers symbiotic benefits to both the service and learning measurement dimensions of the assessment activity. By incorporating service components within course assessments, students can appreciate the applied business or social value of class concepts (like logit regression) outside of their abstract presentation in classrooms. This holds specific relevance to institutions like Niagara, whose Catholic and Vincentian mission identity aims towards preparing graduates to be transformational members of their community. Equally, by adding the external benefit of assisting the community to the individual reward of an assessment, students may be motivated to invest more effort on the assessment. Given that the importance of their deliverable extends beyond merely their earned grade, students motivated by the social value of the assessment will allow the assessment to offer a superior measure of a student's actual mastery.

A second conclusion from the econometric case study is a recognition that fully immersive assessments offer greater potential for student investment. This insight directly follows from the logic of the project-based learning literature. At its best, project-based learning is primarily student driven and will empower students throughout as many dimensions of the project as possible. Students in the econometrics case study were only able to marginally participate in the broader assessment reform project due to data privacy limitations. However, similar projects in future versions of the class would ideally differ from the discussed assessment in three key dimensions. First, rather than be constrained to an exam, the service-driven assessment would take place across an entire semester. This would likely entail a community partner sharing data that could be used to answer a key question relevant to their mission. Second, if at all possible, students would directly dictate the data analysis decisions. Even if the data could not be directly provided to them, the students could outline what they would do to the instructor, who would then carry out their intentions. Finally, there should be opportunities

for the students to directly interact with the community partner. This is key to both facilitating student investment in the project and to offer them an explicit example of how their developed skill sets can directly address community needs.

The final takeaway from this case study centers on the need for resources and institutional support for any similar project to be successful. A major limitation underlying why a more extensive project was not pursued was the challenge of identifying an opportunity for data analysis service. While the instructor was assisted by Niagara's IMPACT office, which focuses on service projects involving members of the university's community, many potential partners either lacked the necessary data or were unwilling to share their data with students. In order for a similar project to fully meet its potential, instructors require both institutional support to successfully identify community partners and sufficient time to implement the intended project. Given the numerous demands already placed on instructors and their potentially limited social networks within the community, it is imperative that administrators offer this support if they wish for faculty to provide transformational project-based learning experiences to their students. This touches on Sullivan's (1995) collaborative tenet of Vincentian education, as student opportunities to participate in a transformative educational experience often rely on engagement with others outside the classroom.

### **CASE 3: MBA HEALTH POLICY**

Similar to the econometrics case study, our third case study also involved students assisting a university office with a campus initiative. In the summer of 2019, Niagara started a food pantry for students which operated out of residence life. During the fall 2019 semester, MBA students in the healthcare management concentration did research and provided recommendations to the newly opened campus food pantry. The project took place in a healthcare policy and management MBA course. This course is required for all MBA students completing the healthcare management concentration. In the fall of 2019, there were seven students enrolled and the course ran as a hybrid.

This project allowed the students to synthesize two research streams. The Grossman model (1972) first recognized that health status is not solely determined by genetics and medical care. More recently, the social determinants of health are now being recognized as important determinants of health status. The CDC defines the social determinants of health as “conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, March 10). Economic stability is one of these conditions and food security is considered to be a prominent component of economic stability. The American Hospital Association (2017, June) provides resources to health systems to inform their efforts addressing deficiencies in the social determinants of health for their patient population, including case studies illustrating best practices in how some hospital systems are addressing food insecurity.

There is also, unfortunately, a growing literature documenting food insecurity among college students (Freudenberg et al., 2019; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018; Nikolaus et al., 2020). Students had to search peer-reviewed literature on how both college campuses and hospital systems were addressing food insecurity in their respective populations, finding between four and six journal articles on each topic. Students then had to review the AHA case studies on food insecurity and search the websites of large hospital systems to identify best practices. Armed with this research, students made recommendations for a successful operation of NU’s recently started food pantry.

Two student groups presented their recommendations to a representative from Niagara University’s IMPACT office, which coordinates service learning for the university. Although their recommendations were varied, three overarching themes emerged. Some recommendations were proactive, aiming to identify at risk students. For example, one suggestion was to include food insecurity screening in the online health portal where students upload required health documents. Other proposals were service oriented, focusing on donations. For example, one group recommended a “Pay it Forward” program, where students could donate unused meal plan

meals to students in need. This group noted that many meal plan meals have been paid for and end up unused or spent frivolously at the end of the semester. The third category involved proposals that monetized food pantry donations. For instance, one group suggested that food pantry donations could be accepted to pay off student parking fines.

For Vincent, “growth in virtue had to accompany growth in knowledge,” (Sullivan, 1995, p. 166). This project included Sullivan’s core Vincentian tenants of an education being holistic and integrated. This project was holistic in that it contributed to students’ moral growth by drawing their attention to an unmet need on the campus and challenging them to offer solutions. Similarly, this project was integrated as it required the students to synthesize two academic research streams and apply best practices to a local problem.

Finally, Vincentian education must be excellent. This entails not only dedicated faculty, but also an active and challenging methodology (Sullivan, 1995). Project-based learning meets this criterion. According to the Buck Institute for Education (n.d.), “project-based learning is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.” This graduate assignment meets many of these standards. Campus food insecurity is a meaningful problem. It is authentic as it involves an issue relevant to students’ lives. The assignment required sustained inquiry, as students had to find resources from two distinct research streams. Finally, consistent with project-based learning, the students presented not just to fellow students and the professor, but a representative from a university office.

#### **CASE 4: LABOR ECONOMICS**

Our fourth and final project-based learning case study offers an example of explicitly integrating institutional mission into the business curriculum. Within a course on labor economics, the instructor embedded primary source material from Catholic Social Teaching into a unit on wage dispersion and labor market inequality. This course was an upper division

elective course held during the Spring 2020 semester and was composed of 15 students from business majors. While the class was originally held in-person and met for 80-minute sessions twice a week, the integration of Catholic Social Teaching into the class occurred during the COVID pandemic, where class periods were held virtually over Zoom.

As one of the final units of the semester, students were assigned to read and engage with several germane selections from Saint John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. *Centesimus Annus* (CA) represents John Paul II's theological and moral analysis of capitalism and contemporary mixed-market economic systems. The former Pope systematically commended and criticized the contemporary global economic order throughout the encyclical. While his analysis surveyed several dimensions at the intersection of economics and ethics, such as capitalism's implications for global poverty and ecology, John Paul II devoted considerable attention in the encyclical to the morality of labor markets under contemporary forms of capitalism. For John Paul II, work and labor represented a means of safeguarding each person's inherent dignity, cultivating their divinely-endowed talents, and providing a communal locus for social and familial engagement.

Students engaged with the Pope's arguments on labor market ethics in *Centesimus Annus* through two elements of the labor economics class. First, after being assigned selections from the encyclical to read outside of class, students participated in an open-ended class discussion on the material. This discussion constituted both a means of determining student comprehension of John Paul II's arguments and encouraged them to identify its relevance to our concurrent exploration of inequality in labor markets. Second, as an essay component embedded within the final exam, students composed short answer responses to question prompts based on the encyclical excerpts. The question prompts included both objective and subjective questions. Objective questions intended to evaluate student comprehension of John Paul II's moral and theological assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of modern labor markets. Subjective questions aimed to elicit

feedback regarding the students' perceived value of integrating Catholic Social Teaching into the curriculum of a business elective course.

Three takeaways emerged from student responses to the subjective component of the assignment. First, students identified finding value in the *Centesimus Annus* unit, as a means of incorporating business ethics to the curriculum. Independent of whether the discussion was philosophically grounded in the Roman Catholic or other secular moral traditions, the students appreciated a curriculum that elevated the topical salience of business ethics. This coincides with Sullivan's (1995) holistic tenet of Vincentian education, with curricula transcending any course's blinkered disciplinary perspective. A student respondent, for instance, mentioned that:

I find value in exercises like (the) discussion of CA, and would find it interesting to have some of these discussions in other business classes...These activities allow me to take information on ethical practices and apply them to topics relevant for my career. By doing so I am better equipped for ethical challenges I may face out in the community or within my work.

Rather than siloing this topic within the domain of classes solely dedicated to the topic (traditionally, taking the form of either a class on business ethics or introductory philosophy coursework), the students wished that ethics was consistently integrated throughout their entire business education.

The second takeaway from the student exam responses focused on incorporating Roman Catholic ideas and its intellectual tradition into a business classroom. While some students did identify that they would prefer no inclusion of the university's mission identity into the business curriculum, a second conclusion from the student exam responses was that an overwhelming majority of students did appreciate integrating germane elements of the Roman Catholic social tradition into business classrooms. The intentional inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching into the curriculum was

particularly desirable to students drawn to Niagara University's religious identity and mission. Offering testimony consistent with this sentiment, a student offered the following feedback related to this theme:

I would like to see more implementation in Vincentian ethics being taught or at least somewhat implemented into business cases at school. There are many of us that chose this school specifically due to its affiliation with the Catholic Church and what we were expecting as an education based on the values of that institution. There are many here that are not Catholic, but that doesn't mean the values should be left out of the classroom.

To the extent that an institution has a unique mission identity, such as Niagara's religious identity as a Catholic and Vincentian institution, students drawn to that institution likely expect that this identity will be integrated throughout their educational experience. This is particularly the case when an institution markets to prospective students that its mission represents a key component in differentiating its educational product from institutions without distinctive mission identities.

A final conclusion from this intervention, inherently linked to the second theme, was the importance of ensuring that the use of Catholic or religious source material should be intentionally inclusive of non-Catholic members of the academic community. A primary goal of incorporating the Catholic intellectual tradition into business classrooms is presumably to demonstrate its relevance for understanding and engaging with the secular concepts in the business world. It can only succeed in that goal if members of a pluralistic classroom universally appreciate its contribution to student mastery of classroom concepts, independent of whether or not they agree with the orthogonal metaphysical claims of Roman Catholicism (or other faith traditions). This observation coincides with Sullivan's (1995) tenet of a Vincentian education being person-centered, as all students need to feel included and valued for a classroom to be truly Vincentian.

### THREE PILLARS FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE VINCENTIAN BUSINESS EDUCATION

As noted throughout the previous section, each of Sullivan's (1995) key tenets were present within our case. However, to provide a streamlined set of principles upon which a transformative Vincentian business education can be founded, we discerned three common themes after reflecting upon our four case studies. First, our projects were *community-centered* in their orientation. Drawing upon Niagara's Catholic and Vincentian mission, the project-based learning cases focused on engagement within the local and university communities. As seen through the food pantry and social entrepreneurship projects, this primarily involved students using project-based learning opportunities as a vehicle for engaging and empowering marginalized members of either community. In order to enrich these experiences, inculcating a lifelong disposition for our students towards transformative community engagement, it is beneficial to highlight the intellectual traditions motivating the Vincentian ethos. The labor economics case study offers an example of this, demonstrating how Catholic Social Thought offers a unique interrogative lens for considering the challenges of inequality. This follows the example of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, whose respective ministries were intellectually derived out of their theological commitments to social mobility and the marginalized.

Second, our projects were *innovative* in their design. The creative dimension of these projects impacted both students and faculty alike. For students, these projects transcended banal assessment alternatives, providing immersive and interactive opportunities that satisfied pedagogical assessment needs. Project-based learning's principle of unstructured learning also compelled students to thoughtfully engage in their projects. This cultivates a resourcefulness that is not only consistent with the Vincentian model of education's emphasis on flexibility, but also with employer demands for hiring a situationally nimble workforce. For faculty, these projects required careful planning and a non-trivial dedication of time to project logistics. As these opportunities often cannot be replicated across semesters, instructors must continuously

search for innovative ways to retool their project-based learning or mission activity for future cohorts of students.

As a third and final theme, our case studies were *solution-oriented*. Students across these projects were required to propose or execute actions to address identified sources of adversity. This often entailed our students drafting action plan deliverables, such as their formulating a social entrepreneurship report or providing recommendations to the university for reforming its class assignment mechanism. The campus food bank case also offers an example of enacting these plans when feasible. Either way, the classroom projects we surveyed were aimed towards solving critical problems impacting those in our community. This follows directly from the Vincentian pedagogical tradition, emphasizing the role of action and implementation towards each individual's moral formation.

Alongside relating to the particular experiences of our cases, these themes – community-centered, innovative, solution-oriented – offer a set of guiding pillars for crafting a distinctively Vincentian business curriculum. While the application of these three themes will necessarily differ across courses, the pillars offer support in discerning a transformative reimagination of Vincentian business education. By drawing on the guidance of these pillars to restore the centrality of mission to their institutions, Vincentian business schools' draw on Christ's imagery of salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16. Just as salt without its saltiness offers no value in Jesus' metaphor, the same logic extends to Vincentian business schools that dilute the transformative opportunities embedded in their Catholic and Vincentian identity. In deemphasizing their rich Catholic and Vincentian traditions, these institutions may become indistinguishable from their secular peers outside of history and aesthetics. More impactfully, this forgoes opportunities to contribute to human progress and thought leadership, such as potential Vincentian contributions to business ethics.

## **PROVIDING THE HEET: ADMINISTRATORS' ROLE IN VINCENTIAN BUSINESS EDUCATION**

Reinvigorating the Vincentian essence within Vincentian business schools hinges on administrators prioritizing mission integration within their strategic vision. Leadership matters in promoting changes to institutional culture and curricula. Returning to Christ's invocation of salt and light, administrators are essential in ensuring that the 'light' of the Vincentian mission is vividly visible to all institutional stakeholders and the broader human community. Just as Christ commands his followers in Matthew 5:16 to "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds," administrators are key in facilitating the opportunity and promise of an authentically Vincentian business education.

In order to offer concrete examples of the role for administrators, one can analogize that administrators provide a necessary source of HEET, fueling the integral light of mission within their institutions. The HEET acronym (Hire Equip Encourage Train) refers to the responsibilities of administrators in successfully recentering Vincentian business schools around mission and ethics. Starting with Hire, this component of HEET focuses on pursuing a mission-driven human resource strategy. Following Roche (2017) and Flanagan (2010), administrators can and should emphasize the consideration of mission as a hiring process criterion. Indeed, hiring for mission represents a major component of John Paul II's vision in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. This does not mean that Vincentian business schools should follow a policy of primarily hiring Catholic faculty (Porth et al., 2009). Rather, to ensure that its faculty will actively facilitate the Vincentian business school's mission, administrators may encourage candidate recruitment policies that take into consideration Catholic and non-Catholic candidates' interest and openness to mission (such as, the importance of incorporating ethics to a candidate's classroom).

The second component of the HEET strategy, Equip, refers to administrators providing sufficient logistical and financial resources to the faculty and staff of the Vincentian business school. As demonstrated throughout all the examples of our case studies, there must be sufficient resources to support faculty members in crafting immersive classroom activities like the surveyed case studies. A common theme across

all our cases was the pivotal support offered by those within Niagara's service-learning center. Beyond introducing us to the concepts of project-based learning and creating a space for cross-disciplinary pedagogical dialogue, the service-learning center offered invaluable logistical support. This included assisting faculty in organizing student transportation to community sites or identifying organizational partners for collaboration. However, these sources of faculty support all exist at the university level, rather than at the college level. The expansion of college-specific faculty support programs holds two opportunities for infusing mission-driven curricular innovation throughout the college. First, providing resources within the business college allows for the development of specialized programs and curriculum that foster creative business solutions to systemic societal challenges. Second, providing support within the college of business will improve the salience of these opportunities to all faculty members. This will promote the broad adoption of the Vincentian mission throughout the college, rather than limiting the potential of these programs to those who self-select into university-wide initiatives.

HEET's third component, Encourage, focuses on the role of administrators in transforming institutional culture. Even in colleges and universities where decisions are made through a bottom-up deliberative process, institutional leaders play an essential role in determining the strategic vision and goals of the institution. Consistent with Rizzi's (2019) advocacy for "values-based decision making," if a Vincentian business school wishes to fully integrate mission into its curriculum and initiatives, it should be led by administrators that recognize the value of mission and draw upon it as a guide for strategic planning. To assist in this process, Rizzi highlights the value of designating administrators (vice presidents for mission) whose remit primarily focuses on mission integration throughout the institution. While these positions generally function at the university level, time and institutional knowledge inherently constrain the ability of any university-level administrator to integrate mission throughout all activities of the institution. Furthermore, as curricular change is driven by choices at the departmental and college level

per university governance structures, university-level mission administrators may not be well positioned to promote the adoption of mission-centered curricular innovation. Administrators charged with promoting mission adoption within a Vincentian business school, such as a college or department-level faculty mission director, may be able to address both of these limitations. These mission directors could also serve as liaisons between their college/department colleagues and university mission administrators, ensuring successful dissemination of mission-supporting resources throughout all levels of the university community.

However, even if a Vincentian business school's leadership is convinced of its mission identity's value, a successful transformation requires buy-in from stakeholders throughout the institution. While changing institutional culture is a challenging task for any organization, incentives can prove useful in encouraging curricular adaptation. Using Niagara's Holzschuh College of Business as an example, the Vincentian mission is incentivized through the college's faculty review accreditation process. Faculty publishing articles germane to its Vincentian mission or related emphases, such as ethics or pedagogical scholarship, receive additional points towards meeting expectations of tenured or tenure-track faculty. Vincentian colleges of business could draw on this example to create similar incentives for mission-driven innovation. In addition to supporting scholarship, Vincentian schools of business could support mission integration into the curriculum. This could include offering incentives to adapting faculty and supporting their efforts through curricular development grants. It is also important that the college considers a faculty member's efforts on integrating mission into their classroom and scholarship as a relevant component for promotion and tenure recommendations. Alongside encouraging adaptation, these incentives may promote institutional cultural change by persuading skeptical faculty of the value of mission integration.

Train, the final component of HEET, recognizes the necessary role of professional development in ensuring the adaptation of an innovatively mission-driven curriculum. Many faculty, regardless of religious affiliation, are unlikely to

join a Vincentian business school with a pre-existing mastery of the Vincentian mission or the Catholic intellectual tradition (Porth et al., 2009). This builds off Naughton's (2009) observation that most Catholic institutions hire faculty primarily on the basis of their field-specific expertise, rather than mastery of mission. One can consider this a challenge of "mission fluency," which must be addressed through training and professional development as a foundational component of any mission integration initiative.

All the Vincentian institutions have wonderful institutional resources. We describe a few here, though this listing is far from extensive. Collectively, the three universities offer the Vincentian Mission Institute (VMI) program. Each school also offers a Vincentian Certificate Program (VMC). These programs aim to develop lay leader mastery of the Vincentian mission. DePaul University also runs the Vincentian Studies Institute of the United States. All three schools promote the charism through various activities during Vincentian Heritage Week. We are all engaged with our local communities as well. St. John's has their Vincentian Institute for Social Action and Niagara recently started the Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Quality and Mission. DePaul operates the Community Peacemakers (CPM) program. In addition, all three institutions have specific initiatives to develop Vincentian knowledge in the faculty. Niagara University has a faculty mission director that works closely with Niagara's vice president of mission. Interested faculty apply for this three-year position and implement a project of their choosing. The FLC that all three authors participated in was the initiative of the faculty mission director. Consistent with the discussion in Whitney and Laboe (2014), DePaul invites both interested faculty and staff to become "Mission Ambassadors...who serve as vital agents of the work of mission integration and mission effectiveness across the institution." St. John's has several areas where interested faculty can be involved in the work of mission integration. The St. John's Office of Academic Service-Learning has a faculty advisory board, while the St. John's Vincentian Institute for Social Action has a Faculty Research Consortium (FRC).

However, all of the aforementioned examples are limited in extending mission-centered professional development opportunities to a subset of faculty self-selecting into these university-level initiatives. This suggests that another role for a college or department-level faculty mission director would be expanding awareness and encouraging participation in mission-centered professional development for all faculty and staff stakeholders. Part of this charge would be to develop and facilitate discipline-specific forms of mission training that are responsive to discipline-specific needs.

### **LIGHTING THE FLAME: A CALL TO ACTION FOR ALL VINCENTIAN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS**

From our collective experiences in Niagara University's Faculty Learning Community, we developed three pillars for a uniquely Vincentian college of business education: community-centered, innovative, and solution-oriented. As a set of preconditions for implementing the pillars, our proposed HEET strategy guides Vincentian colleges of business toward a more cohesive integration of the charism into business curriculum. HEET stands for "hire", "equip", "encourage, and "train." This strategy stems from Christ's message in Matthew 5:16 to "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds."

As a visualization of the HEET strategy, imagine the simple act of lighting a candle in a dark room. The wick of the candle ignites upon coming into contact with a lit match, held with care between one's thumb and index finger. In this image, the candle represents a Vincentian college of business. The candle's flame reflects the Vincentian charism as lived out by both the university community as well as the alumni. It signifies, in the words of Father Holschneider (2012, July 16), a "Vincentian heart." The match's flame signifies the ignition of the Vincentian charism in the college of business alumni. A Vincentian college of business can light the flame by implementing HEET (the four fingers), thereby engaging the students during their time with us (the thumb). We believe the successful implementation of HEET involves college level faculty mission directors, serving as



a liaison between the University level mission resources and the faculty.

One of the striking conclusions taken from this imagery of lighting the match is the interconnected nature of how all stakeholders in a Vincentian school of business are required for the HEET strategy's success. The candle is dark until it is lit by the match. Neither the fingers nor the thumb can light the candle by itself – each contributes to the action. Business alumni cannot fully live out the charism without the business faculty integrating the mission into their courses. The faculty cannot light the candle through only scholarship and community activities -- they must engage the student to fully ignite the flame.

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