

PASSING THE TORCH: MAINTAINING FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY TRADITIONS DURING TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP

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Catholic universities face a dramatic shift, as religious orders of priests gradually turn leadership control of the university to lay individuals. This study examined the tactics used to build sustainability of mission and values during leadership transition, from programming to strategic planning, placing emphasis on the role of evaluation research in developing systematic integration of mission and values into the increasingly lay leadership of the university. Survey results from three groups of university leaders (administrators, $n = 13$, senior faculty, $n = 13$, and lay Board of Trustees members, $n = 13$) were compared regarding perceptions of the institution's mission, vision, and values. We also assessed Trustee expectations for the continuance of the university. Implications for higher education and continuance of faith traditions at Catholic universities are discussed.

Faith-based universities, particularly Roman Catholic institutions, face a unique yet very common dilemma. These institutions are on the verge of a fundamental shift in leadership from religious to predominately lay leadership. Those administrators currently in leadership roles, both religious and secular, face the challenge of ensuring that the university's organizational values remain intact during and after the university's transition to an all lay leadership. While details related to campus operations are unique to higher education, there are issues that may be found throughout the lives of many organizations. Many non-profits and community organizations do not outlive their founder(s) for this very reason; organizations that survive either find a mechanism for sustaining organizational values or transform as power shifts from

group to group (Hanson, 2006).

While change may be beneficial for adapting to new times it is important that founding ideals remain intact to serve as the bedrock of the organization. It is unclear exactly how lay leaders maintain the values of their faith institution. Some within the lay Catholic community expressed concern over transitions to lay leadership by various religious traditions or orders. Steinfels (2007), for example, reported that lay and clergy principals of Catholic schools claimed equal amounts of commitment to the religious mission of their institutions. However, lay principals felt significantly less equipped than clergy to maintain the Catholic identity and mission of their school (see also Dosen, 2009).

Mission Statements

The goal of a university mission statement is to clearly define its identity, goals, and culture so that it operates efficiently and easily present to the outside world (Ehrlich, 2000). A well articulated mission statement is a powerful resource in designing effective strategic planning. Bourne et al. (2000) found that colleges whose institutional missions were clearly understood and embraced by employees generally had more effective strategic planning. Mission statements help leaders articulate the unique characteristics of the institution and envision future growth within that mission (Bingham et al., 2001; Amis et al., 2002).

Mission statements define an organization and guide both daily operations and long term aspirations (Emery, 1996; Wright, 2002). The mission statement of a university must accomplish many goals for multiple audiences in what is typically a very concise proclamation (Carver, 2000). These multiple audiences include students (including present students, potential students, and alumni), parents, employees, and the perception of the larger community outside the university. The mission statement enables everyone to work towards common goals and most importantly in this context by providing an overarching vision toward which each member may strive (Berg et al, 2003; Ferrari & Cowman, 2004).

The State of DePaul University

Specific to the current study, DePaul University's mission is based on providing education and service to first generation college students emphasizing civic engage-

ment, diversity, and public service (Dosen, 2009). As one of three universities in the US traditionally led by priest-members of the Congregation of the Mission (commonly called *Vincentians*), DePaul University is located in the metropolitan Chicago area. The number of Vincentian priests across the US is dwindling, with the mean age of existing Vincentians now in the 60s (*DePaul Newslite*, 2009). As its religious leaders age, DePaul University must take steps now to ensure that its mission and values are sustained in its growing lay leadership.

The university's mission is based on three central values; Vincentian Identity, Catholic Pluralism, and urban civic engagement. Sullivan (1997) defined these values as follows: *Urban*, delivering quality education to locations in and around the metropolitan area of Chicago, IL; *Catholic*, directing services to the poor and economically disenfranchised through such programs as actively engaging students, faculty and staff in volunteer and community service directed at impoverished communities; and, *Vincentian*, respecting human dignity, diversity, and "personalism." These values define the university. They reflect the values of the Vincentian order and are the principle beliefs upon which DePaul University was founded (Dodin, 1993; Dosen, 2009). As the founding principles of the university these three tenets (i.e., urban, Catholic, and Vincentian) serve as the basis and yardstick for future action and vision (Rowley et al., 1997).

The Role of Strategic Planning to Facilitate Organizational Sustainability

A key to preserving a university's identity is strategic planning (Dosen, 2009). One of the first initiatives to ensure that the founding traditions would survive at DePaul beyond the life of the Vincentian religious order was a strategic plan begun in 2006 termed *Vision Twenty12* (<http://president.depaul.edu/Downloads/20112InAction12209.pdf>). The goals of this plan included preparing students to be socially responsible future leaders and engaged alumni, as well as further solidifying and expressing the institutions identity as a Vincentian and Catholic institution.

The plan was approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees. Six overall goals were created, namely: 1) enrich academic quality; 2) prepare students to be socially responsible future leaders and engaged alumni; 3) be a model of diversity; 4) selectively increase enrollment; 5) strengthen financial position; and, 6) further institutionalize DePaul's Vincentian and Catholic identity. It is worth noting that the six goals fall evenly into two categories, *mission and values concerns* (preparing students to be socially responsible future leaders and engaged alumni), and *traditional collegiate concerns* (enriching academic quality, selectively increase enrollment, and strengthen financial position).

Lay Leaders: Keeping Faith Traditions Alive

While mission statements and strategic planning affect every member of the university community, stakeholders in the

institution's future cannot maintain an organization's culture without the cooperation university leaders. There is a great lack of research on organization decision makers, especially at very high levels (McDonald & Keys, 2008). A university might prepare lay leadership once the religious tradition founders have passed control of the school to the laity. One very useful report (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2007) relevant to the present study surveyed 1,478 members of Board of Trustees from public and private universities across the US providing a much needed reference point for looking at decision makers and creating allowing a set of national statistics. Among the informative findings was that school Trustees rated *promoting the mission of the institution* as the most important factor in judging a President's success. In fact, they rated it highly in importance than financial concerns. Similarly, Trustees rated lack of racial and ethnic diversity as the number one student issue and second largest faculty issue (after inadequate salaries).

We wondered how Trustee perceptions might be compared to institutional views held by school Senior Administrators who manage a wide variety of operations like academic affairs, student services, and financial and logistical management. Tenured faculty also are in many ways leaders of the institution, as they hold positions of power in their departments. Therefore, we evaluated the university's success in integrating mission and values into the priorities of lay leaders. This exploratory study examined Trustees' perceptions and the amount of priority placed

on the University's mission and values concerns and whether they placed importance on mission over traditional collegiate concerns. Furthermore, we compared the Trustees' perceptions with other leaders in the university, namely stratified random samples of senior administrators and tenured faculty reported in previously published data (Ferrari & Velcoff, 2006; Ferrari, Cowman, Milner, Gutierrez, & Drake, 2009).

Method

Participants

A total of 39 laypersons served on the Board of Trustees at the present university when data were collected. Board members appoint, support, and assess the performance of the President, approve long-range plans and educational programs, ensure the well being of faculty, staff, and students, and manage finances. From this group, 13 Trustees (33%; 12 men, 1 women, M age = 62 years old) responded to our survey. It should be noted that this response rate was very similar to national Trustee study by Selingo (2007), which included Caucasian males with business backgrounds who graduated from the institution they served. One notable difference was that most participants in the present study (83.3%) self-identified as Roman Catholic, compared to 24.6% of participants in Selingo's national survey. Participants on average served on the Board for approximately 6 years, with 25% of Trustees having served for more than 10 years. None of these respondents were clergy.

In order to compare this sample to lay Senior Faculty and Senior Administration, a random stratified sample was drawn from each of the two groups. To ensure comparability, we included two stratified random samples matched with the Trustees on gender, religion, and amount of time associated with the university. One sample included senior, Full Professor faculty (11 men, 2 women, M age = 57 years old, M years at the university = 7.65); the second sample comprised of senior (Vice Presidents and Deans) administrators (10 men, 3 women, M age = 58 years old, M years at the university = 8.72). We kept our stratified random groups sizes small in order to stay comparable to the relatively small Trustee sample size.

Measures

All participants completed Ferrari and Velcoff's (2006) *DePaul Mission and Values Inventory (DMV)*. The *DMV* assessed perceptions of university mission and values through two overarching components - institutional *identity* (16 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert Scale) and *mission driven activities and programs* (23 items, each rated on a 4-point Likert scale). The first component, *institutional identity*, measured respondent's perception of the importance of mission and values in the identity of the university by two subscales, *innovative and inclusive* and *Catholic pluralism*. The *innovative and inclusive* subscale was composed of 10 items capturing issues of risk taking, personalism, value of education, and pragmatic, relevant course content (author M score = 63.18, SD = 9.16; coefficient alpha = 0.76). The *Catholic*

pluralism subscale (6 items) included both the depth of Catholic heritage and religious identity as well as openness to all faiths as an institution (author M score = 27.65, SD = 4.52; coefficient alpha = 0.79).

The second set of scales in the *mission driven activities and programs* section contained three subscales; *urban and global engagement, university specific programs, and faith formation opportunities* (see Ferrari et al., in press, a). Respondents rated these scales on how important they found various activities to be reflective of the university's mission. The *urban and global engagement* subscale (8 items) focused on volunteer service, community engagement, and international education opportunities (author M score = 26.52, SD = 4.56; coefficient alpha = 0.86). The *university specific programs* subscale (6 items) contained programs unique to DePaul University, such as Vincentian heritage events (author M score = 26.61, SD = 5.89; coefficient alpha = 0.89). Finally, the *faith formation opportunities* subscale (9 items) included Catholic and other faith worship, religious education, and spiritual programs at the university (author M score = 19.98, SD = 4.94; coefficient alpha = 0.86).

In addition to the *DMV*, the Board of Trustees completed a measure created for the present study, termed the *Trustee Values Inventory (TVI)*. The *TVI* included 41 questions (39 Likert-type, plus 2 open-ended statements) developed specifically for this study to better understand the role mission and values plays in the decision making process by the university's Board of Trustees. The attributes in this measure included financial, prestige, diversity, and

mission related concerns. The *TVI* measured the amount of importance a Trustee placed on various factors when conducting their business as an agent of the university, based on Selingo's (2007) national study.

Items within the *TVI* comprised of two subscales with each item rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *rarely influences my decisions as a trustee*; 5 = *very strongly influences my decisions as a trustee*). The first subscale contained items on the university's *mission and values* (18 items; present sample M = 79.74, SD = 0.33; coefficient alpha = 0.82) and consisted of Catholic pluralism, Vincentianism, Catholic identity, and urban identity statements taken from the University's Strategic Plan). The second subscale contained *traditional collegiate concerns* (21 items; present sample M = 85.68, SD = 0.26; coefficient alpha = 0.72) such as matters of finances, organizational structure, campus external and internal relations, and school prestige.

Procedure

The *DMV* and *TVI* measures were distributed in pen and paper format to the Trustees at a board meeting. Completed Board of Trustees' surveys were either mailed or faxed to the University Secretary. Responses were collected over a period of two weeks and the data were forwarded to the first author for analysis. The *DMV* was administered to both tenured faculty and senior administrators online and electronically recorded (see Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006; Ferrari et al, 2009).

Table 1:

Mean Scores on DMV Scale for Trustees, Tenured Faculty and Senior Administrators

	<u>Trustees</u>		<u>Faculty</u>		<u>Administrators</u>	
<i>DMV Inventory subscales:</i>						
Innovative and Inclusive	64.85 ^a	(3.78)	49.55 ^b	(12.74)	55.36 ^b	(6.36)
Catholic pluralism	38.33 ^a	(2.39)	30.82 ^b	(7.85)	32.55 ^b	(4.68)
Urban/global programs	26.33 ^a	(2.64)	24.36 ^b	(8.07)	16.50 ^b	(3.91)
University specific programs	29.45 ^a	(3.33)	17.08 ^b	(6.39)	26.18 ^c	(5.27)
Faith formation programs	20.00 ^c	(3.10)	13.31 ^b	(6.21)	27.33 ^a	(4.12)

 $n = 13$ per group

Values in parentheses are standard deviation.

Note. Superscripts without the same letter are significantly different, $p < .01$.

Results and Discussion

A series of *one-way ANOVAs* (corrected for small sample sizes, $p < .01$) assessed the three participant groups' perceptions on each of the five *DMV* subscale scores. Table 1 shows the *DMV* scale scores for the Board of Trustees and stratified random samples of Full Professor faculty, and VP/Dean senior administrators. There was a significant difference across groups on their perceptions of the university as innovative and inclusive, $F(2, 38) = 10.72$, $p < .001$, and on Catholic pluralism, $F(2, 38) = 6.76$, $p < .003$. In both cases, *post hoc comparisons* (Newman Keuls, $p < .01$) indicated that Trustees held stronger perceptions of the university's identity

compared to senior faculty or administrative leaders (see Table 1).

Also, there were significant differences across the three groups on their personal importance for mission driven activities such as urban and global engagement programs, $F(2, 38) = 12.07$, $p < .001$, university-specific activities that highlight aspects of the school's patron-saint and religious order, $F(2, 38) = 20.11$, $p < .001$, and faith-formation programs for Catholic and other denominations, $F(2, 38) = 29.44$, $p < .001$. *Post hoc comparisons* again indicated that Trustees reported stronger feelings of importance for a number of activities than either faculty or administrators, specifically programs that emphasize urban and global engagement in social justice and activities where the

patron-saint and religious order of the university are highlighted (see Table 1). However, the Senior Administrators (VPs and Deans) believed the faith-formation programs for Roman Catholic and other denominations were more important to reflect the school's mission compared to either faculty or trustees.

To assess Trustee perceptions of mission and values (i.e., *DMV* scores) and considerations of important institutional mission concerns over traditional collegiate concerns, three *hierarchical regression analyses* were run. Dependent variables were *TVI* scores. In the first analysis, the independent variables were both *DMV* subscales comprising the innovative and inclusive plus Catholic pluralism scores; the second analysis included as independent variables only the three mission driven activities subscales (i.e., urban/global engagement, university specific programs, and faith formation programs); and, the third analysis comprised as the independent variables all five subscales of the *DMV*. For each hierarchical regression performed, none of the models were significant predictors of *TVS* scores for either mission and values or traditional collegiate operational concerns.

Taken together, we found that lay Board of Trustee members reported stronger perceptions of the school's mission identity than professional employees at the university (i.e., faculty and administration). As far as we know, the present study is the first systematic assessment of higher education Trustees, other than the national study by Selingo (2007) reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Our pre-

sent study extended those earlier results by comparing lay Trustees with other vital members of the university, and we focused on non-financial or operational duties. It seems that the strategic plan at our university to establish means to facilitate organizational sustainability works well with our Board, and not as strongly with faculty and administration.

Also, the present study seems important in relating rating of mission and value concerns over traditional collegiate concerns. This outcome is promising as far as sustaining institutional values over the course of the leadership transformation. While no significant relationship between perception of mission and importance placed on it in decision making was found in the present study, our results may be an artifact of our small sample sizes.

Because of the nature of our sample sizes, however, it is very difficult to gather enough responses to properly conduct expansive statistical analyses. The lack of significant findings may be partially because of "ceiling effects" on subscales of both *DMV* and *TVI* inventories. Essentially, in both cases, it is possible items were rated so highly by participants that there was not enough variance to compare the scales with one another. Clearly, the small sample sizes questions whether we can generalize our results to other Catholic and faith-based schools. Perhaps, the use of a self-report, quantitative survey is not the best method to solicit insights from Board members. A semi-structured interview may have yielded much richer materials.

Implications for Higher Education and Catholic Universities

Sustaining an organization's mission requires creating an environment in which leaders are trained and encouraged to reflect personalism, commitment to service, and a commitment to locality. The ability of a university to maintain its institutional identity throughout the transition to a lay leadership also includes a dependence on its ability to institutionalize mission and values into the university structure (Dosen, 2009; Ferrari & Cowman, 2004). It is possible for a faith-based university to take steps to prepare future (lay) leaders who understand, embrace, and "live" the mission. Strategic planning is needed that incorporates mission and values and sets mechanisms in place creating a new lay generation of mission-driven leaders. In order for effective continuation of the values-centered college, the higher education institution must maintain a system in which leadership mechanisms are formalized and sustained.

The present study indicated that lay Board of Trustee members who become or may already be the leadership at a Catholic university may value these concepts and utilize them in their decision making practices. Such sustainability seems quite reassuring to those individuals who fear the university will not be able to retain its Catholic tradition identity when left without clergy as institutional guides.

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