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# Bridging General Education and the Business Discipline: Surfacing Central Themes through a Core Course

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**ABSTRACT:** General education and business major courses often follow parallel paths with little intersection or appreciation of the other. Students benefit, however, by seeing key themes and skills linked to both general education and specialized disciplinary courses. Giving specific attention to Christian institutions, this paper argues for more intentional connections between these two parts of the curriculum, highlighting their common ideals of shared learning, shared connections as human beings, practical skills, institutional distinctiveness, and integration. One strategy to overcome the bifurcation of general education and business curricula has been to ground institutional distinctives within a core course experience, which can then be called to mind in subsequent courses. A core course for first-year students is especially effective for Christian institutions due to the significance of the themes typically introduced in such a course. Although educators have called for building connections between general education and specialized disciplines, very little scholarship has addressed business disciplines specifically or provided models of successful implementation. The present article provides a detailed example of how one Christian institution's core course can engage and benefit students by highlighting connections to organizational and career themes. The article then demonstrates concrete ways important core course themes can be intentionally reinforced within the business curriculum. General suggestions for implementation are also provided.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since both general education and major courses play a significant role in preparing Christian business students for engagement in career and society, it is important to persuade students that these courses and topics are worth their time and effort. Although higher education institutions emphasize the importance of general education, students usually direct their primary focus toward courses in the major. While students tend to perceive greater value in those general education courses with clear connection to their major or with concrete, applicable skills, they are also inclined to view core courses focusing on values and critical thinking as being less beneficial—something to “get out of the way.” Despite the fact that there have been calls by both Christian and secular educators to make curricular connections between general education and specialized courses (e.g., Boning, 2007; Wehlburg, 2010), an unfortunate divide continues to

exist in practice (e.g., Dockery, 1999; Dose, 2017; Dose & Bechtold, 2016; Wells, 2016b).

Bridging the gap between general education and the business major can be accomplished by a coordinated approach of first surfacing relevant content within general education courses that is also relevant for career and organizational life more generally. Later, important themes introduced in general education courses can be reinforced in business major courses. Particularly at Christian colleges, important topics and ideas should pervade coursework, and distinctive themes potentially assist in making those connections. Rather than being isolated, all coursework should contribute to a holistic set of educational objectives designed to help students “develop skills, abilities, and perspectives necessary to become collaborative agents in the contemporary workforce and society” (Messiah College, 2017).

A first-year core course, in particular, can provide an ideal platform for introducing important themes that can

then be reemphasized within subsequent major courses. Such a course focuses on common thematic content and is taken by every student at the same point in their college journey. A core course often includes subject matter related to the mission and identity of the college, themes related to Christian faith and worldview or other central themes of the liberal arts, as well as critical thinking and writing competencies. For example, at Messiah College, the Created and Called for Community course includes a variety of readings related to creation and stewardship, identity and community, and calling and vocation. These themes are relevant not only for all students in their first year, but specifically for business students as they consider organizational life and career choice. In fact, the content may have more meaning for students as seniors than it does for first-year students. As such, helping students in the core course to see how the curriculum will benefit them in future major courses and upon graduation will enhance perceptions of the value of the course.

### **General Education**

In order for the connection between general education and major courses to be valuable, general education must have actual and perceived worth in its own right. The purpose and execution of general education itself has generated a great deal of research interest and a significant degree of theoretical agreement, even if implementation has lagged. General education is considered an enduring distinctive of higher education in the United States (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015; Gaston, 2015; Wells, 2016b) and comprises approximately one-third of the credits required for a bachelor's degree in the U.S. (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Boyer (1981) noted that general education is the learning that is "common to all people" because it is grounded in our shared experience (p. ix), further stating that the "mission of general education is to help students understand that they are not only autonomous individuals, but also members of a human community to which they are accountable" (Boyer & Levine, 1981, p. 22). General education "gets at something bigger than any single discipline" (Wells, 2016b, p. 9). Operationally, graduates should hold some set of things—content and skills—in common, to some extent across all institutions, but certainly within one particular institution. This might include a particular set of courses, disciplines within a distribution requirement, common learning objectives, or a core course. Toombs, Amey, and Chen (1991) have keenly observed that the mission of the institution should be central in course content. "Grand design of the curriculum is important. The crucial question is not how closely an institution conforms

to some ideal prescription but how well the faculty select and organize general education to honor the intentions of the institution" (p. 117).

### **CORE COURSES IN GENERAL EDUCATION**

A core course is a common learning experience within general education that attempts to communicate something about the institution's values and purpose, often occurring as a first-year experience (FYE) and as a key means of introduction to higher education. Common intellectual experience, FYE, writing-intensive pedagogy, and themes such as global and cultural understanding have been found to benefit students as high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008; Skipper, 2017)—pedagogy leading to higher intellectual capacity, student retention, and student engagement (Rhodes, 2010). Such attributes create the potential for a core course to provide a focal point for establishing connections between general education and business courses.

The chosen core course themes often reflect the identity of the institution, particularly in the case of a college or university with a Christian mission. For example, the core course at Wheaton College (2018) centers on "enduring questions" such as "what is a good life" and explores readings such as Augustine's *Confessions* and the Cape Town Commitment. Gordon College's (2018) core course *The Great Conversation: Foundations in Thinking, Reading and Writing* also focuses on the question "What is the good life?" with related themes of love, vocation, Christian character, community and justice/shalom. Anderson University's course is built around themes of integrity, excellence, servant leadership, responsibility, and generosity (<https://www.anderson.edu/student-life/student-success/>).

Since core course themes express central ideas and values of the institution, it seems logical that those themes also be present in other general education courses and courses within major disciplines. However, unless the themes and curricular connections are made salient throughout the curriculum, student recognition of the significance of these key ideas may be diminished.

### **Ideals of General and Specialized Education**

The goals of general and specialized education are aligned in many ways; however, Christian and secular higher education institutions have often failed to recognize or appreciate this compatibility. Ignoring these mutual goals contributes to the belief that the two curricular areas are at odds, undermining the potential for general education and business courses to mutually reinforce each other

and reducing the real and perceived educational value for students. Boyer (1988) and others have proposed that the general education curriculum ideally embodies certain attributes such as shared learning pedagogy, connection as human beings, practical skills, distinctiveness with respect to a particular institution, and integration. Though perhaps articulated less explicitly, the same ideals exist within the business discipline.

Students may encounter *shared learning*, such as a common intellectual experience in a first-year, seminar-style core course or a set of core requirements in the business discipline. Common Christian beliefs can heighten this shared learning. Boyer's (1988) ideal that all students understand their *shared connections as human beings* is especially relevant for a Christian college. Being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) is particularly significant. A general education core course could emphasize this as major theme. Business core courses such as management and marketing are particularly relevant venues for reinforcing this theme due to the focus on people and relationships. Essential practical *skills* such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, quantitative literacy leadership, teamwork, adaptability, time management, etc. are recognized by both general and business faculty as well as employers (Jones, 2002; Rhodes, 2010; Stark & Lowther, 1988). For these reasons, it would make sense to articulate to students the benefit general education serves for disciplinary coursework and their work upon graduation.

General education is shared learning that is *distinctive*—reflecting unique institutional identity (Bowen, 2004). For Christian colleges, a first-year core course can have an important role in framing the mission and values at the heart of the institution, encouraging character and identity formation. This direction harmonizes with the call in Ephesians (Wells, 2016a) to put away one's old self and be renewed "according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ep. 4:22, NRSV). Business departments also seek to create major courses that are institutionally distinctive both to attract students as well as to develop graduates who are sought after by employers for both skill and integrity. Christian colleges undertake character and identity formation in diverse ways but are most effective when students recognize and develop "the intellect and character necessary to express Christian commitments in responsible decisions and actions" (Messiah College, "Abilities of the Liberal Arts," n.d.). Repeating key themes throughout the curriculum reinforces the centrality and interconnectedness of these key ideas. If students collectively encounter a course that defines the distinctive institutional mission and values early on, that encounter

sets the stage for placing other knowledge and skills within that frame.

*Integration* speaks to pulling together the various experiences, themes, and intellectual proficiencies or skills (Boyer, 1988) in a coherent way that is tied to the institution's mission (Johnson, Ratliff, & Gaff, 2004). Though not always recognized as such by faculty or students, the curriculum is a network with a "density of connections to the whole of human culture" (Murphy, 2006, p. 88). When conceptualized as a network or system, faculty can focus less on individual courses and more on how interactions among them produce student learning (Cuevas, Matveev, & Miller, 2010). Cohen and Kiskar (2010) have advocated for a curriculum in which students would encounter a "framework on which to place knowledge stemming from various sources and teach them to think critically, develop values, understand traditions, respect diverse opinions" (p. 242). Just because students encounter concepts in the first year does not mean they will remember them in advanced classes; integration should be "iterative, recurring [and] incremental," providing multiple opportunities for application (Rhodes, 2010, p. 5). Integration is already common within the business curriculum, e.g., a strategic management capstone course that integrates the various business disciplines. For Christian institutions, an integrative curricular framework adds Scripture and faith to the other knowledge, skills, and connections, helping students apply a Christian worldview. Thinking critically about faith integration does not necessarily come naturally (Smith, Chun, & Chandler, 2016), so deliberate attention by faculty to helping students develop this skill is important. Opitz and Melleby (2014), Christian educators, have stated that integration should "help lead students to develop wisdom and discernment, to live a life of humility and curiosity and delight. A good curriculum tells a story and invites students to participate in that story" (p. 44).

### ***Integrating General Education with Business***

To take Boyer's integration ideal a step further, however, there should be intentional synthesis between general education and the major (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015; Bell, 1966; Gaston, 2015). Wehlburg (2010) described the following advantages:

By integrating the general education experience with the major course work, it is possible to create a new and better understanding of the undergraduate education experience. With appropriate rigor, incorporation of both areas can enhance one another. Transfer of learning may occur more easily; students may be able to bring critical-thinking or problem-solving

skills gained from their general education core into their major courses. Content from the major may influence how a student views information in the general education courses. With integration, students might be better prepared for diverse and unexpected requirements in future careers. A coherent educational program that combines all of a student's educational experiences might increase retention and overall learning. (p. 10)

Although small in number, published examples have demonstrated that institutions can successfully and strategically tie together general education, particularly core courses, and major disciplines. St. Louis University (Weissman & Boning, 2003), The University of the Pacific (Matz, 2010), and St. Joseph's College (Nichols, 1996) tied their general education core course learning objectives to those in specialized majors. St. Joseph's also undertook a collaborative determination of what a departmental contribution to the general education core would be. Specifically within business, empirical evidence from the University of South Carolina Aiken demonstrated that performance on English 101 and 102 impacted scores on the Major Field Test in Business (Ritchie, Rodriguez, Harrison, & Wates, 2014). LaSalle (Leauby & Robertson, 2011) and King's College (Jones, 2002) paired accounting and general education courses in order to improve professional writing, organizational skills, and a sense of audience, thus increasing student awareness that "written and oral skills are necessary to allow an accurate and efficient exchange of accounting information" (Hirsch & Collings, 1988, p. 16, as cited in Leauby & Robertson, 2011, p. 50).

Valuable though the integration of core courses and the business curriculum may be, the degree of implementation has largely not lived up to the promise. Dockery (1999) has noted that "the fragmentation of knowledge should alarm all committed to Christian higher education, for it strikes at the foundation of our purpose" (p. 12). A core course with no apparent connection to business major courses or skills may be a powerful signal of this fragmentation; although core courses have significant potential to foster these linkages, instead they become merely courses that students must "get through." When institutions implement Boyer's ideals, general education and specialized major courses work *with* rather than against one another (Boyer & Boyer, 1996).

#### AN EXAMPLE OF A CORE COURSE

A detailed example, focusing on a core course at a Christian College and making connections with the busi-

ness curriculum, may be a helpful resource for faculty and institutions seeking to create the kind of bridges within the curriculum described previously. At Messiah College, the integrative common experience that highlights distinctive aspects of the institution and incorporates skills such as writing occurs through the Created and Called for Community (CCC) core course that all first-year students complete in the spring semester. Each course section follows the same syllabus, including the timing of the readings, the assignments, and the other shared activities (e.g., a convocation with the provost, library and career center sessions, and service day). The intention is to set the context for learning at Messiah College and to help students understand some of the foundational principles that drive the educational mission. This shared experience is all the more valuable as it plays out on a residential campus where even students in different sections of the course find themselves reflecting on the same topics and can converse with one another about these topics in the dining hall, library, or dorm.

The following describes the overall goals of the Created and Called for Community course:

The Created and Called for Community course applies the intellectual skills learned in First Year Seminar to content directly related to Messiah College's Mission, Identity, and Foundational Values. This is done in the context of a medium-sized discussion-oriented course designed around the themes of creation, community, and vocation. Students learn that because they are created in the divine image, they are God's agents for service, leadership, and reconciliation in the broader community. The course is designed to ask questions of life and learning, those questions which students engage in order to participate fully in their academic pursuits. The central question to be considered is: "What is my vocation as a faithful steward of God's creation?" Through examining literary, historical, artistic, philosophical and theological works, students engage the biblical themes of forgiveness, compassion, non-violence, peacemaking, justice, and racial and gender reconciliation through the lens of the College's unique religious identity and foundational values, with a particular focus on the importance of community. In this context students work toward enhancing their ability in the basic intellectual skills: how to read critically, think logically, and communicate effectively. In addition, students focus on how the Christian faith can and should be related to the intellectual life. In short, Created and Called for Community is designed to encourage positive attitudes toward the Messiah College academic experience. (Messiah College, 2018)

Readings are of a variety of genres and authors, including Gerald Sittser, Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Plato, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Augustine. A further description of the learning outcomes for CCC (Messiah College, 2018) is provided in Appendix 1.

Course topics, e.g., what it means to be created in God's image, are central enough to serve as connections to almost any other course on campus. For example, discussions in a human resource management course about policies and practices can refer to Scripture, but also back to the discussion that students will have had in CCC, even if they were not in the same section or took it the same year. This approach of making connections to other parts of a student's curriculum can help learning come alive and take on meaning outside the CCC context. Stressing connections both elevates the importance of the CCC class and models for students what it means to take these foundational issues seriously since they do apply outside of a class that students are "required" to take.

### MAJOR DISCIPLINE IDEAS WITHIN A CORE COURSE

The following examples are from my own experience teaching Messiah College's CCC core course. They describe drawing connections from business and organizational content as well as helping students understand the relevance of course assignments to work that they might undertake after graduation. The principles of integrating disciplinary themes within a core course that I present here assume that the students in the course are pursuing a variety of majors, but that they can all benefit from links to workplace skill and organizational content. Although in this case, the instructor has a business background as does the intended audience of this article, and the course is from a particular institution, the fact that the curriculum of many colleges and universities includes a core course based on key themes suggests that the ideas presented here may be helpful to others.

#### *Content*

The course begins with an introduction to Messiah's mission and culture, followed by the key themes of Messiah's core course: creation, calling, and community. Although the course approaches the themes primarily from a general Christian perspective, a few aspects focus on Anabaptist, Pietist, and/or Wesleyan views (Messiah's theological background).

#### Mission and Culture

Messiah College's core course begins with readings and a presentation about higher education—what it means to

be a student and about the nature of universities in general and Messiah College in particular. The first reading, "Go with God: An Open Letter to Young Christians on their Way to College" (Hauerwas, 2010) has much to say about the perspective students should take about their college years, directed both at the present and the future. In order to foster the connection between general education and a specific discipline, one focus of class discussion is Hauerwas's emphasis that being a student is a calling, not merely preparation for something in the future. Hauerwas went on to state that "whatever you end up doing with your life, now is the time when you develop the intellectual skills the Church needs for the sake of building up the Body of Christ" (p. 51). As the first reading in the course, from the outset there is a future-oriented aspect. Much of Hauerwas's essay speaks to the process of being a student, so it is important to explicitly highlight the future orientation, recognizing *both* the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of learning. Other key points from the essay include the importance of not compartmentalizing but rather building connections between disciplines (e.g., theology and literature [Dante] and science [Newton]) and of gaining historical insight into the practice of one's discipline. Instructors can lead students to think specifically about their own discipline, whatever it might be. For example, Hauerwas (2010) does not mention human resource management, but the essay does present Christianity as a way of thinking about human beings, the world, history, and God. Hauerwas also challenged students to be "uncompromisingly moral." No matter the subject area, one is always to think about it in the light of Christ.

A presentation by the provost to students in all sections of the course addresses the commonalities and uniqueness of Messiah College as a higher education institution. One point within the presentation describes the intersection of the College's belief structure with the belief structures of educators and students. Although most classroom discussion following the presentation centers on the specific beliefs themselves, I also take the opportunity to share the organizational chart of the institution. This helps students connect the organizational structure to the discussion of various stakeholders and appreciation of the diversity of Christian perspectives. The organizational chart is not the primary topic of discussion but is one way to both help students understand their organizational environment and to introduce concepts relevant to their understanding of a future workplace.

Another early course reading is by alumnus Earnest L. Boyer (1984), called "Retaining the Legacy of Messiah College." It discusses various virtues that Boyer both advocated and had observed at Messiah, such as to serve, to

“expand knowledge rather than restrict it,” and to create “a community, not just a campus.” To conclude the discussion, I show a video from the president’s annual address to faculty and staff at the beginning of the school year that illustrates the accomplishments made by Messiah College employees and students over the preceding year. I ask students to make note of what values are portrayed in the video. After describing the content of the values portrayed, we talk about whether they are consistent with what our readings advocate and if what they have experienced on campus is consistent with the video and the readings. I also bring in the concept of organizational culture and its importance for employees—for them in the future as they explore internships and jobs.

### Creation

The learning objective from the Creation theme that is most relevant to students’ major discipline and career path has to do with being created in the image of God and that, therefore, we are ourselves creative. The assigned reading by Tolkien (1964), “Leaf by Niggle,” depicts the idea of “sub-creation”—echoing on a human scale God’s great work of creation (Tolkien, 1947). Sayers (1947) wrote “Why Work?,” which also addresses creativity. Students take part in this sub-creation now and when they graduate and exercise their major discipline by creating business plans, computer programs, lesson plans, experiments, products, new processes, etc. Sustainability and care for creation is a related theme; business students can consider how their own discipline can use resources creatively and effectively.

Another point connecting to the workplace is that institutions as well as individuals are fallen. We are created to be in relationship—those relationships include the workplace; however, our relationship with God is what must be given priority. In his essay “In the Image of God,” Birch (1985) wrote about “the ethic of being” and “the ethic of doing.” Both are vital and connected. “Christian social concern requires not only that we ask what we should *do* in a broken world but also that we ask who we are to *be*” (p. 14). In many ways, core courses such as this relate to “being,” while major courses relate to “doing.” Students are receptive to “doing” and by helping them consider explicit connections between being and doing—between general education and the major—we can inculcate more meaning into both. As Birch (1985) went on to say, “As we enter and are nurtured by Christian community, we form values, perspectives, and perceptions that inform our deciding and acting. The identity we bring with us as Christians deeply affects our participation in ministering to a broken world” (p. 14). Mannoia (2000) echoed that perspective in his book *Christian Liberal*

*Arts: An Education that Goes Beyond* when he discusses how Christian institutions offer the combination of learning to both become like Christ and serve the world.

### Community

The community theme in the course emphasizes the vision and purpose for community in various settings: family, society, neighbors, friends, campus, nation, church, etc. The context of “church” includes denomination and congregation as well as the universal Church and the spread of Christianity through history to the current movement within global Christianity. Specific beliefs or rules within a community are discussed as well as separation from or interaction between organizations (i.e., being in but not of the world). One’s individual or social identity within a community is a topic of discussion.

Several applications of organizational behavior topics arise in this section, including leadership, conformity, decision making, motivation, conflict, and power. The assigned passage from Augustine’s (2006) *Confessions* addressed rightly ordered love, and discussion can focus on many contexts. Another course reading, “Bowling Alone” (Putnam, 1995), introduced the topic of social capital and leads to a discussion of social network analysis and the nature of ties within organizations. No course reading makes specific reference to work organizations as communities, so that omission is noted as is applying course content to students’ experiences as community members.

### Calling

The section of the course on calling and vocation has the most explicit connection to major and career for students, and they “typically find it to be the most personal and central to who they currently are and who they are becoming” (Bechtold, 2017, p. 82). Part of the instructor’s task is help students place calling in its wider context than only major or job. “Understanding the concept of calling must first focus on the one who is doing the calling” and “that calling is first and foremost to God himself” (Bechtold, 2017, p. 82; see also Guinness, 1998). Course readings reinforce the idea that individuals can have callings in multiple areas of life, including via service to others in the church and in the broader community, through education toward virtue (Plato, 400 BCE) and as agents of transformation and reconciliation (Tutu, 2004). All of these areas require discernment, taking into consideration what others say (Sittser, 2004), but not relying on others exclusively (Schweitzer, 1933/1998). It is important for students to recognize that calling is broader, multifaceted, and changeable throughout one’s life, taking place in the present as well as the future.

Of course, though not exclusive to calling, career remains a significant aspect, and the timing of this section of the course is fortuitous, occurring near the registration time for fall courses. A presentation from the career center advises students about available resources and reinforces themes from course readings regarding strengths and discernment. In addition, content from the business discipline can also reinforce points present in the course readings. In “Why Work?” Sayers (1947/2017) emphasized that work is a way of life in which “the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God” (p. 1). She also noted that “work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do” (p. 13). Quality of work is important (Sayers, 1947/2017) regardless of the type of work it is; secular vocation is sacred just as much as specifically religious work (Schweitzer, 1933/1998). At the same time, society does not perceive that all work has dignity (Keller, 2014), “so many college students do not choose work that actually fits their abilities, talents, and capacities, but rather choose work that fits within their limited imagination of how they can boost their own self-image” (p. 102). That is not to say that calling is always dependent on talents and gifts or that there is “one right answer;” rather, “a calling is a way of seeing the world with the eyes of the heart” (Sittser, 2004, p. 73).

### ***Workplace Skills***

Although course designers see obvious educational benefit for students developing perspectives necessary for contribution to contemporary society, the future benefit of the course is less apparent to students themselves. Mannoia (2000) recognized and supported the importance of both instrumental and intrinsic values within Christian higher education. Since many students, as noted, have extrinsic goals for coursework, it is helpful to highlight for students what they would agree has a concrete and obvious benefit.

Developing a persuasive argument is a skill with significance for both career success and course objectives. Since writing plays a significant role in the course, I consistently emphasize the importance of developing persuasive arguments. Students may believe that general education writing assignments are unlike those that they may be called upon to complete in the workplace. Although there are dissimilarities to be sure, one commonality is the importance of persuasive writing. Much of the writing graduates will do in the workplace has a persuasive purpose. I often give examples of when students might be required to do so in the “real world” that are applicable for a variety of majors and might include convincing one’s boss to decide upon a certain option, requesting needed equipment or personnel, or motivating

coworkers or subordinates to undertake a task. I demonstrate the persuasive purpose of course readings such as “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (King, 1963), a real-life example of attempting to influence others’ beliefs and actions. Students read and compose writing assignments using skills that will be relevant and beneficial to them in the future.

One particular assignment in the CCC course relates to both persuasive writing and vocation. It requires students to describe a problem somewhere in the world that needs to be addressed and to demonstrate what is wrong and why it is a genuine problem. Students find an organization that is addressing the problem and two academic sources that talk about the problem that this organization is addressing. Students critique the organization’s website and how effectively it uses its resources (based on information found in Charity Navigator; <http://www.charitynavigator.com>). One difficulty of this assignment is the many related pieces. Students are challenged not to neglect any components as well as to put them together in a cohesive paper. Even some instructors are challenged by the assignment parameters, choosing to eliminate the website evaluation and/or Charity Navigator portion. In order to help students, as well as to tie the assignment to a real life scenario, I provide examples of when they might write such a paper after graduation:

- A. You work for a [hospital/university/company] that wants to support a charity and your boss asks you to research a particular cause that is consistent with your employer’s mission. After you pick this particular cause, your boss also wants you to research an organization that is addressing this particular problem and submit a report.
- B. You want to work or volunteer for an organization that supports a world problem that you strongly believe needs to be solved. Narrow down the problem so you can articulate to your friends and family why you want to do this; then find an organization you would be proud work with.

Since one objective of the assignment is to get students to think about vocation in terms of service, these examples also help emphasize that purpose, which can sometimes get lost in all the assignment requirements (i.e., word count, drafts, citations, etc.).

Other skills relevant for future success include time management (also referenced in the Sayers (1947/2017) reading) and being detail-oriented, both integral to writing in the core course. One such example is demonstrated in the context of learning citation style. Citation itself is important in order to demonstrate academic integrity; however, students sometimes become frustrated with the formats for various sources, including punctuation and capitalization



requirements. This is especially true for a citation style to which they are not accustomed. In addition to trying to explain the rationale for the formatting rules, it can also be framed as practice in making a good impression to an employer by giving careful attention to specifications of a task. Furthermore, the citation style of their major discipline is very likely to be different from that which they learned in high school (e.g., APA vs. MLA).

### INTEGRATING IDEAS FROM A CORE COURSE INTO THE BUSINESS MAJOR

If the themes of a core course are so central, than these ideas already should exist in the context of major courses—and their existence and connection simply need to be made more explicit. Often, we discuss similar themes to the common course within our business courses but without realizing what topics or readings students have previously encountered. Although it requires awareness of the core course themes, intentional recognition of these themes in the curriculum, and commitment to highlight their relevance, it is not necessary to incorporate new content into an already packed curriculum. For example, if human nature is a theme in management courses, it may simply be a matter of reminding students that the idea of *imago Dei* is not new to them. Students have encountered the idea in the core course, but now it may become more meaningful when tied to their discipline and to the practical implications for the workplace. A theme such as “calling” that may have had less impact on first-year students will gain increased resonance for students in a chosen major and especially for seniors as they approach graduation.

#### *Integration in the Business Core*

An idea of how themes might relate to the business curriculum is provided in Table 1. Each row represents one of the business core courses at Messiah College. Each of the columns represents one of the components (i.e., creation, community, calling) of the CCC course. The individual cells in the chart offer reflection questions that provide points of connection between the topics discussed in CCC and the content of specific courses in the field of business. The table illustrates the merits of themes like creativity and stewardship that are applicable to both one’s business career and broader life decisions. Students will experience membership in many communities and identities throughout their life, but their Christian community pervades all of it, and they will spend a significant portion of their time in a work community. Calling is a complex concept, encom-

passing one’s career certainly but also a broader concept that students need to grapple with, including understanding that it can change over time. Students would find value in being encouraged to take that holistic view but also to connect their major discipline within the context of their life as a whole, conditioning faith and worldview as they relate to life choices. Emphasizing connections with general education can also surface the connections between courses in the business core before students encounter a senior capstone course. Students may not initially recognize the extent to which business disciplines themselves are increasingly integrative.

#### *Integration within Specific Courses*

In addition to the general business core as a whole, course objectives across a single business course could be connected to general education core course themes. Table 2 provides an example of how specific topics or learning objectives of a Human Resource Management course could be connected to aspects of the CCC course. Acknowledgement of humanity’s creation in the image of God has implication for how we design jobs, compensate, create policies, and offer training. The theme of community presents itself in topics such as person-organization fit, diversity and inclusion, team structure, and training. Calling is reflected in organizational mission and realistic job preview and selection, just to name a few. It would not be necessary to fill in every cell in the table—focusing on the strongest connections would make the most impact.

#### *Integration within Major Curriculum*

Departments or schools of business can also address the relationship of aspects of a general education core course to specific major requirements (i.e., beyond the business core). More quantitative majors such a finance or accounting may focus on reinforcing the same key lessons from the business core, keeping these themes in front of students until they reach a senior capstone course. Other disciplines such as Human Resource Management may have stronger connections to some of the key core course themes and thus may explore these ideas in a more detailed fashion throughout upper-level course requirements. For example, as shown in Table 3, a Human Resource Management major or concentration can tie core course themes to courses in Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior, Compensation & Benefits, Employee Relations, and Leading Organizational Change. Again, these are sample questions that may vary based on the general education themes emphasized at the particular institution and the objectives of a particular course.

**Table 1: Core Courses in Business and their Relation to “Created and Called for Community” (CCC)**

| Business Core Courses             | Connection to Created and Called for Community   |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                                   | Creation   | Community  | Calling  |
| Principles of Management          | What is the impact of an understanding of creation on our understanding of human behavior in organizations? Created in God’s image? What does it mean to be “fallen” as social beings and how is that manifested in the field of management? | What is the value of our Christian community in understanding the scope of human behavior?   | Christ calls us through the various aspects of our lives as expressed in our knowledge of who we are. How does self-awareness influence our call?      |
| Marketing Principles              | How is God’s creative impulse expressed in marketing communication?  | How does market segmentation support or detract from the idea of community?  | How does marketing practice consider a balance between individual needs, organizational needs, and the needs of the larger society?                    |
| Principles of Economics           | How do we balance economic progress with preserving God’s creation?  | What factors contribute to and undermine community?  | Christ’s call often calls us to action. Belief often follows action. How might Christ’s call be influenced by various social forces?                   |
| Accounting                        | How is the principle of stewardship present in accounting principles?  | How do we respond to the expectations of various communal authorities (business, government, professional association)?                  | What is the difference between a calling and a career?   |
| Quantitative Methods              | The creative act of God in the beginning can be characterized as bringing order out of chaos. How do we see this at work in statistical methods?   | What is the value of using tools to discover the underlying nature of a community? How will that help us seek the good of the community? | What is the value of working in areas that may not be part of your skills or preferences? Would Christ ever call you to do things that are hard to do? |
| Information Systems               | How is innovation in technology related to our being made in the image of a creator God?   | How can information systems experts assist organizational communication?   | How do I use principles of information technology in my particular major discipline and vocation to promote organizational ethics and effectiveness?   |
| Business Law                      | How do we balance imago Dei with the evidence of sin and brokenness in relationships and institutions?   | How do business laws reflect the values and attitudes of various community constituencies?   | How do I use legal principles in my particular major discipline and vocation to promote organizational ethics and effectiveness?                       |
| Financial Management              | How can we effectively steward organizational and societal resources?  | What financial practices benefit the organization as a community?  | How do I use financial principles in my particular major discipline and vocation to promote organizational effectiveness?                              |
| Strategic Management/<br>Capstone | Being created in the image of God is a responsibility. What special insights from the field of business can be offered in terms of humans being created in the image of God?   | How can we as a community in this class encourage one another in our understanding of the field and our place in the field?              | What do I know of calling that will enable me to take the next step in my journey out of college?  |

**Table 2: Human Resource Management course and its Relation to “Created and Called for Community”**

| Topic                                 | Created  | Community  | Called  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Introduction                          | Human Nature: Created in the image of God/Fallen   |  | Human Capital: Quality of work we do  |
| Connecting to Organization's Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Short-term vs. long-term focus</li> </ul> | Role of diversity in competitive advantage   | Mission, vision of organization   |
| Business Environment                  | Demographic, economic, technology—part of creation   | Diversity & inclusion globalization  | How do Christians view compared to others   |
| Legal                                 | Law & grace in OT  | Laws that benefit individual/group/society<br>ADA, EEOC, FMLA  |   |
| Planning                              | Caretakers of resources  | Succession planning  |   |
| Job Design                            | Job characteristics theory—meaningfulness, autonomy  | Team structure   | Specific vocation   |
| Recruiting                            |  | Internal vs. external vs employee recommendation   | Realistic job preview (RJP) to test specific calling  |
| Selection                             | Creativity, intelligence, character as criteria  | Mutual fit between employee and organization; collegiality   | Process ties to Sittser—talent, opening doors, motivation, life experience, voice of others, joyful service—play role in helping applicant assess vocation      |
| Training                              | Discipleship—learning  | Training topics dealing with interpersonal interaction: diversity, conflict, teamwork, socialization                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education as a calling (Plato)</li> <li>• Career development—vocational journey as multiple steps (Sittser)</li> </ul> |
| Performance Evaluation                | Terminate in a way that recognizes <i>imago Dei</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability &amp; respect regarding peer evaluation</li> <li>• Relationship</li> </ul> | Quality of work we do (Sayers)  |
| Compensation & Benefits               |  | Equal pay for equal work, minimum wage   |   |
| Employee Relations                    | Reconciliation<br>Policy formation (impact of created in image of God vs. fallen)                        | Union-management relations   | Safety & health—Taking care of neighbor (Good Samaritan)  |

### *Integration of Skills*

Finally, skills aspects of general education within a common learning course such as CCC can also be reinforced in major courses, building on the foundation provided. Smith et al. (2016) noted that genres typically found in general education courses such as classic poetry and literature enhance emotional intelligence and ethical awareness in business students. Soft skills and critical thinking skills are vital for business majors, and the discussion format and writing element of course such as CCC can be capitalized and built upon in subsequent courses in the business curriculum. This goal requires that instructors of major courses be aware of what skills students can be expected to have attained previously so that these skills can be further enhanced.

### **NOTES ON IMPLEMENTATION**

The core course described here is only an illustration of what could be done to strengthen the ties between the business and general education. Not every institution's core course will be the same because such a course taps into the unique identity of that college or university. Nevertheless, especially within a Christian college, there will be some similar themes. Curricula will likely include some common foundational texts as well (e.g., King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"). Finally, whatever the themes may be, it is likely that some opportunities exist for forward-focused application of skill and content learning as students think about the usefulness of the course for their major discipline.

**Table 3: Human Resource Major Courses and their Relation to “Created and Called for Community”**

| Business Core Courses         | Connection to Created and Called for Community   |   |   |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|
|                               | Creation   | Community   | Calling   |
| Principles of Management      | What is the impact of an understanding of creation on our understanding of human behavior in organizations? Created in God’s image? What does it mean to be “fallen” as social beings and how is that manifested in the field of management? | What is the value of our Christian community in understanding the scope of human behavior?                                | Christ calls us through the various aspects of our lives as expressed in our knowledge of who we are. How does self-awareness influence our call? |
| Human Resource Management     | How can we best care for human resources?  | How can organizational members work together to accomplish individual and organizational goals?                           | How can we encourage quality of work? How can we develop talents, satisfaction, and engagement of employees?                                      |
| Organizational Behavior       | How do individual attitudes, values, creativity, decisions contribute to organizational functioning?   | How can teamwork and group decision-making be conducted in a way that benefits individuals, groups, and the organization? | How do motivation techniques reflect the concept of calling? How can organizations consider members’ callings within and beyond career vocation?  |
| Compensation and Benefits     | How do conceptions of equity reflect human nature?   | How do organizations implement individual vs. team rewards?   | How do extrinsic and intrinsic rewards impact each other?   |
| Leading Organizational Change | How can we reflect God’s character with respect to stability and change?   | How do we support each other in the context of change?  | How do we best listen to visionary organization members?  |

Not every theme or topic will be explicitly connected to the business discipline; the point is that there are overarching themes that *do* connect across the curriculum.

A departmental or school of business faculty discussion is a useful vehicle to consider both integration within the major and to connect themes from general education that exist across the major curriculum, essentially generating a type of curriculum map similar to Table 1. However, a department-wide strategy is not the only way to make disciplinary connections; individual instructors can take the initiative, making connections within one course, such as found in Table 3. Beyond the classroom, a gathering of all first-year students within a department or major to talk about general education core course themes in the context of business is another way to emphasize importance of these themes as well as build connections between students.

On a larger institutional scale, it is also valuable to include faculty from various disciplines, including business, as instructors in the core course. Often due to writing-across-the-curriculum strategies or various staffing issues, faculty teaching the course tend to be from a few disciplines, particularly in the humanities. Ownership of the course by

faculty across campus also sends the message to students that this content is important to everyone, not just certain disciplines or not just general education faculty. The contribution of faculty from all disciplines models the connections between the liberal and applied arts and sciences that we want our students to perceive.

## CONCLUSION

Recognizing and communicating more explicit connections between general education and business courses provides unrealized opportunities to foster student learning and prepare students to engage the workplace upon graduation. Christian institutions hoping to develop student character and identity can enhance appreciation for themes that make their curriculum distinctive. Core courses in particular are fruitful starting points for skills and content that can be reinforced by major courses. The business discipline in particular is a resource for workplace skill and organizational content that can be introduced within a core course. Topics such as organizational culture, the workplace

as a community, the validity of secular vocations, and the importance of persuasive writing and attention to detail can make the course more meaningful for students. Messiah College's themes of creation, calling, and community are one example of key ideas that can be connected to business in terms of creativity, vocation, and *imago Dei*, reinforced across the business core, within a specific course, or across major specific business courses.

Successful implementation requires intentional steps such as fostering awareness of the key core course themes and learning objectives. Faculty in the business department must commit to reviewing course content in light of the institution's core themes and drawing student attention to instances where core course and major course themes intersect. Ideally, disciplinary faculty will play a role in developing core course themes and contribute to teaching core course sections. Although individual faculty can independently choose to highlight themes in their own courses, truly bridging general education and major disciplines must become an institutional priority. Acknowledging and appreciating the degree to which general and specialized education hold the same ideals can facilitate such efforts.

In sum, intentional connections between themes found in general education core and major courses help students integrate faith with their learning, holistically connect general education with discipline specific education, and see their academic preparation as part of their Christian identity. These connections also put students on the path specified in Romans 12:2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

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## APPENDIX 1: CREATED AND CALLED FOR COMMUNITY COURSE OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The Created and Called for Community (CCC) course comprises the second half of Messiah College's curriculum for first-year students, following First Year Seminar (FYS). Together, FYS and CCC are designed to equip you with the intellectual skills and tools needed to succeed during the rest of your education at Messiah College. In particular, FYS and CCC as "w" courses both focus on writing. The ability to write accurately, clearly, and convincingly will serve you well both in the remainder of your college career (whatever your major), as well as in whatever vocation and profession you enter following your college career.

CCC also introduces you to the particular kind of community and institution that is Messiah College. Every college and university has its own distinctive history, identity, and mission. Messiah's history and identity are rooted in three strands of the Christian church known as Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism. Depending on your own background, one or more of these strands more or less familiar to you. We hope that this course helps you become familiar with basic elements of Messiah's identity, mission, and foundation. The purpose of the course is not to force you to subscribe to certain ideas but rather to cultivate a climate in which there can be better, deeper, and richer conversations about important issues precisely because they are informed by some common understandings. We hope that this process that begins this semester will continue through the rest of your college experience.

The CCC course will encourage you to have such enriching conversations with other first-year students—both in and out of class—in part by using a common curriculum. Some of the common readings assigned are classic texts, which have been read by generations of college students. Others are more recent and speak to various contemporary issues and concerns. It is hoped that the CCC readings collectively will help shape your thinking about your values and convictions and about what pathways in life might best allow you to express the gifts and talents God has implanted in you. This is a process that will start this year but will continue in the years to come. It is hoped that the CCC course might play a small part in this vital process.

CCC, then, is an inter-disciplinary and common-learning course. It is not designed first and foremost to be a content-rich course. Rather, it is a "meaning-making course." It is hoped that over the course of this semester, you will receive helpful resources to address the experiences, questions, and challenges that you will face in the future in an informed and thoughtful fashion. And it is also a discussion-oriented course. One way to become equipped for this task is to meet and engage with people and ideas worthy of shaping you and your thinking. This semester, you will have the opportunity to develop your thoughts alongside other people—the authors whose works we read, your instructor, and your classmates.

### ***Learning Objectives***

By the completion of this course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

- a. describe biblical and theological implications of the Old Testament emphasis on being created in the image of God and the New Testament emphasis on becoming a new creation.
- b. articulate defining characteristics of different kinds of communities, including those that are faith based, academic, national, international, ethnic, inter ethnic, and professional.
- c. develop a working definition of Christian vocation as it relates to reconciliation, service, and leadership.
- d. write critically using effective prose for particular audiences

### ***The 3 C's of CCC***

**Creation:** The first words of Scripture in some translations say that “in the beginning God created...” And so it seems fitting that you will begin exploring the theme of creation and creativity by studying the account of God’s creation in Genesis 1 and 2. You will examine both the natural and human creation, including the moral and ethical implications that flow from the understanding that every person is made in God’s image (or, in Latin, the *imago Dei*) and so possesses dignity and status. You will also consider how to be faithful stewards of creation and ways in which you can express the creative impulse God has implanted in you.

**Community:** All human beings throughout history, each of them made in God’s image, have lived within various types of groups or communities: families, groups of friends, churches, college campuses, neighborhoods, nations, and the world-wide or global community. The process of community-building brings with it both great rewards as well as challenges. Communities are inescapable, yet they place demands on us. In exploring this theme, you will examine the factors that strengthen and weaken community and the challenges of community-building in a variety of settings. Along the way, you will consider both inspiring exemplars of community-building as well as times and places where communities have fallen short and succumbed to the practices of segregation, racism, isolation, or violence.

**Calling or Vocation:** Christian vocation requires us to consider not only what we do but also who we are. We are called to personal transformation by practicing spiritual disciplines and called to social transformation by addressing injustice in the world. Exploring this theme in CCC, you will view some of the ways in which various people have served, look at where and how they have found their place in the world, look at vocation in various settings, continue the process of discerning your own vocation and place in the world, and look at some of the characteristics of Christian vocation—especially service, work, leadership, and reconciliation.



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