

# Building an Intentional Culture of Social Justice: Increasing Understanding and Competence in the Curriculum

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## Abstract

This article describes one Catholic university's efforts to strengthen its mission commitment to social justice by providing quality faculty development to a large cross-section of the full-time faculty. The purpose of this initiative is to provide faculty with the tools and knowledge necessary to embed Catholic Social Teaching in their course syllabi. We describe an initial study of syllabi that stimulated plans for a three-year initiative that would increase social justice outcomes in courses taught by one third of the full-time faculty. The story of implementation outlines the process we followed and some of the lessons we learned along the way. Assessment strategies and future directions are summarized. The story offers perspectives for other institutions with similar values and mission statements that are creatively and diligently seeking fresh and effective ways of transmitting their Catholic values to their students.

At University of the Incarnate Word (UIW), we were curious about the extent to which social justice content and/or activities were included as learning outcomes in our curriculum. Thus, we embarked on a systematic review of syllabi from 2002-03.<sup>1</sup> In our investigation, we were looking for evidence of (1) social justice themes rooted in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and (2) course-based activities that benefited the community. Our study considered the syllabi of all schools of the university at that time: undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral.

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<sup>1</sup> In fall 2005, we published an article describing the efforts made at University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) to document concrete evidence of social justice content or activities included as learning outcomes in our curriculum university-wide. Denise Doyle and Robert Connelly, "Social Justice at the University of the Incarnate Word: Seeking Evidence in Support of Mission Effectiveness," *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 24 (2005): 127-146.

The results of this review showed that only one course in the university, a Religious Studies course entitled “Catholic Social Teaching,” satisfied both criteria. Religious Studies courses in general came the closest to satisfying the first criterion; very little else in the curriculum revealed the commitment to social justice that is explicitly articulated in the university Mission Statement.<sup>1a</sup>

In the fall semester of 2003, we convened several meetings of the faculty to discuss our findings. Faculty members seemed surprised at our results, insisting adamantly that they did bring social justice into their classes. However, all were in agreement that a clear definition of social justice tied to the major themes of CST was lacking, as was the consistent implementation of related content in courses both in the core curriculum and within the major.<sup>2</sup> Most faculty members expressed their lack of sufficient understanding of the content and significance of CST. Faculty members felt inadequately prepared or thought that they lacked the competence to explain Catholic encyclicals or the documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent synods with academic rigor.<sup>3</sup> However, as

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<sup>1a</sup> University of the Incarnate Word. “The Mission of UIW.” <http://www.uiw.edu/mission/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Doyle and Robert Connelly, “Social Justice at the University of the Incarnate Word: Seeking Evidence in Support of Mission Effectiveness,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 24 (2005): 131. In our paper, we summarize social justice as relating to “the ultimate goal of ordering social, political and economic institutions for the benefit of the common good. Social teaching represents the church’s evaluation of how well contemporary institutions operate in the light of the Gospel. While social justice is directed to the common good, the social teaching of the church is the compass that points out how to find that direction in current circumstances.”

<sup>3</sup> Monika Hellwig clearly states the problems facing faculty as they consider bringing Catholic Social Teaching into their courses:

First of all, it is essentially an interdisciplinary project, requiring some background knowledge in several distinct academic disciplines; second, the source documents in official church teaching are written in a style quite alien to that to which our students are accustomed; third, the specific positions taken by Catholic Social Teaching rest on a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Scripture and tradition than our college students generally possess; in the fourth place, the curricular time given to the religious component in undergraduate studies has shrunk in most Catholic colleges to a skimpy total of six semester hours (two one-semester courses), while graduate programs offer no time at all; and finally, in many cases professors in the germane fields, including theology and Scripture, have themselves only the most superficial knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching.

Monika Hellwig, preface to *Living the Catholic Social Teaching: Cases and Commentary*, eds. Kathleen M. Weigert and Alexia K. Kelley (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), xi.

we considered faculty development possibilities, we saw that the challenge at our institution was not so much in transmitting a body of heretofore-unknown material to faculty members but rather in unlocking material in their own area of expertise where they have the most confidence and comfort, which relates to issues and themes relevant to social justice, and which can be referenced at least to basic principles of CST.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of our journey, our university did not aspire to be one of a handful of institutions that have created a “Catholic Immersion” culture. Such cultures contain “courses that stress social justice [and] have an impact on a large segment of the student body, and the course content must relate social justice to the other significant parts of the Catholic heritage, such as the New Testament, the doctrinal teachings of the Church, and its social teaching through papal encyclicals and other documents.”<sup>5</sup> Neither did our institution have a particular objective to emphasize hiring Catholic faculty and staff and teaching Catholic theology to all students. We did want, however, to open the door for interested faculty members to begin to see how their understanding of the general concept of social justice could be informed and deepened by learning more about the basic principles of CST.

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<sup>4</sup> This is in line with James Heft’s response to Hellwig’s description of the problems:

[A]lmost all courses should be taught in such a way that the real moral issues within them are addressed. To teach in this way cannot be adequately done if, to begin with, the “moral optique” is quarantined to departments thought by the rest of the faculty to be esoteric [philosophy and theology]. It can be achieved only by faculty in many disciplines who understand the importance of a “moral optique,” and who are sufficiently competent to draw it out of the very content of their courses in thoughtful and appropriate ways.

James Heft, “Catholic Education and Social Justice,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 1 (2006): 18.

<sup>5</sup> Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57. The authors describe four models of Catholic Higher Education, ranging from what could be described as the most Orthodox in character (Catholic Immersion) to that which is most secular, with only a small cohort of Catholic practice and identification (Catholic Cohort). In the recent article, “Engagement with Pluralism: A New Way of Understanding and Fostering a Catholic Culture within Catholic Universities,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28 (2009), 169-186, authors Charles R. Strain, James Halstead, and Thomas Drexler challenge the foundation of these categories, describing instead a Catholic Engagement Model. This more inclusive approach recognizes the value of pluralism, broader community realities, and dialogue aimed at building bridges rather than boundaries. The Engagement Model seems better to capture the lived experience of our institution over many years. The vibrant swirl of many interconnecting conversations does not appear to be adequately captured in the four-model approach proposed by Morey and Piderit.

## Implementing the First Year of the Project

We were convinced that the faculty would be interested in participating in a development plan if it stressed, very concretely, the preparation of quality learning outcomes for the classroom. With this in mind, we began to plan and then to implement a three-year initiative that would be anchored each summer with an institute conducted by a national expert in the field of CST. Those individuals committing to the institute were required to incorporate social justice content into a specific syllabus in a course they were planning for the fall. They would also have multiple opportunities to share and to evaluate their work with other participants.

Clearly, for faculty development to be effective, the facilitator must be perceived to have the expertise the faculty sought. Dr. Patrick McCormick, a member of the theology faculty at Gonzaga University, provided that expertise. McCormick has written extensively on social-justice-related issues and is well known for his lively and accessible presentations. His initial presentation in March 2005, in conjunction with our annual namesake day celebration, included material from his then recently-published *Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God*.<sup>6</sup> His presentation was very well received, and we invited him to return in January 2006 to launch our social justice initiative by giving a public presentation to which all faculty were invited. He also conducted a four-hour workshop for twenty-five faculty members who had registered for the session, for which they were given a small stipend. At this workshop, McCormick began to introduce the content of CST and to suggest ways in which it could be integrated into a variety of courses. These faculty members were then invited to attend an institute that would take place over three days shortly after the end of the spring semester.

This first summer session included formal presentations by McCormick, informal discussion groups, individual opportunities to discuss specific course curricula with McCormick, and concrete examples of how faculty members were already involving students in community service and service-learning activities.

The institute was very successful, which convinced us that our investment in this plan was important and that the format we were using had the potential for increasing the content of social justice across a variety of disciplines. Participants included faculty members from a true

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick J. McCormick, *Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).

cross-section of the university departments—Art, Biology, Business, Education, Economics, English, Nutrition, Pharmacy, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Sociology—and the result of their work was impressive, some of which is presented in the section below on Sample Syllabi. In the January 2007 workshop for the entire full-time faculty, a workshop that began the spring semester, three faculty members from the first summer institute shared how they had integrated social justice themes into their courses in Philosophy, Economics, and Visual Art.

### **The Second Year of the Project**

The brief testimonies of these three faculty members were a powerful introduction to the second round of work with McCormick, which began with the January mini-workshop and was followed by the second summer institute in 2007. We easily recruited another cohort of twenty-five faculty members from across the various schools and disciplines for this summer institute.

By the end of the second cycle of summer institutes, we had accumulated more than forty syllabi from undergraduate through doctoral courses that reflected specific social justice content. We had also seen an increase in service-learning activities that involved students helping to address the needs of the local community. Clearly, some disciplines found it easier to incorporate appropriate material related to social justice into their courses than others. One mathematics teacher expressed concern about what “Catholic math” might mean, and while very willing to understand what was being presented in the institute, could not see a connection between social justice and calculus. As one practical response, McCormick reminded the participants about what he called the “just classroom.” Here, he reflected upon the fact that how we treat students is, in most cases, more important than the specific information imparted in a course. Indeed, another lesson in living out of CST ideal is this: long after a student has forgotten the details of a class, she will remember the way the teacher treated her.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Elias expands on this important idea:

Teaching is an activity that needs to be scrutinized for its moral dimensions. Like all human activities, teaching involves issues that bear on justice, as well as good and evil. It is not enough to teach about justice or to encourage others to work for justice, teachers must also teach justly.... Justice can be raised about the purposes, content, methods of teaching, and methods of evaluation. The example of justice in practice may go further than discussions or lectures about justice and peace.

John L. Elias, “Education for Peace and Justice,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 9 (2005): 174.

### The Third Year of the Project

The final year of the social justice development plan began in January 2008. Enthusiasm for the opportunity to learn more about social justice and positive reports from faculty members who had already attended the summer institutes increased the number of individuals who signed up for the preliminary workshop in January.

The 2008 election year raised several thought provoking areas of discussion among the final summer participants. They shared how different disciplines might approach election issues and also modeled a way to help students become better critical thinkers so that they formulate their own opinions—even if those opinions differ from others, especially the faculty member. In this discussion, the participants avoided appealing to an authoritative voice in presenting CST as relating to current issues and made a commitment “to persuade through reason and deliberation.”<sup>8</sup> McCormick had emphasized this legacy of CST as a counter balance to what might be the more common perception of the teaching as solely authoritative.

This intuitive sensibility might have been more informed and developed had we used some of Todd Whitmore’s work<sup>9</sup> to understand the importance of practical reason and experience in our overall framing of the context of the three-year project. Such reflection would have identified that these sensibilities are consistent with the tradition and content of Catholic Social Teaching.<sup>10</sup> Our framing also would have benefited from an understanding informed by broader distinctions about what can distinguish Catholic institutions, which was described in more recent literature, especially the idea of a Catholic engagement model.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 251.

<sup>9</sup> Todd D. Whitmore, “Practicing the Common Good: The Pedagogical Implications of Catholic Social Teaching,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 3 (2000): 3-19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Charles R. Strain, et al., “Engagement with Pluralism: A New Way of Understanding and Fostering a Catholic Culture within Catholic Universities,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 28 (2009): 169-186; John C. Haughey, *Where Is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009).

## Sample Syllabi

Faculty members took advantage of McCormick's presence during the summer institute and the following January to investigate ideas for incorporating or revising social justice themes in their syllabi.

Table 1 illustrates different formulations of social justice or CST that faculty identified as specific outcomes in their classes.

A sampling of that which occurred in specific classes illustrates some of the learning, both planned and unexpected, and thus follows. In an elementary Spanish class, students had the opportunity to complete a project that involved examining a social justice issue in a Spanish-speaking country. One freshman student said, "When we started, I wasn't completely sure what social injustice was, but after researching I realized there are millions of people living in poverty in Mexico who are suffering every day due to forces that are beyond their control." The student was not alone in experiencing a shift in awareness as well as in expectations of what education should mean at UIW. On the pretest the instructor devised for the class, only 10% of the students were able to name some issues of social injustice that they would expect to learn more about while at UIW. On the posttest, 85% were able to do so.

One assignment in an education course for elementary teachers involved having students plan group presentations in which they related one theme of CST to a children's book. The instructor was pleased with the students' ability to make connections among social justice, children's literature, and daily issues in education such as bullying, social isolation, and environmental consciousness.

One instructor used a photography class as a service project. Students contacted nonprofit centers serving those in need and then did a photo essay showing how the center worked with its clients; afterward, students gave the center copies of their work. While studying photo-journalists as social commentators, students were asked to select a social justice issue that they would expose through photography. Three of the ten students chose immigration. One student who was an immigrant and another student from a border city spoke about the abuse of and discrimination against immigrants that they had personally witnessed. As the instructor noted, "Classes don't always so clearly lead students to see the connection between theory learned and their lived personal experience."

In a business class, students formed teams and conducted debates around marketing issues. They were asked to evaluate marketing

**Table 1.** Different Formulations of Social Justice Identified as Specific Outcomes.

<b>Course</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Assessments</b>
<b>Accounting 6318</b> Professional Ethics in Accounting and Business	Become aware of CST, especially with regard to business and investments as discussed in <i>Economic Justice for All</i> (1986)	Class discussion and a short essay
<b>Athletic Training 2320</b> Evaluation of Injuries & Conditions to the Head, Neck and Upper Extremities	Gain an understanding and appreciation of the social justice concerns of healthcare in society	In-class debate and discussion and a written position paper
<b>Biology 4460</b> Research in Water Quality	Reflect on social justice issues related to research in the headwaters area of the main city river (adjacent to the campus)	Group class presentations
<b>Business 3331</b> Principles of Marketing	Integrate Catholic social justice themes with marketing theory	Debate panels, position papers, class participation
<b>Education 3351</b> Reading, Writing, and Study Skills in Content Area	Connect principles of CST to a teacher's ethical and professional responsibilities	Complete a written reflection on "why reading matters"
<b>English 2310</b> World Literature Studies	Arouse awareness of the various "voices" which cultures have used to preserve, sustain, or empower their identities	Papers, quizzes, and/or journal entries; A final comprehensive essay exam
<b>Music 1320</b> Music Appreciation	Develop an awareness of the role music plays in shaping and reflecting societal beliefs, norms, and values; creating unity and healing among a society; and developing a sense of social justice within a society	Class discussions; group projects; quiz and exam questions
<b>Nursing 4541</b> Nursing the Childbearing Family	Discuss personal values and beliefs about compassion and justice, critically reflecting on how these influence professional behaviors	Clinical performance, reflective journaling
<b>Religious Studies 1345</b> Biblical Themes	Become familiar with themes of social justice as they appear in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament	Essays, class and group discussion, written exams
<b>Sociology 3323</b> Criminal Justice	Use CST as a lens for understanding "peacemaking criminology"	Research aimed at developing this new section of the course
<b>Spanish 1312</b> Elementary Spanish II	Identify and recognize a social justice issue in a Spanish- speaking country	Group presentation in class
<b>Theatre 2361</b> Introduction to Theatre Design	Become aware of how CST could relate to the arts and unions that operate in the entertainment industry	Group presentations on contrasting views



practices from both a Catholic social justice framework and the values reflected in the UIW Mission Statement. On the final exam, students were asked: “What does social justice mean in the mission of UIW?” The instructor identified four dominant themes in their responses: ethical decision-making, community service, compassion, and equality. As one student commented, referencing the importance of learning about social justice in this class and of UIW’s forty-five-hour community service requirement for graduation: “This school not only educates your mind, but your heart as well; that is why it is such a great place.”

In a graduate class in Human Resource Management, the instructor commented that “Catholic Social Teaching Principles can be applied in all faith/belief systems, and incorporating them into this course has taken it to a whole new level while also providing an opportunity to bring discussion of the Mission and the works of the Congregation of Sisters into the classroom.”

### **Summer Institute Readings**

In the various syllabi collected, a common handout given to students was the one-page reading, “Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching,”<sup>12</sup> that McCormick used to present and discuss the principles. The principles are summarized as Human Dignity, Community and the Common Good, Rights and Responsibilities, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, Participation, Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers, Stewardship of Creation, Solidarity, Role of Government, and Promotion of Peace. McCormick also provided a ten-page handout of notes including an extensive bibliography that he has used in his classes.

### **Evaluating Our Efforts**

At the end of the three-year project, we were not completely satisfied with the quality of syllabi designed. We recognized the results were partly a function of the relatively limited amount of time we could devote to CST content and instruction in a three-day summer institute.

Without a more in-depth familiarity with CST documents and interpretive literature, faculty understanding remained very general and tended to be superficial. Individual principles sometimes came to mean

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick McCormick, “Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching,” Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) (Revised 2006).

whatever the faculty person or, ultimately, whatever the students thought they meant.<sup>13</sup> We also noticed that in conversations among themselves and with McCormick, faculty members seemed to lean toward framing learning outcomes in more generic social justice terms without a clear connection to CST. This might be remedied by a major institutional commitment, for example, that seeks to infuse CST throughout the core curriculum or required courses in the core or a focused program such as a minor or concentration that can complement studies in the major.<sup>14</sup> This would seem to require a long-term development program that would require more resources and likely limit those who would be able to participate. The relatively short development activity we have attempted can, at best, hope to whet appetites for a greater understanding of Catholic Social Teaching and stimulate those with some background to delve deeper. It also provides some common and basic vocabulary that increases and encourages more informed dialogue.

Two years after the project, we feel more confident in our approach, even with its limitations. We are now convinced that these three years of faculty development have effectively served as that stimulus to delve deeper and, if viewed through the lens of the Catholic Engagement Model as illustrated through DePaul University, have also served to make basic principles that relate to the lived mission of the university more intentional among faculty. A working paper developed at DePaul in 2003 to stimulate dialogue summarizes seven principles: The Dignity of the Human Person; The Goodness of Community; A Gracious, Sacramental Universe; The Wisdom of the Past and the Creation of New Knowledge; The Complementarity of Authentic Religious Faith and Carefully Exercised Human Reason; The Promotion of Social Justice; and A Compassionate Commitment to the Poor and Marginalized.<sup>15</sup> In a business class described above, students associated social justice with ethical decision-making, community service, compassion, and equality. As the graduate faculty commented in the last example, CST principles can be applied in all faith/belief systems and can bring discussion of the mission and the works of the Congregation of Sisters into the classroom. Such realizations included in the ongoing dialogue among our faculty during the three-year project and beyond and the evidence that we touch on later under assessment both resonate with the principles that

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<sup>13</sup> Michele R. Pistone, "The Devil in the Details: How Specific Should Catholic Social Teaching Be?" *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 1 (2004): 507-533.

<sup>14</sup> See a description of the interdisciplinary minor in Catholic social tradition at Notre Dame in Whitmore. "Practicing the Common Good," 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Strain, et al., "Engagement with Pluralism," 179.

DePaul University uses to characterize its Catholic identity as a Catholic Engagement institution.

### **Annual Project Structure Summary**

We believe the annual five-stage structure for our project was successful and replicable. The following points summarize our efforts and provide some reflections on each.

1. We began the year in January with the facilitator presenting on a current issue open to the university community and then, on the next day, holding a morning workshop for faculty who might be interested in participating in the institute the following summer.
2. The three-day summer institute for approximately twenty-five participants provided formal CST presentations in the afternoon, leaving in-between times and mornings for individual or small group consultations with the facilitator geared at formulating specific course outcomes to be included in syllabi for the fall semester. Presentations included social justice themes in Biblical stories and the ten principles of CST. There was also what might be described as a more practical session, such as taking advantage of service-learning opportunities or analyzing issues in an election year. At noon on the third day, a wrap-up session focused on concrete strategies for incorporating social justice principles into regular courses.
3. By the fall, faculty members who had participated in the summer institute were asked to integrate social justice themes into the syllabus of at least one course they were teaching in the fall. These faculty members met over lunch before the semester started, to share what they hoped to do with their courses that fall and offer suggestions to one another for syllabi improvement. They submitted copies of revised syllabi to be kept on file in the Academic Vice President's office as well as in their separate division schools.
4. The following January, when the facilitator returned to repeat what was done previously, there were also times set aside for faculty from the previous summer to debrief with the facilitator and to assess what worked, what did not, and what could be improved.
5. By the middle of that March, faculty participants from the previous summer were asked to submit a more formal evaluation of the course they taught in the fall. They were asked to respond to the following tasks:
  - a. Describe Catholic Social Justice Teaching content emphasized in this course. List course / learning outcomes that addressed this content;

- b. Summarize what students actually learned about Catholic Social Justice Teaching content in this course;
- c. Overall, were you satisfied with this version of the course and would you do anything differently next time?

The evaluations that were completed by faculty after each major development activity (January workshop and summer institute) confirmed the success of the basic structure of our project and McCormick's impact as a facilitator. The faculty satisfaction surveys were aimed at measuring perceived growth in faculty understanding of CST and faculty members' confidence in bringing that awareness into the classroom. During the three years, the survey respondents consistently agreed that the development activities provided useful information about the content and the "spirit" of social justice and that they intended to incorporate social justice outcomes in their courses.

In a later section of this article, we summarize the results of a survey given in spring 2009 to the first two cohorts of 2006 and 2007 to determine the lasting power of the development project. Here, faculty participants reflected on their perceptions three and two years after their summer institute experience.

### **Budget and Leadership**

The budget for each of the three years of the project totaled approximately \$20,000. This covered faculty stipends, materials, meals, and the facilitator's compensation, travel, and expenses. Almost half of the total was allocated for faculty stipends. For the second and third years, grant funds from the sponsoring congregation of the university covered half of the total budget. This helped establish a tangible connection between the mission of the founding congregation and the ongoing work of the mostly lay faculty at the university.

During this same period of time, at least ten faculty members, including some from the summer institutes, have also benefited from university support for individuals to attend programs and conferences sponsored by various national groups, including *Collegium*, Lilly Fellows Programs, Council of Independent Colleges, and Diocesan social justice organizations. These experiences have led to more informed curriculum changes, showing the impact faculty can have in adding to the conversation about social justice around campus and then influencing others to consider curriculum changes.

A major initiative of this nature demands strong administrative champions. The Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs provided funds for the individual development activities just listed. She and the Vice President for Mission Effectiveness have been key players in the initial planning stages for our social justice project. They attended to the budget and logistics in implementation but also were visible and active participants in many of the sessions during the three years. They have also exhibited their leadership in mission education for the last nine years by planning and conducting two-day mission retreats for faculty and administrators. In 2009, the VP for Academic and Student Affairs initiated the next three-year faculty development project entitled “Ethics Across the Curriculum,” which has extended the social justice initiative.

### **Assessment—Faculty Perspective**

The six goals of this faculty development project, which we titled “Building an Intentional Culture of Social Justice: Increasing Understanding and Competence in the Curriculum,” provided the framework for identifying standards to determine success of the project:

- a. Increase faculty understanding of basic themes in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching;
- b. Assist faculty in developing specific and appropriate learning outcomes and evaluation methods related to social justice content in specific courses;
- c. Increase student understanding of basic themes in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching in select courses adapted for this project;
- d. Increase faculty members’ confidence in their individual abilities to transmit key social justice concepts in appropriate curriculum within a variety of disciplines and courses;
- e. Encourage dialogue among faculty participating in the year-long program as well as those who have already completed similar activities the preceding year and now serve as mentors;
- f. Encourage ‘graduates’ of the project to become leaders on campus in stimulating ongoing discussion about Catholic Social Teaching in the classroom.

In April 2009 we planned a luncheon in celebration of our three-year project. In preparation for the event, we sent out a survey to the first two cohorts, those of 2006 and 2007, asking how well the six goals above were achieved three and two years out from their summer institute

experience. Combining Agree/Strongly Agree, the responses on a five-point Likert scale ran from 86–95% on questions about increased faculty understanding of CST themes, help in developing appropriate learning outcomes, increase in student understanding, faculty confidence in teaching social justice concepts, and more conversations with colleagues about social justice. One hundred percent of faculty respondents agreed with the concluding statement on the survey: “Overall, I believe this three-year project has contributed to the building of an intentional culture of social justice” at the institution.

This positive response was confirmed in a report from an independent consultant we hired to do individual interviews with volunteers at the luncheon gathering. The report summarizes interviews with twelve faculty. One surprise that emerged from the report: five of the faculty, because of their perceived understanding of social justice issues, had been invited to lecture in other classes.

At the April lunch we also asked the sixty attending faculty members, who represented all three cohorts, to provide examples of activities, events, or decisions that might point in the direction of a growing culture of social justice at the university. Those present seemed to agree that the phrase itself, “social justice,” if not “Catholic Social Teaching,” was much more commonly referenced on campus and in every segment of the community: students, faculty, and administrators. Others pointed to course or program-based activities. Institute faculty themselves were responsible for nearly all of the initiatives mentioned below.

In 2007, we saw the first issues of a university publication that has now been transformed into a peer-reviewed journal, publishing submissions from all over the country. Its new title is *Verbum Incarnatum: An Academic Journal of Social Justice*.

The latest generation of our undergraduate honors program was also approved in 2007. Social justice is a prominent feature in the goals of the program, in its curriculum and in its teaching faculty. Social justice is also highlighted in a service-learning component of the program.

Service learning is a steadily growing initiative at our institution. One example involving biology classes also illustrates a growing emphasis on environmental issues that relate to the DePaul principle of A Gracious, Sacramental Universe. A nature sanctuary, recently established by the sponsoring Sisters Congregation, is adjacent to the campus and serves as an invaluable opportunity for doing soil and water quality research and cataloguing flora and fauna. Creation of the

sanctuary has stimulated interest throughout the campus community in learning more about protecting and preserving the natural environment and how this connects to CST.

Faculty can also invite their classes to participate in a new community service activity, “Meet the Mission,” that was initiated in the fall of 2006. Faculty members partner with primarily first-year students at the beginning of the semester as they spend a day of service in conjunction with community agencies that work with underserved populations in the city. Among other things, this activity is used to help students better understand our forty-five-hour community service graduation requirement that has been in place for over twenty years. In addition, we also hold a research day each February, and faculty members have featured some of their work related to social justice.

The curriculum-based activities seem to have planted seeds that are sprouting across campus in various ways. Social justice-related discussions and speakers are now regularly part of the faculty workshops that begin our fall and spring semesters. Faculty at the April lunch thought that social justice was also more visible than ever before; for example, themes were apparent in activities planned during months recognizing African Americans, Hispanics, women, and the earth as well as on Peace Day. Social justice also is a regular theme in theatre productions and art exhibits. In the last two years, social justice has become a regular feature in the student newspaper.

Two years after the project, as we reflect on how these initiatives, their diversity, and the ongoing dialogue on campus have progressed, we conclude that we are continuing to build an intentional culture of social justice in the context of a Catholic Engagement university.

### **Assessment—Student Perspective**

The real test, however, of the success of this initiative involves determining that which students take away from both individual classes and from their overall experience at the university. One internal resource we are beginning to use to gauge impact on student learning is our Graduation Exit Survey. In 2007, we added social justice questions to this survey for the first time. Undergraduates were very positive about the influence of the Core Curriculum in their understanding of social justice issues in contemporary society. The positive responses increased slightly in spring 2009. Graduate students in 2007 were less convinced that their programs helped them understand the relevance of

social justice to their professional work, but in spring 2009, there was a dramatic 40% increase in the positive responses to the same statement. We are gratified at this response and expect it to be maintained on the next iteration of the survey.

Another external survey we use at the undergraduate level may provide some insight on student attitudes about issues related to social justice. In comparing our 2004 and 2008 results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), our senior students increased their responses in a number of areas: tolerance, dialogue among different races or different belief systems, developing a personal code of values and ethics, contributing to the welfare of the community, and community service. In 2010, the gains noticed in 2008 continued. There may be a correlation in growth illustrated in the responses to these items and how the social justice initiative has had some impact on the climate and culture at the university.

### **Final Considerations: Lessons Learned in Implementing a Social Justice Initiative**

In concluding this narrative of one university's experience, we would suggest the following key elements when replicating this initiative at another institution:

1. It is essential to evaluate rigorously how a key mission tenet such as social justice is being concretely transmitted and taught to students. We began by examining syllabi across the campus; DePaul University's use of a faculty and staff survey devoted to mission topics could add another important perspective.<sup>16</sup>
2. Faculty support for what is primarily a faculty-development initiative must be encouraged from the highest academic levels if it is to cross disciplines.
3. The faculty development must be undertaken systematically and must be conducted by an expert not only in the topic of social justice linked to Catholic Social Teaching but also in pedagogy and in the reality of the learning environment today.
4. Adequate resources must be dedicated to this plan.
5. There must be measures in place to assess the faculty and their growth in understanding of CST and their implementation in concrete learning outcomes, followed by assessment of student understanding of the meaning and content of social justice.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles R. Strain, et al., "Engagement with Pluralism," 178.



This list represents guidelines followed during our project. Areas we may have improved include providing more support to faculty participants during the initial stages as well as during the time they developed possible learning outcomes. Ways we could have provided such support would be the following: (1) assembling introductory texts and library resources in an accessible location, (2) identifying model syllabi from a consultant or other institutional web sites, (3) making a list of current faculty with Catholic Social Teaching background, and (4) providing individuals or offices that could be consulted as needed about learning outcome and assessment design when the institute facilitator is not on campus.

## **Conclusion**

There are competing agendas as the university environment requires new and more sophisticated technology, necessitates new teaching methodologies, and faces the demands of accreditation and various other projects and priorities. Unless there is a continuous focus on social justice, the immediate gains of any one round of effort or one initiative will diminish. Our university has planted the seeds, reaped an initial harvest, and all the signs point to its readiness to sustain its commitment to social justice across the curriculum over the long run.

