Framework for the Integration of Faith and Learning at Whitworth

Approved by Whitworth faculty – May 2015

Goals of this Framework:
1. This framework is designed to serve a generative function rather than a restrictive function—to encourage involvement that respects an array of approaches and illuminates options.
2. This framework is designed to promote, with some variations, faith integration as a university-wide endeavor, including faculty, staff and students.
3. This approach aims to provide clarity and common language regarding faith integration in the context of a university that values difference and decentralization.
4. This framework may help guide the creation of faculty development programs, to give direction to support for faith integration efforts.
5. These categories are constructed to help promote strategies for accomplishing Strategic Planning (2021) priorities regarding faith integration.
6. This approach is intended to help provide coherence and thoroughness in the way the institution reports contributions made to the faith integration project.

Preamble:
Whitworth University, a Christian university shaped by Reformed and evangelical theological traditions, is committed to providing its student body “an education of mind and heart.” Whitworth is also informed by the rich diversity of ideas intrinsic to its ecumenical community. Given this vibrant heritage and breadth of perspectives, the call to integrate faith into scholarly pursuits and institutional life is of particular importance and challenge.

Whitworth’s evangelical and Reformed commitments center first on relationship with Christ and authority of Scripture as institutional cornerstones. Beyond these foundational convictions, Whitworth’s distinctly Reformed character echoes throughout community culture and values: that both heart and mind matter; that they are inseparable facets of the whole human being; that acting and understanding, intertwined, are means for service to God. In addition, even as faithful commitment to knowledge is central to university life, we believe in human limitation; the Reformed tradition emphasizes our dependence on God, and God’s final sovereignty over all of life. Thus, efforts to promote integration of faith and learning reflect deep commitment to seeking understanding, cognizance of the limits of human perspective, valuing of God’s creation, and conviction that faith is relevant to all of life.

Whitworth’s Reformed and evangelical character, lived out in ecumenical context, informs the categories of activity around which faith and learning initiatives are organized at Whitworth:
- That each of us, according to John Calvin, has a vocation or calling to serve God in the world—and that work in all spheres of life matters. Thus, one way in which faith may be integrated is to consider academic study and university involvement in the larger context of preparation for vocation—for service to God through every facet of our lives.
- That, while grace is the basis for justification, Scripture calls us to responsible, faithful action. Most centrally, Biblical mandates inform a new kind of ethic—one that is focused on love for God and neighbor. This ethic of service itself requires a foundation of understanding—the kind of understanding that a university education helps provide.
• That our minds matter—and careful, discerning reflection on ideas in light of Scripture is at the heart of Christian education. This has implications for careful examination of philosophical assumptions of disciplines, viewed in light of biblical doctrine with appreciation and thoughtfulness.

• That faith engages public life as well as personal conviction. We are called into the world for the purpose of extending mercy, and bringing about reconciliation and justice. We are likewise called into the world as grateful people, with appreciation for the good gift of God’s creation, including gratitude for each other and for the remarkable products of human achievement.

Categories:

1) Vocation
The concept of vocation addresses what kind of work we are called to do, which involves career goals, to be sure, but also service to church and society, neighborliness, marriage, and family. The concept of vocation also concerns what kind of people we are called to become. Since the concept of calling or vocation is central to understanding human nature and God’s design for humankind, it is important to explore vocation as an issue related to the integration of faith and learning and how a liberal education applies to purpose and to quality of life. Initiatives promoting conversations around vocation would include but not be limited to mentoring, advising, sharing one’s story, supervision of internships and service learning, as well as classroom assignments and residence hall discussions.

2) Ethics, virtue and public policy
Commitment to faith means commitment to good—including life that reflects Christian virtue, action that is ethical and public policy that is just. On the one hand, there are widely-shared convictions that guide communities and ethical principles that govern professional fields. On the other hand, however, a person’s worldview convictions may call the individual (or community) to commitments to good that extend beyond popular consensus. Thoughtful deliberation regarding these higher convictions—about virtues, ethical commitments and matters of policy—are of central importance in a rich and considered life of faith. In a university setting, ethical considerations enter into the process of acquiring academic knowledge as well as the practices of culture; demonstrating intellectual virtues in learning and moral virtues in community are both central to life in the Christian university. Faculty and staff modeling lives that serve humanity, experiential learning opportunities that allow student to exercise virtues (e.g., service learning, student leadership, athletics), classroom discussions, mentoring and advising, and assignments that consider ethical implications of worldview commitments form the basis for virtuous lives and thoughtfully-considered public policy.

3) Intersection between theological assumptions and academic discipline
Theological assumptions provide a lens through which to assess and critique underlying assumptions of one’s academic discipline. Conversely, assumptions of one’s discipline may illuminate matters of doctrine, the intrinsic value and nature of God’s good creation, and practice in the life of faith. Specifically, disciplinary assumptions regarding epistemology, the natural world, and human nature may provide opportunities for dialogue. The hope is that this dialogue occurs between what one believes as part of one’s faith tradition and what one believes as a practitioner of one’s academic disciplines.

4) Intersection between faith and culture (through public discourse and creative expression)
Contributions of thoughtful Christians often extend beyond the academy into broader culture. As these contributions are made out of a context of faith, they become a central way in which faith and learning may be integrated. These contributions may take the form of expressions that shape culture, or that offer analytical or critical evaluations of culture; they may take the form of modeling through one’s life a prophetic vision of transforming faith. These initiatives may include public comment on social, scientific and political issues, analysis of ways faith influences culture, artistic expression reflecting values inherent in one’s faith perspective, or work toward social good that is an expression of one’s faith.

**Background:** This framework is based on a paper written originally by Dale Soden, director of the Weyerhaeuser Center for Christian Faith and Learning.

**Note:** This framework has been presented to the Academic Advisory Group, the Board of Trustees, the Teaching/Learning/Assessment Committee, the Cabinet and the Academic Leaders Institute, and has been approved as a resource by the Whitworth University faculty (spring, 2015).