



---

12-1-2006

## Assessing Catholic Identity: A Study of Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Sandra M. Estanek

Michael J. James

Daniel A. Norton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce>

---

### Recommended Citation

Estanek, S. M., James, M. J., & Norton, D. A. (2006). Assessing Catholic Identity: A Study of Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges and Universities. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 10 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1002062013>

This Focus Section Article is brought to you for free with open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Catholic Education* by the journal's editorial board and has been published on the web by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information about Digital Commons, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu). To contact the editorial board of *Journal of Catholic Education*, please email [JCE@nd.edu](mailto:JCE@nd.edu).

# ASSESSING CATHOLIC IDENTITY: A STUDY OF MISSION STATEMENTS OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

SANDRA M. ESTANEK

*Canisius College*

MICHAEL J. JAMES

*Boston College*

DANIEL A. NORTON

*Nazareth College*

*Since the publication of Ex Corde Ecclesiae (John Paul II, 1990), Catholic colleges and universities have become more deliberate and intentional regarding their institutional and Catholic identity. This article continues the conversation about Catholic identity as it relates to student outcomes, and proposes some preliminary strategies for assessment.*

## INTRODUCTION

### ASSESSMENT, OUTCOMES, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Assessment has become a highly sophisticated, expensive, and controversial reality of higher education governance, practice, and culture. However, Love and Estanek (2004) observed that administrators and members of the faculty commonly approach assessment efforts with skepticism and perceive it as something that is imposed from outside academia with limited relevance to the central tasks of teaching and scholarship. Love and Estanek further argued that assessment should be accepted as an essential tool in the process of ongoing personal and organizational learning.

Unfortunately assessment is too often associated with commercially successful and market-driven national rankings. The view of assessment as an academic practice reveals a substantive and valuable role that deserves critical attention by the academic community. Erwin (1991) defined assessment as the “systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students” (p. 14). Astin (1993) defined assessment as “the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff, and institutions of higher education” for the purpose of “improv[ing] the functioning of the institution and its people” (p. 2). Functioning is a term understood in this

context “to facilitate student learning and development, to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and to contribute to the community, and society” (p. 2). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) defined assessment as “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence, which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). Love and Estanek (2004) defined assessment as, “on-going efforts to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes individual, programmatic, or institutional effectiveness, and using that evidence to improve practice” (p. 85). Each of these definitions offers an emphasis on distinct aspects of a complex enterprise. However, they hold in common the notion that higher education institutions can and should systematically collect information to demonstrate to what degree and in what demonstrable ways they are doing what they say they are doing. Love and Estanek encouraged higher education professionals to develop an assessment mindset in order to inform both individual professional practice and an effective institutional culture.

### **THE ASSESSMENT MOVEMENT: A BRIEF HISTORY**

The assessment movement was spearheaded in the late 1980s by the United States Department of Education and regional higher education accrediting associations. Komives and Schoper (2006) argued that the emergence of accreditation agencies was a result of elements of a convergence of educational reform movements in higher education that were responding to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, *A Nation at Risk*, and the Carnegie Commission report, *College* (Boyer, 1987). Since the late 1980s, higher education accrediting agencies have required their member institutions to be specific about educational goals and outcomes and to collect a variety of data in support of an analysis of how those goals are being met.

The assessment lens initially had a focus on institutional capacity for effectiveness in carrying out its educational mission; that is, the institution’s “resources, structures, and processes” (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions [C-RAC], 2003, p. 1). According to C-RAC, a confederation of seven regional higher education accrediting associations, capacity criteria include “fiscal solvency, faculty credentials, curricular coherence, and governance structures” (p. 1). While these earlier developed categories continue to be accepted as necessary conditions for institutional effectiveness, assessment criteria developed since 2001 have been broadened to also include a results-oriented inquiry of outcomes and student learning. For example, the C-RAC 2003 statement of principles of good practice suggests that,

At the core of these new approaches are such questions as: What are students learning? Is it the right kind of learning? What difference is the institution mak-

ing in their lives? What evidence does an institution have that ensures it is worth the student's investment? (p. 2)

The C-RAC principles of good practice statement further supports standards and accountability that are explicitly connected to the mission of the college or university. The C-RAC (2003) document makes the case that, "Instead of insisting on compliance to standardized learning goals, [the commissions] have promulgated standards that not only assess institutional capacity, but also evaluate the congruence between an institution's mission and its learning goals, curricular offerings, and student learning outcomes" (p. 2). C-RAC continued, "In essence, institutions are expected to be clear about their mission and educational purposes and to demonstrate, through their educational goals and results, how well these purposes are being accomplished" (p. 2).

Institutional mission has emerged as a new and essential criterion for the assessment process. The American Association for Higher Education document, *Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*, for example, reinforces this notion of mission-focused assessment by insisting that, "Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about" (Astin et al., 1991, para. 1).

## MISSION, OUTCOMES, AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Concurrent with the assessment movement in American higher education, Catholic colleges and universities have been exploring appropriate methods for inquiry to effectively define the distinct values and principles held in common by the more than 200 Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States. A renewed dialogue and deliberation on the meaning and source of the institutional characteristics of Catholic identity were brought to a climax in the mid-1980s. In 1986, the Vatican published a draft of a proposed apostolic constitution intended, according to O'Brien (1994), to define the relationship between the Catholic colleges and universities and the hierarchy. Gallin (1992, 2000) argued that the Vatican was determined to call forth a clear statement of mission and accountability from the colleges and universities in the United States in the wake of events inspired by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The most notable among these in Catholic higher education was the 1967 manifesto, Land O'Lakes Statement, a document drawn up by a group of 26 American bishops, university presidents, and Catholic intellectuals gathered at Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin. This statement asserted: "The

Catholic University today must be a university in the full modern sense of the word, with a strong commitment to and concern for academic excellence” (as cited in Gallin, 1992, p. 7). To perform its functions, “[it] must have true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external, to the academic community itself” (as cited in Gallin, 1992, p. 7). Independence did not mean secularization; voluntary commitment and the study of theology would be vital links to the Catholic heritage and the Catholic community. The university would remain Catholic, the signers affirmed, for Catholicism would be “perceptively present and effectively operative” by means of scholars in theology who were to “engage directly in exploring the depths of Christian tradition” (as cited in Gallin, 1992, p. 7). In 1972, international delegates meeting under the auspices of the Sacred Congregation for Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities echoed these words, urging support from the hierarchy and promising “frank and confident collaboration” in return (O’Brien, 1994, p. 58).

Unsatisfied, the Vatican pursued a long, behind-the-scenes campaign to ensure that Catholic higher education remained Catholic on its terms (O’Brien, 1994). This process culminated with the publication of the apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990). Promulgated by the late Pope John Paul II, this document reasserted the need for Catholic institutions and theologians to be directly accountable to the Church’s bishops. Gallin, then executive director of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, argued that with a separate incorporation, “church officials now had to deal with the universities as independent autonomous corporations rather than being able to monitor theological studies, speaker policies, honorary degrees and various student issues” (as cited in O’Brien, 1994, p. 60).

*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) listed four “essential characteristics” of the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities. They are:

- 1) a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such; 2) a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research; 3) fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church; 4) an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life. (pp. 13-14)

To respond to the vision for Catholic colleges and universities depicted in Church documents, including *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Hellwig, former president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, provided institutional officials with some concrete practical suggestions in implementing

the vision that they can adapt to their particular institution. Hellwig (2004) introduced suggestions acknowledging that “because our colleges and universities have various purposes, programs, and student bodies, it is very unlikely that a particular institution will match all of these elements and indicators.” The five general categories of the Catholic character of the institution “do suggest practical ways of realizing the Catholic mission of the institution” (pp. 115-116). They are: (a) a public profession of the Catholic identity in institutional statements and public documents; (b) engagement with culture and scholarship by way of applying Catholic wisdom and critique to all aspects of human knowledge and the curriculum; (c) fidelity to the Gospel as it is transmitted in Catholic tradition not only by teaching Catholic tradition but by modeling it; (d) service to Church and society by bringing to bear scholarly resources to respond to pastoral needs of the Church, to help with Catholic education at all levels, and to help solve problems of human suffering; and (e) transmission and exploration of the broader Catholic cultural heritage in philosophy and theology, in literature and the arts, in the study of nature and of society, in ritual and symbolism, in spiritual traditions, and the full celebration of the Christian calendar.

Twenty years after the advent of the assessment movement in higher education and the concurrent and related discussions of accountability for Catholic identity among the Catholic higher education community, we can arrive at three fundamental realities: (a) assessment is an operational reality for higher education in the United States; (b) among the various approaches to and criteria for assessment, mission is consistently identified as a critical feature; and (c) a vision for the distinct mission of Catholic institutions of higher education has been articulated authoritatively in a variety of defining documents from the Roman Catholic hierarchy, most notably *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990), and from Catholic higher education leaders and scholars.

## **INITIATIVES FOR CATHOLIC MISSION AND IDENTITY**

Following the publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Catholic higher education community engaged in an intense period of analysis and discussion on Catholic identity. The focus of these deliberations has largely been on the resources, structures, and processes, critical to implementing initiatives supporting Catholic identity. For example, hiring for mission as a response to the declining numbers of men and women in religious life serving in Catholic higher education in faculty and administrative roles has been at the center of this consideration (Heft, Katsuyama, & Pestello, 2001; Heft & Pestello, 1999).

A variety of professional development strategies for lay faculty and administrators with an emphasis on mission have emerged with sponsorship

support from a number of key national Catholic higher education organizations. For example, Collegium, a summer colloquy on Catholic identity and intellectual life for faculty, was established in 1992; the Institute for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (now the Association for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities) was created in 1995; and the Institute for Administrators in Catholic Higher Education, hosted at Boston College and co-sponsored by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, was founded in 2000. Seminars for trustees and Catholic mission have been developed and facilitated by a collaborative initiative of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and the Association of Governing Boards since 2003. In 2005, the Rome Seminar was established and sponsored by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in cooperation with the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas in Rome with the intention of offering trustees, administrators, and senior faculty a personal introduction to the Catholic Church at its Roman center.

At the institutional level, offices of mission and identity have been established on a majority of Catholic campuses. Catholic studies programs have developed across the country as well as an emphasis on the intellectual tradition of Catholic social teaching and advocacy in the classroom and in student development programming. Collectively, these efforts are an attempt to increase the institutional capacity to animate Catholic identity in contemporary society.

## **DIALOGUE ON ASSESSING MISSION**

Similar to the evolution of thought in secular discussions of assessment, more recently strategies for planning and developing approaches to explore the question of outcomes related to Catholic identity and institutional capacity have taken shape. These discussions have taken place with Catholic higher education leaders and officials of the Roman Curia (Miller, 2005), with researchers and observers of Catholic higher education (Morey & Piderit, 2006; Steinfels, 2003), and with various professional associations within the Catholic higher education establishment. The latter has been evidenced by program presentations and discussions at national and international meetings of educators in Catholic higher education, including the recently formed Catholic Higher Education Research Cooperative, which is a professional association of institutional researchers from Catholic colleges and universities who are interested in developing cooperative initiatives to address assessment and data collection on Catholic mission and identity.

When addressing what should be assessed to document institutional effectiveness related to Catholic identity, suggestions often have focused on

what is easily counted, such as attendance at weekly Mass on campus and the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. However, it is clear that what Catholic colleges aim to accomplish is a complex ideal that affects many dimensions of students' learning and development and that requires not only the collaboration of administration, faculty, and staff but also the response of the students.

Determining where to begin when developing an assessment process that embraces the complexity of impact of the college experience is an essential step in developing an appropriate assessment strategy. The cautions of those who have written about assessment are well taken here. Assessment cannot be imposed effectively from above or from without (Love & Estanek, 2004) and assessment must not be based on what is most easily counted (Astin et al., 1991). Effective assessment efforts are best grounded in the mission of individual institutions.

## **MISSION STATEMENTS AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY**

Upcraft (2003) argued that "all assessment is local" (p. 559). What this means for our study is that the fundamental principles and values of Catholic identity are operationalized and realized by each individual Catholic college and university. It is in the mission statements of each of these institutions where the principles and values of a Catholic education are publicly articulated. Schuh (2003) argued that an institution's mission statement "serve[s] as a useful reminder of what the institution is about and what it aspires to achieve" (p. 362). Dolence, Rowley, and Lujan (1997) wrote that, "mission statements can be helpful in getting people to pull in the same direction in the pursuit of common and well-understood goals" (p. 137). Thus, studying the mission statement of an institution is one way to understand its stated purpose, values, and vision (Young, 2001).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to consider the mission statements of a representative sample of Catholic colleges and universities as a point of analysis of Catholic identity characteristics that are institutionally agreed upon, and (b) to identify and categorize dominant institutional values from mission statements that may inform a Catholic identity assessment process.

Two previous studies of mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities have occurred. Foote, Buzzi, Gaughan, and Wells (1996) included a review of mission statements in their study of diversity and Catholic higher education. Young (2001) compared the themes that were surfaced to the consistent academic values of American higher education, which Young (1997)



had articulated in a previous work. This study differs in that it does not seek to compare the mission statements of Catholic institutions to another body of literature or set of values; instead, through employing content analysis techniques, it allows the mission statements to speak for themselves so that the dominant values of Catholic higher education can be surfaced directly to provide an internally generated basis for the assessment of Catholic identity.

## METHOD

The first step in this study was to develop a systematic random sample of established Catholic colleges and universities in the United States that would serve as a basis for analysis. A list of all Catholic colleges and universities found on the website of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU; [http://www.accunet.org/search/all\\_catholiccolleges.asp](http://www.accunet.org/search/all_catholiccolleges.asp)) was used to begin to develop the sample. This list contained 235 institutions; however, 16 listed institutions were located outside of the United States, and one institution had closed since the list was published. The revised list that was used contained 218 institutions. The purpose of this analysis was to develop a representative sample that contained approximately 25% of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, or 55 institutions. This sample of established Catholic institutions would be representative of sponsorship, size, and geography. Care was taken to develop a systematic random sample so that the sample mirrored the diversity of Catholic higher education in the United States in terms of sponsorship, size, and location. If one did not take care to do this, it would be possible for one sponsoring tradition, for example, to be either overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample. For example, in Young's (2001) study, a random sample of 73 schools was analyzed. Nineteen schools in the sample were Jesuit institutions. This represented 26% of the sample, yet Jesuit schools only represent 13% of all Catholic institutions in the United States.

In our opinion, this has the potential to skew the data, as do regional differences and the size and complexity of the institutions, and thus, a systematic random sample that represented the diversity of Catholic higher education in terms of sponsorship, size, and location was needed. Thus, the first function that was performed was to factor the random list that was computer generated by sponsoring congregations. One of the most salient characteristics of American Catholic higher education is that the overwhelming majority of institutions were founded by individual religious congregations. Ninety-three percent of the institutions on the ACCU list (203 institutions) were founded by religious congregations. Six percent (14 institutions) were founded by individual bishops and dioceses and only one institution was founded collectively by the bishops and has canonical status.

Each institution was counted by sponsoring order; for example, there are 28 Jesuit institutions, 19 Dominican institutions, 16 Mercy institutions, and so on. The percentage was calculated for each group down to 1% of the total list of 218 institutions; for example, Jesuit (13%), Dominican (9%), Mercy (7%). Forty-six institutions were sponsored by congregations that accounted for less than 1% of the total of 218 institutions and were put into an “other” group. By doing this, the percentages of the sample could be determined. Again for example, of the 55 institutions in the sample, 7 should be Jesuit, 5 should be Dominican, 4 should be Mercy, and 9 should come from the “other” group so that they are representative of the percentage of these sponsoring traditions in the total of Catholic institutions in the United States.

To determine the institutions that should be in the sample, first a non-factored random sample was generated electronically. Next, the researchers calculated the number of institutions by sponsorship in the electronically generated sample. Institutions were then added or subtracted to match the appropriate percentage determined by the analysis of the ACCU list of institutions. When this was done, attention was also paid to both size and location. Using a map also produced by the ACCU, we determined the appropriate geographic distribution of the systematic random sample. Based upon this analysis, it was determined that 25 institutions in the sample of 55 should come from the East; 19 should come from the Midwest; 7 should come from the West; and 4 should come from the South. This level of care was taken so the researchers could be confident that their sample was representative of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The names of the institutions included in the systematic random sample are included in the appendix.

Once the sample was generated, the mission statements of each of the 55 institutions were downloaded into an electronic database. A content analysis of these mission statements was conducted using the method of narrative analysis proposed by Kvale (1996). This was done in three rounds. Round one consisted of the following steps. First, each researcher independently analyzed each mission statement in the systematic random sample for themes and categories. Next, we shared our independent analyses and discussed the similarities and differences in them. Based upon this discussion, we developed a codebook of themes. Round two consisted of the following steps. The first researcher reviewed the mission statements and electronically color coded them for the themes in the codebook. The second researcher reviewed this analysis for missing themes and suggested adjustments, which were discussed. Then the third researcher developed a database of the sample institutions and checked which institutions’ mission statements included which themes in the codebook. The most often stated themes that were

expressed in the sample of mission statements were Catholic identity (94.5%), sponsorship (76%), constituencies served (60%), nuts and bolts (76%), community (47%), diversity (56%), and student outcomes (91%). Round three focused on the further analysis of the category of student outcomes. The findings in this article were developed from this analysis.

## RESULTS

Statements of Catholic identity were the first category that emerged from our content analysis. Fifty-two of the 55 institutions in the sample (94.5%) directly state that they are Catholic institutions. They do this simply and directly, most often in the first sentence of the mission statement, such as “A University is a co-educational Catholic college.” The three institutions that do not overtly state their Catholic identity are institutions in the state of New York, which is not surprising. Gallin (2000) documented the controversy with “Bundy money” in New York State in the 1970s, which caused many Catholic institutions in the state to focus on their sponsorship in their written documents and to remove overt references to being Catholic. While some of the statements simply stated that the institution was Catholic, many statements contained related language that outlined how the institution understood its Catholicism. Themes related to the Catholic intellectual tradition were articulated in 23 mission statements (42%). These included such themes as the dialogue between faith and reason or faith and culture, the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and knowledge in the service of Truth and the greater good. Social justice and social responsibility themes were included in 25 statements (45%). These included such themes as reverence for the dignity of all persons and direct commitments to service and peace and justice. Developmental language also was included in 25 statements (45%). Using themes such as spiritual development, and educating for personal responsibility, values, and integrity, these statements indicated that their vision of education extended beyond the classroom to formation of the whole person. Finally, religious language was used in 18 statements (33%). These included direct references to God, Jesus, the Gospel, and prayer. However, direct language from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) was used in only one statement, as was the necessary presence of Catholics and fidelity to the Magisterium.

Sponsorship was the second category of analysis. Forty-two of the 55 institutions in the sample (76%) refer to the history and tradition of their sponsoring religious order. It is clear that these institutions understand their Catholic identity through the lens of this experience. Most (39) institutions use a short expression, such as “X University is a Catholic, Jesuit university,” or “Y College is founded by the Sisters of Charity,” or “Z College is sponsored by the

Sisters of Saint Joseph.” Three institutions include a more lengthy explanation of their educational philosophies, which have emerged from the sponsoring traditions and which inform the missions of their institutions.

Forty-two of the 55 schools (76%) include statements that we categorize as “nuts and bolts,” or statements that described specific academic programs and activities of the institution. These include statements regarding the liberal arts (93%) and professional programs (64%) offered by the institution; undergraduate (100%) and graduate offerings (36%); and continuing education (19%).

Thirty-five institutions (60%) also include statements regarding the make up of their student bodies, such as co-educational (91%) or all-women (9%), and statements regarding the constituencies they serve. Developing an ethic of service is stated by 37 institutions (67%); however, at the same time, 30 (54%) are quite specific about their purpose to prepare students for professional success or economic advancement.

Twenty-six of the institutions (47%) describe themselves as a community or aspiring to create a community. Fourteen (54%) of these institutions describe themselves as an academic community or a community of learning; 3 (11.5%) describe themselves as a diverse community; 2 (8%) indicate they are a community of faith; 1 (4%) indicates the institution is a supportive and welcoming community; and 6 (23%) do not add any descriptors to their self-understanding as a community.

The finding on diversity is a provocative one. Thirty-one (56%) of the 55 institutions include a statement on diversity. These statements embrace diversity, including religious diversity, as a positive dimension of their institutional identity and an aspect of the institution’s Catholic identity. The mission statements include such statements as, “University X favors diversity and ecumenically welcomes all who share its goals” or “We welcome women and men who reflect the rich diversity of the world’s cultures and perspectives” or “[Our institution is] committed to its central identity, while yet open and welcoming to all.” What is most interesting is that this positive embrace of diversity contrasts with statements of concern that institutions cannot realize their Catholic identity because too many members of the community are not Catholic (Estanek, 2006; Morey & Piderit, 2006).

Fifty of the 55 institutions in the sample (91%) include specific references to student outcomes in the mission statement. We did not begin the study with the intention of providing a basis for assessment. However, it became clear that this was possible once the analysis indicated that specific outcomes were being clearly stated as part of the mission of institutions. The specific student outcomes that were stated in at least 10% of the mission statements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Specific Student Outcomes Stated in Mission Statements*

Student outcomes	Percentage of mission statements where outcome stated
Intellectual development	32%
Social justice/social responsibility	28%
Religious or spiritual development	26%
Service	26%
Leadership	24%
Moral development	24%
Personal growth	24%
Education of the whole person	22%
Responsible citizenship	10%
International perspective or awareness	10%
Professional competence	10%
Lifelong learning	10%

## DISCUSSION

We began this study with the question of whether the mission statements of a representative sample of Catholic colleges and universities could yield a collective vision of Catholic higher education upon which a plan for assessment could be built. We believe that our analysis indicates that this is possible. The major finding of this research is that the mission statements refer so often to specific student learning outcomes that these outcomes could be used as a basis for assessment. While we have parsed out individual themes in this analysis in order to identify them, the reality is that these themes are intertwined in the actual statements of mission. From our analysis of mission statements we posit that an institutional understanding of Catholic identity is culturally embedded in a number of factors including: foundational heritage and sponsorship; the groups of constituents it serves currently and historical-

ly; and how the institution defines its educational enterprise. Specific outcomes such as intellectual development and the education of the whole person, service, leadership, and citizenship may characterize all institutions of higher education, but when they are taken together and coupled with the statements of Catholic identity and sponsorship they articulate the basis for a distinctively Catholic education and can form the basis for assessment.

How might this be done? Recent experience from student affairs can be helpful in this regard. During the past several years there has been much discussion at national levels of how it would be possible to assess the learning and development that characterizes the co-curricular responsibilities of student affairs. These areas have been resistant to assessment because of the perceived difficulty in measuring the learning and development that occurs in the campus co-curricular experience (Love & Estanek, 2004). Documents such as *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999), *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006) have been created by teams of experienced faculty members and student affairs professionals as responses both to the insistent calls for accountability and the perceived difficulties of assessing the soft outcomes of student development. The efforts of these professionals provide us with a template for assessing the soft outcomes of Catholic identity.

Using the framework developed in the literature just discussed, we developed the following table (see Table 2), suggesting how one might begin to connect the values that were articulated in the mission statements we studied to specific outcomes, experiences, and job responsibilities. The table-analysis format visually represents the ways, both formative and summative, that the activities of the institution correspond with the values of the institution as distinctly Catholic. For example, by reading the table one connects certain activities to specific job responsibilities supporting the notion that the mission and Catholic identity of the institution is an imperative for all members of the college or university community.

Table 2

*Specific Activities that Connect Student Outcomes to Catholic Identity*

Student outcomes in mission statements	Specific outcomes related to Catholic identity	Experiences related to Catholic identity outcomes	Who is responsible?
Intellectual development	Knows and understands the teaching of the Catholic Church in relevant areas. Is able to dialogue about them. Knows about the history of the institution's founding order. Understands how the history and values of the institution have been influenced by the order.	Theology and religion classes. Department symposia and speakers. Structured opportunities to engage with members of the founding order. Major campus events which tell the history of the institution.	Faculty in theology and religious studies. Faculty in arts and sciences, humanities, social sciences. Members of the founding order. Those responsible for campus events
Social justice and social responsibility	Recognizes the dignity of all persons and understands that this is a dimension of Catholic teaching. Understands and appreciates human differences and cultures.	Course on Catholic social teaching. Debriefing sessions for service experiences. Fourth credit for service learning. Speakers and dialogues. Articles in student newspapers.	Faculty in social sciences and professions. Campus ministry staff. Those responsible for college policies.
Religious/spiritual development	Develops a greater understanding of and appreciation for one's own faith and the faith of others. Is able to integrate religious teaching to one's personal behavior.	Required courses. Retreats. Religious celebrations connected to campus special occasions. Structured opportunities for dialogue on faith that include adults on campus.	Faculty in theology and religious studies. Campus ministry staff. Campus programming staff. Cadre of adult mentors.

Table 2 (continued)

Student outcomes in mission statements	Specific outcomes related to Catholic identity	Experiences related to Catholic identity outcomes	Who is responsible?
Service leadership and responsible citizenship	Recognizes that one's education not only provides an opportunity for greater personal success but also entails a responsibility to serve others. Understands this as a dimension of Catholic teaching. Reflects on leadership as service.	Service opportunities and alternative spring break. Connecting these activities to Catholic social teaching. Connecting leadership training to Catholic social teaching. Restorative justice dimension to judicial hearings and sanctions. Service dimension to student groups.	Campus ministry staff. Faculty in all areas. Student affairs staff, especially those involved in student leadership development. All those serving as student organization advisors.
Moral development	Knows Church teaching in areas of morals and understands the thinking behind them. Is able to dialogue about them. Is able to connect moral teaching to personal behavior.	Institutional policies consistent with Church teaching. Moral issues are topics of campus programs, leadership development and resident assistant training. Ethics training for judicial board members. Ethics courses in all disciplines that include relevant Church teaching. Campus code of honor based overtly in Church teaching.	Student affairs staff, especially residential life staff. Organizational advisors. Judicial affairs staff. Faculty in all areas.

This table includes the categories of Catholic identity that emerged from our study of mission statements then connects them with specific outcomes, activities to achieve those outcomes, and the persons responsible for those activities. This process can be adapted to reflect the appropriate categories specific to an individual institution and mission statement. By adding an additional column entitled "How Do We Know?" an individual institution can begin to develop an appropriate tool for assessing stated values with specific



outcomes. As we developed this table, it became clear to us that much of the work that had to be done was to consciously connect Catholic tradition and teaching to the teaching and learning that already occurs on campus both in the classroom and in the co-curriculum and campus environment. This effort requires the recognition that Catholic institutions must be intentional about including the teachings and tradition of the Church in their structures of learning and that they must be intentional in supporting this through training and assessment. It requires individuals to be tasked with these responsibilities and supported in accomplishing them. Most importantly, this effort requires a conviction that the teachings of the Church continue to offer relevant inspiration to ensure the dignity of the human person and the common good.

## CONCLUSION

Catholic higher education is at a critical moment that requires a more sophisticated approach to address what has appeared to be an elusive assessment goal. If this process does not emerge from within Catholic higher education, it will likely be imposed in a format that may not meet the needs of the institutions nor provide the most effective and constructive process for institutional learning and mission effectiveness. Although tools for measuring the impact on students who attend Catholic colleges and universities are still elusive, a number of institutional researchers and scholars on higher education, student affairs, and enrollment management professionals are beginning to collaborate on the development of appropriate research methods that may prove to be more effective in the future.

All successful assessment efforts begin with agreement on what it is that will be assessed. This study demonstrates that there is a consensus of student learning outcomes that characterize a Catholic higher education experience. The study further contributes to the effort to assess Catholic identity by providing a basis upon which assessment can be done that is grounded directly in the stated educational aspirations of Catholic colleges and universities. It is our hope that further research and thinking in this area will yield productive collaborations within Catholic higher education. And that those collaborations will result in an enhanced capacity of Catholic colleges and universities to continue to serve the Church and society in even more effective ways.

## REFERENCES

- Astin, A. W. (1993). *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Astin, A. W., et al. (1991). *Nine principles of good practice for assessing student learning*. Retrieved June 22, 2006, from <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/relatedlinks/aahe.htm>
- Blimling, G. S., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (1999). *Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2003). *Regional accreditation and student learning: Principles for good practice*. Retrieved May 21, 2006, from <http://www.ncahlc.org/download/0412AssessmentAccredLearningPrinciples.pdf>
- Dolence, M. G., Rowley, D. J., & Lujan, H. D. (1997). *Working toward strategic change: A step-by-step guide to the planning process*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Erwin, T. D. (1991). *Assessing student learning and development: A guide to principles, goals, and methods of determining college outcomes*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Estanek, S. M. (2006). Results of a survey of senior student affairs officers at Catholic colleges and universities. *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 24(2), 83-99.
- Foote, T. H., Buzzi, B. M., Gaughan, J. M., & Wells, R. K. (1996). Diversity within America's Catholic colleges and universities: Efforts and linkages to Catholic identity, institutional mission, and leadership [Special issue]. *Occasional Papers on Catholic Higher Education*, 1(3).
- Gallin, A. (Ed.). (1992). *American Catholic higher education: Essential documents, 1967-1990*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Gallin, A. (2000). *Negotiating identity: Catholic higher education since 1960*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Heft, J. L., Katsuyama, R. M., & Pestello, F. P. (2001). Faculty attitudes and hiring practices at selected Catholic colleges and universities. *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 21(2), 43-63.
- Heft, J. L., & Pestello, F. P. (1999). Hiring practices in Catholic colleges and universities. *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 20(1), 89-98.
- Hellwig, M. K. (2004). Evaluating the mission and identity of a Catholic college or university. In Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, *Mission and identity: A handbook for trustees of Catholic colleges and universities* (pp. 45-52). Washington, DC: Author.
- John Paul II. (1990). *Ex corde ecclesiae: Apostolic constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic universities*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administration.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administration.
- Komives, S. R., & Schoper, S. (2006). Developing learning outcomes. In R. P. Keeling (Ed.), *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience* (pp. 17-41). Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administration.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Love, P. G., & Estanek, S. M. (2004). *Rethinking student affairs practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, J. M. (2005, October). *Challenges facing American and European Catholic universities: A view from the Vatican*. Terrence R. Keeley Distinguished Vatican Lecture given at the Nonovic Institute for European Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN.
- Morey, M. M., & Piderit, J. J. (2006). *Catholic higher education: A culture in crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: Author.
- O'Brien, D. J. (1994). *From the heart of the American church: Catholic higher education and American culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Schuh, J. H. (2003). Strategic planning and finance. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 358-378). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Steinfels, P. (2003). *A people adrift: The crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Upcraft, M. L. (2003). Assessment and evaluation. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 555-591). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). *Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Young, R. B. (1997). *No neutral ground: Standing by the values we prize in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Young, R. B. (2001). Colleges on the cross roads: A study of the mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities. *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 21(2), 65-81.

*Sandra M. Estanek is an assistant professor and program director in College Student Personnel Administration at Canisius College. Michael J. James is director of the Center for Catholic Education at Boston College. Daniel A. Norton is assistant director of residential life at Nazareth College. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Dr. Sandra M. Estanek, Canisius College, 2001 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14208.*

## Appendix

*Institutions Included in the Systematic Random Sample*

Alvernia College	Ohio Dominican University
Aquinas College	Queen of the Holy Rosary College
Assumption College	Regis College
Avila University	Regis University
Bellarmino University	Saint John's University
Calumnet College of Saint Joseph	Saint Joseph's University
Clarke College	Saint Mary's College
College of Notre Dame of Maryland	Saint Michael's College
College of Saint Mary	Saint Peter's College
College of St. Joseph	Saint Vincent College
DePaul University	Saint Xavier University
DeSales University	Seton Hall University
Dominican University	Seton Hill University
Edgewood College	Siena College
Felician College	Silver Lake College
Fordham University	St. Francis College
Holy Family University	St. Gregory's University
John Carroll University	St. Mary's University
Lewis University	The Catholic University of America
Loyola College of Maryland	The College of Saint Rose
Manhattan College	Thomas More College
Marylhurst University	University of Notre Dame
Marywood University	University of San Diego
Mercy College of Northwest Ohio	University of San Francisco
Molloy College	Ursuline College
Mount Marty College	Villa Maria College of Buffalo
Mount Mercy College	Villanova University
Notre Dame de Namur University	