Faith-Based Entrepreneurship: Cross-Subsidizing the Spiritual Mission

WE THOUGHT AT FIRST IT WAS the bounce that book authors get when the timing is right for their titles—in our case, Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Yet, we sensed a micro-trend among small, religious institutions looking for everlasting spiritual redemption and long-term economic viability. This new breed of contemporary Christian college has developed new revenue streams, providing financial replenishment for faith-based, liberal arts residential campuses.

As Florida’s first Catholic university, Saint Leo University offers a traditional, residential campus and a Benedictine learning experience. That said, it is easy to forget that Saint Leo once teetered on the economic brink. Under new leadership over the last decade, it achieved a stunning reversal of fortune fueled by online program expansion, new opportunities for place-bound student audiences, and learning sites on U.S. and overseas military bases. President Arthur Kirk notes, “It is very much about striving to achieve maximum potential.”

Wittenberg University (Ohio), a campus in the finest Lutheran tradition, generates non-tuition revenue through savvy grantmanship. As President Mark Erickson suggests, they must continue to bring the world to Wittenberg and Wittenberg to the world. With an internationally recognized program in East Asian Studies now over 40 years old, the university has established the East Asian Institute, an initiative connecting the historic strengths of the East Asian program with business and economics programs.

Beyond the Catholic and Lutheran examples, William Boozang, Eastern Nazarene College’s (Mass.) director of adult and graduate studies, cites ENC’s 2+2 partnership with Massasoit Community College (Mass.) as a major source of non-traditional revenue—critical resources to preserve ENC’s Nazarene heritage for the betterment of ENC and its traditional, full-time, residential students.

What do Saint Leo, Wittenberg, and Eastern Nazarene have in common? Each has cross-subsidized its religious mission and classical liberal arts programs, demonstrating strong Christian values and an abiding commitment to ethical stewardship and faith-based social entrepreneurship. To read more on this topic, see the online version of this column at www.universitybusiness.com.

James Martin and James E. Samels, Future Shock columnists, are authors of Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence. Martin is a professor of English at Mount Ida College (Mass.) and Samels is president and CEO of The Education Alliance.

Acknowledging Grief

GRIEF COUNSELING ON CAMPUS is usually thought of in terms of big events like the shootings at Virginia Tech or Northern Illinois University. But people on campuses experience day-to-day grief, as well. “In my research, and the research of others, we’ve learned that in any given year about 22 to 33 percent of any student body is suffering a loss,” says Illene C. Noppe, professor of human development at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Faculty and staff might also be coping. “If we do the typical American thing of sticking grief in the closet, we are setting up retention issues.”

Noppe is the faculty advisor for Students of AMF at UW-Green Bay (www.studentsofamf.org), a peer support group for college students grieving the illness or death of a loved one. Noppe aided the efforts of students Ashley Durand, Nicole Hoagland, and Amanda Brodhagen to create a memorial garden on campus, which was dedicated in April. “We were trying to find a way to be visible without serving pizza,” Noppe explains.

Campus administrators gave the project “phenomenal” support, she adds, by providing space outside the student center, offering design services from the master gardener, and ensuring the garden is watered over the summer. During the dedication ceremony, perennials were planted in honor of campus members and attendees planted annuals for loved ones.

The location outside the student center ensures people can easily visit the garden any time. The planting ceremony will be an annual event.

Even though students are young they still suffer loss, which is often sudden, Noppe says. “I think it is a significant problem and campuses and administrators have to become aware of the significance of college student bereavement. . . . Anything you can do to acknowledge it is important.” —A.M.