

COLLEGES WEEK

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C1



Catholic College Courses You Can't Find Anywhere Else

How the Faith Factor Presents Itself in the Classroom

BY TIM DRAKE
REGISTER SENIOR WRITER

College freshmen and their parents choose Catholic institutions of higher education not only for the schools' ability to impart and strengthen the Catholic faith, but also on the quality of the schools' academic offerings. One thing that truly sets Catholic colleges and universities apart is that they often offer courses not found anywhere else.

Catholicism informs nearly every topic, thus allowing Catholic colleges and universities the opportunity to teach in ways that show how faith intersects with everything from leadership to architecture.

God's 'First Book'

That's certainly true of Wyoming Catholic College, the state's only Catholic college. While the school offers a Great Books-style education, it is its offerings in a Latin-immersion course, an equestrian course and a one-of-a-kind three-week Outdoor Leadership Program that set it apart from both its Catholic and secular counterparts.

Wyoming Catholic College partners with Lander, Wyo.-based, world-renowned National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to offer incoming freshmen a backpacking trip in the Wyoming wilderness before school begins in August and a one-week winter adventure in January.

"There are other leadership programs out there, but truly nothing as practical or wholesome as what we do," said Mark Randall, vice president for institutional advancement.

"Students learn how to choose a goal,

plot how to get there, the food and equipment needed, resolving conflicts, teamwork and handling things you never dreamed would happen, such as coming to a creek that's too big to cross," explained the college's president, Father Robert Cook. "Learning all of this is different from the theoretical study of leadership in a classroom."

All freshmen also take a two-and-a-half day wilderness medical-training course to learn how to manage injuries in the wild. The 21-day orientation has a heavy spiritual component as well. Groups are split into sections by gender, each with their own chaplain, student leader and NOLS staff person.

In addition to offering spiritual direction and the sacraments during the orientation, the chaplain is encouraged to find opportunities for spiritual or scriptural reflection during the adventure. For Father James Walling, the college chaplain, for example, that meant reading about the Transfiguration after a mountain climb, celebrating Mass on the peak, and reading about the Baptism of the Lord near a river.

The experience creates "students who are very tightly bonded," explained Matt McGee, director of the program. "They overcome challenges together, like navigating deep river crossings or climbing high peaks that are above 13,000 feet. When they come back to the classroom, they're prepared to handle the academic challenges because they met the other challenges that they weren't prepared to do."

'Theology of Creation'

While not as hands-on as the Wyoming
CONTINUES ON PAGE C4

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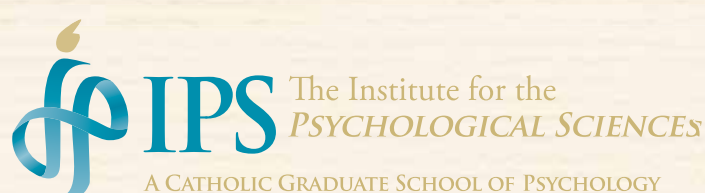
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A Catholic Finds Faith at Oxford

BY ERIN O'LUANAIGH

Three years ago, I entered my freshman year at Hillsdale College. Although Hillsdale is nestled in Midwestern cornfields 700 miles from my Connecticut home, I was content with my school of choice. With excessive paper writing and a tendency to recite whole chapters of Strunk & White's *Elements of Style* at unsuspecting passersby, I was shaping up to be quite the Hillsdale English major.

But something was missing. The *Harry Potter* series, the complete works of Jane Austen and British television had made me weak. I was a closet Anglophile, and I secretly longed for the kind of collegiate experience that would turn Sebastian Flyte green with envy. Yes, my first two years at Hillsdale were full of thoughts of the oldest university in the English-speaking world: Oxford.

Oxford. That mythical village. That quaint little country lane scattered with quaint little tea rooms and 38 quaint, little ivy-covered colleges. Where lines of edifying poetry drip from your pen the moment you step within the town limits. Where the men look like Colin Firth and write like T.S. Eliot and pray like John Henry Newman and a handful of brainy women pick and choose among them. Where the sun ever shineth and the boats ever punt-eth.

Oxford was where it was at. No mortal could convince me otherwise. And, lo and behold, Hillsdale just happened to have a study-abroad program that would allow me to attend — however briefly — this hallowed institution. (Coincidence? I think not.) After filling out mountains of paperwork, receiving that prized acceptance letter, and parting tearfully with every last penny to my name, I boarded a plane for jolly old England.

The first in a succession of mild heart attacks occurred the moment I rode into town. Oxford is not a quaint, little country village. In fact, it's a rather bustling city with rather a lot of homeless people.

"Know your place," advised our English liaison. "Many of these stu-

dents can trace their pedigrees to royalty." Needless to say, I made few friends among the full-timers.

Nor did I win the heart of any Oxford faculty member. Excepting one extraordinarily kind tutor, my efforts to charm and amuse were met with various degrees of throat clearing and dour expressions. Dreams of conversation over tea and crumpets with fussy, lovable old Englishmen perished after the first tutorial.

And the preparation required for these sessions began to make Hillsdale look like *Hooked on Phonics*. Each week, an 800-900 page novel had to be read, digested and dissected in a 12-page paper for one tutorial, a hearty dose of textbook reading and another 12-pager for the other.

To add insult to pedagogical injury, the Oxford powers that be placed me in a flat two miles from the city center, complete with a front door that wouldn't shut, a dryer that wouldn't dry, a bathtub that leaked like a sieve, and outlets that refused to emit electricity.

But the biggest shock of all was my astonishingly bad luck in the roommate lottery.

The Kodak-worthy Oxford experience of my dreams was officially debunked.

In an effort to salvage my stay, I made time for daily Mass at my adopted parish, the Oxford Oratory, founded by none other than Blessed John Henry Newman and run by a community of priests known for their orthodoxy and expository preaching. Sunday Masses had been standing-room only, but weekdays proved far more intimate.

Before long, I had met a Dickensian group of 6:30 "dailies," which included, among others, a middle-aged Irish couple, two elderly Italian widows named Maria, one *mantilla*-wearing mom with six children, and a dapper old gent with a silver-plated cane. When "mantilla mom" invited me to a Lenten retreat at the parish center, I had unwittingly gained entrance to Oxford's underground Catholic community.

On the day of the retreat, I was greeted at the door by a middle-aged Englishwoman wearing five or six multicolored scarves and a large

black raincoat, hot to the touch from spring sunshine. She grabbed me a heaping plate of orange-flavored Jaffa cakes with one hand and pushed me toward the tea table with the other, exclaiming, "Darling, they've told me all about you! You're the American!"

All my 6:30 friends were in attendance, along with dozens of parishioners from every conceivable walk of life. Spaniards, Nigerians, Welshmen, Oxford dons, graduate students, college porters, waitresses etc. And to each one, the woman in the black raincoat announced, "Here she is, the little American girl! Let's all make her feel very welcome!"

After weeks of thwarted dreams, I had finally assimilated into a segment of Oxford society. Perhaps it was not the most typical segment, nor the most glamorous, but I'll be darned if it wasn't the most interesting. My new friends were a heterogeneous crowd, but all were firmly devoted to their faith in a decidedly irreligious setting — none more so than the English, who now fight a more toilsome battle against atheist neighbors than they had waged against centuries of Protestant persecution.

Suddenly, summer arrived in Oxford. Flowers fell out of window boxes and filled the city's many gardens. I trekked through Oxford's narrow streets, visiting Shelley's old stomping grounds and C.S. Lewis' favorite pub, The Eagle and Child. And I spent as much time as possible with the motley crew at the oratory, where, I discovered, a young student named Gerard Manley Hopkins had also attended daily Mass many years ago.

When the time came, I was sorry to leave. For those last weeks, I had loved living in Oxford. But I confess I didn't love learning there.

The following term, I returned to the Midwest a little more grateful and a little more humble. And I had Oxford to thank.

Erin O'Lunaigh is a senior at Hillsdale College. Her hometown is Cheshire, Connecticut.

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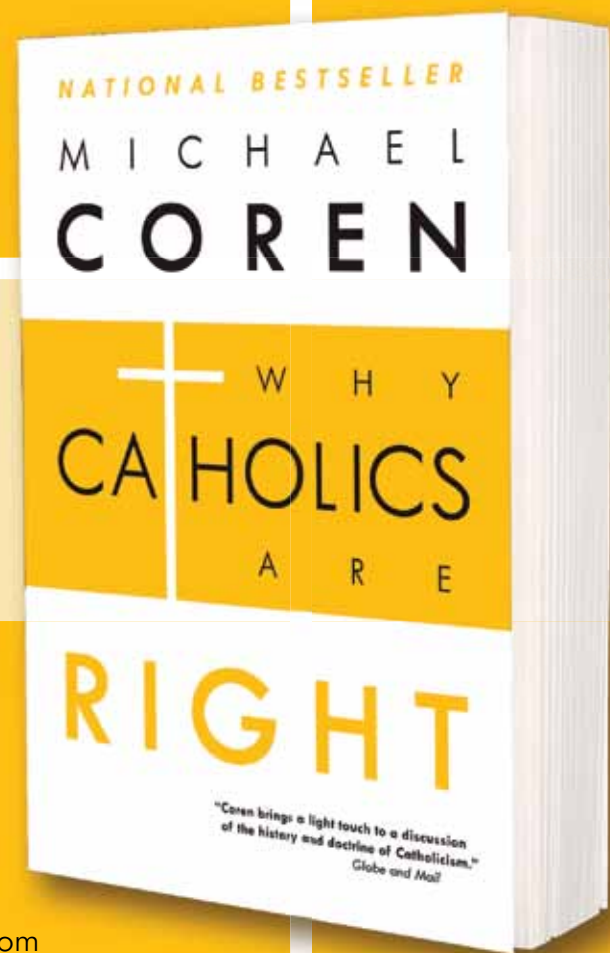
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College Seniors Network to Land Jobs

BY STEVE WEATHERBE

As Kayla Kermode began her senior year at Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, Calif., last fall, she planned to put off serious job hunting until her second semester. Then recruiters from Wellpoint, a health insurer, were sent to campus by an alumnus. Now Kermode has a job waiting for her at Wellpoint.

Classmate Nathan Dunlap has a similar story. He'll be working for Pixomondo, a computer-animation firm. He was hired by the friend of his brother, a TAC alumnus who has been mentoring him for several years.

These students are typical of many seniors and recent graduates of Catholic colleges who have gotten a boost into the workforce from networks of graduates — or from satisfied employers impressed by their predecessors.

"They were looking for someone analytic, with problem-solving skills," Kermode said. "They'd already interviewed at several business schools, and this alumnus said, 'Okay. Why don't we try Thomas Aquinas? After all, you are pleased with my work, aren't you?'" They were and did.

"Apparently, they want people who don't just look at the numbers, but who can step back and see the big picture," Kermode explained.

This is precisely what is taught at Thomas Aquinas and other schools devoted to the Great Books approach. Students study classical writings, and then they explain and critique the works.

Dunlap is confident the program will serve him well: "Studying the philosophers — and watching movies — makes me think that the best stories are based on a good understanding of what it is to be a human being."

Thomas Aquinas spokeswoman Anne Forsyth says the college's learning approach "gives our students an edge. They aren't prepared for any particular job, but their reasoning has been honed by four years being challenged to analyze and defend ideas. That's good training

for any job, and prospective employers know that."

About 10% of the school's grads go into the priesthood or religious life. Others go into the military, attend architecture or law schools, or pursue teaching, journalism, public-policy work and, lately, medicine.

John Paul the Great University in San Diego, which opened in 2004 with the mission to "Impact the Culture for Christ," is preparing students for the film industry and new media. The school offers undergrad specializations like video gaming, screenwriting and producing, as well as theology and New Evangelization; internships are procured with film companies such as Metanoia Films (maker of *Bella*). The school also offers master's degrees in business and biblical theology (see related stories in this section).

School spokeswoman Colleen Monroe, herself a recent grad, hopes for a career in costume design but expects she may have to create her own job. John Paul the Great stresses entrepreneurship. A film professor at the school has set an example by starting Yellow Line Studio, which produced a feature thriller, *Red Line*, in which many students, including Monroe, contributed.

Last year's graduating class includes a sister and a postulant with the Sisters of the Vineyard Chaldean Convent, who are helping to run an online TV station for Catholics in the Middle East; the owner of a start-up wedding videography company; a graphic artist making TV commercials; a Catholic blogger; a writer and story developer at Yellow Line Studio; the owner of a start-up brewery; and a "biomimicrist" who works at the San Diego Zoo studying animal behavior that could solve engineering problems.

Matt Salisbury started a motion-graphics company when he graduated in 2009. "We were inspired by *An Inconvenient Truth* and some of the spots being done for the Obama campaign, but we wanted to work for pro-life and Catholic organizations," Salisbury said. Now, seven JP the Great students and graduates

work part time for Creative Rhetoric.

"I was always entrepreneurial," Salisbury said. "But I'd probably be working for others if JP the Great hadn't forced me to take accounting and business planning."

At Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, a survey of 2010 grads revealed only 4% are jobless, with 85% employed full time, in religious life or attending graduate school.

Nancy Ronevich, the director of career services at Franciscan, said its students have a reputation for being good thinkers with a well-rounded education. Many teach or nurse in Catholic institutions and join diocesan or parish staffs. Others go into the armed forces or work for such government agencies as the FBI. Many also go on to law or medical school.

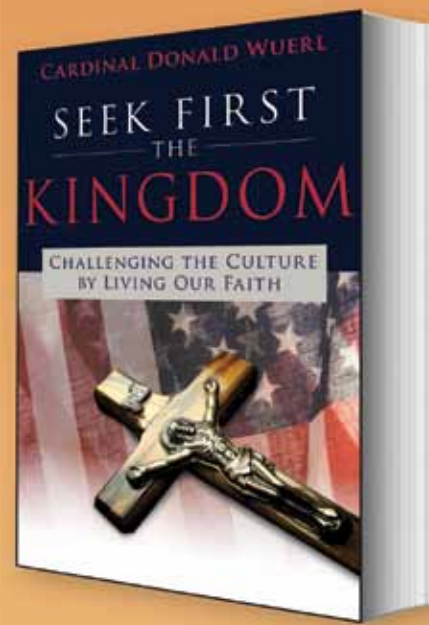
Informal networks of alumni provide job tips and mentor current students. Franciscan also offers a fraternity-like group of "households" that not only live and worship together when on campus, but provide an ongoing link between the school and alumni in the workplace.

The University of Dallas has educated five of Patrick Fagan's children. Fagan, the director of the Washington, D.C.-based Family Research Council, said that the university "provides preparation for life. If you come away with a good grade-point average, employers know you are bright and can work hard."

Fagan's son Thomas, UD '07, a stockbroker, says the largest grouping of Dallas grads outside of Texas is in the Washington, D.C., area, as he is; most work in government or public-policy jobs. He found his job through a friend.

His sister Margaret, '05, also found her teaching job at a Maryland Catholic school through a friend. Though UD has an education program, which she did not enter, what she did study "gave me a very structured perspective with the subjects all interwoven. It gave me a love of poetry and eye for beauty and a love of ideas."

Steve Weatherbe writes from Victoria, British Columbia.



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George Mason University School of Law

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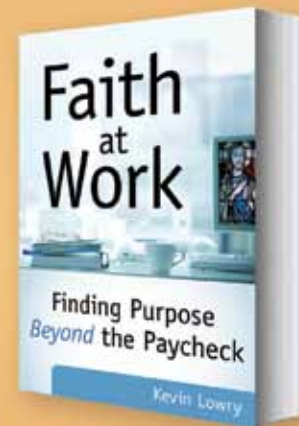
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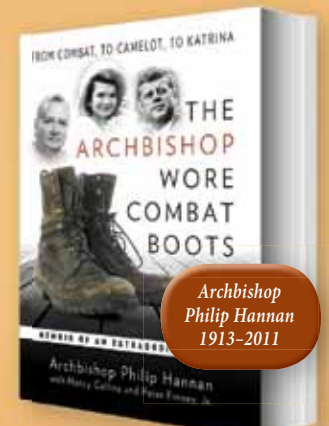
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Teens

Courses

CONTINUING PAGE C1 STORY

experience, students at the University of St. Thomas in Houston are also learning about creation through a course titled "Theology of Creation." That course has been offered annually since the spring of 2009 and is taught by Sister Damien Marie Savino of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, who chairs the environmental science and studies department.

"The course integrates science and theology, along with contemporary questions such as evolution and environmental issues, with the Catholic intellectual tradition and the teachings of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI," described Sister Damien.

The course was originally offered as a theology elective for students and a required course for environmental science and studies majors. Last year, the course became a "synthesis course" in theology.

Learning in Rome

While colleges have long had study-abroad programs, one extremely popular trend among Catholic colleges and universities is the option to study for a semester in the heart of the Church: Rome.

One of the more popular and extensive Rome experiences is offered by Christendom College. Juniors are encouraged to take four

courses in Rome either during their fall or spring semester. Among the courses studied while living in Rome are: "Italian 101," "Roman Perspectives," "Art & Architecture" and "Theology" ("Moral Theology" in the fall; "Apologetics" in the spring).

"The classes are right there in Rome, near St. Peter's, at the Istituto Maria SS Bambina," said Sarah Federico, of Corydon, Ky., who studied in Rome this past fall. "We have to cross St. Peter's Square to get to class each day."

"Seeing all of the people attending papal audiences and hearing all the languages spoken there opens your mind to the history and the universality of the Church," she said. "We saw St. Peter's bones and went into the catacombs. Catholicism is everywhere, and learning there made the early Church come alive."

"No other school can boast such a convenient location," said professor John Noronha, who directs the program and has taught moral theology, art and architecture, and apologetics for the past two years. "Living so close to St. Peter's and seeing the Pope with such frequency creates a special bond between our students and the person of the Holy Father."

Art and Architecture

Elizabeth Lev often teaches the "Art & Architecture" course, providing tours of architecture and related arts, from classical antiquity through the Baroque age, exhibited in the monuments and masterpieces of

Rome and Florence.

In addition to studying in Rome and Florence, the program includes visits to Siena and a retreat in Assisi. Students are also able to participate in optional trips to sacred cities such as Orvieto and Subiaco.

Professor Noronha said that student highlights have included "audiences with the Pope, visits to pontifical academies and congregations of the Roman Curia, special Masses and meals with cardinals and ecclesiastical leaders, participating in the Lenten Station churches' tradition, and walking the ground on which the saints and Fathers of the Church once walked."

Making It Practical

If there's a common complaint about college courses, it's that they are often too theoretical and less practical. One course, offered by John Paul the Great University in San Diego, flies in the face of that criticism. It is the university's "LaunchPad" course.

"LaunchPad was originally designed to encourage students to launch a business of their own and get them to start an endeavor before they graduated," said Dominic Iocco, professor and provost at the university.

The course is taken during students' junior and senior year. Iocco described it as "not your typical 'sit in the classroom'" course.

Iocco described some of the projects that students have launched.

"Students have done all sorts of different things, from creating a design firm to a full-service laundry business and a brewery. One group of students worked on a Web video series; another is working on creating a video catechism."

One impressive outcome of LaunchPad is the work of graduate Tara Stone. Her project was creating the feature-length motion picture *Red Line*. The film is a contained-space thriller about a group of survivors trapped in a subway tunnel after it has collapsed.

Stone, originally from Monument, Colo., wrote a series of short scripts during her junior year in LaunchPad. By the end of her junior year, she proposed writing a feature-length script. She completed the script during the first quarter of her senior year. By the second quarter, the film was in production, and during the third quarter, it was in post-production.

Under the direction of Hollywood professionals, interested John Paul the Great students learn about camera operation, lighting, costuming, makeup and production.

"Even in the best film schools, students don't get this kind of opportunity," said Stone. "Certainly, there's no other Catholic college allowing you to work on a feature film."

Red Line is currently being submitted to film festivals, with the hope of premiering it at the Tribeca Film Festival in April. Stone is actively seeking marketing and a distributor for the movie.

Second Chance Project

Sometimes the practical opportunities come via student clubs closely associated with degree programs. At Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan., members of Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) were nationally recognized for their work in designing the Second Chance Project, an effort to reduce the rate of recidivism in the state of Kansas.

With guidance from Dave Geens, director of the School of Business at Benedictine, graduate Jordan Neville and others taught entrepreneurship classes to inmates at Lansing State Correctional Facility in order to help ex-offenders find gainful employment or start their own businesses upon release. The SIFE team also developed an outplacement program designed to help inmates find jobs after release.

Catholic Twist

Even when it comes to more traditional courses, Catholic universities often offer them in ways not found with their secular contemporaries. The faith and Catholic teaching can be brought into practically every imaginable course.

Walsh University in Canton, Ohio, offers a "Catholic Short Stories" course through its theology department. The course, which has been offered for the past two years, explores Catholic thought and practice, as expressed through short stories; in particular, in the work of Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor.

"We start with the original short story, Genesis 2 and 3, to frame the class," described professor Matthew Powell. "Nearly every story in the Judeo-Christian tradition will reflect that story at some time."

Powell describes that as students read Graham Greene's story *The Second Death*, they begin to see the connections between the story and Scripture, and then they discover

how powerful a story is.

"It really impacts students this age, who are often struggling with their faith," said Powell. "Many Catholic students are worried that they're doing something wrong because they're struggling with their faith. They come to find their faith and make it their own."

At Christendom College, Adam Schwartz teaches a popular course on "The Catholic Literary Revival." The course examines the literary revival of orthodox Catholicism in modern Britain in a wide variety of genres, including fiction, fantasy, literature, poetry, history and social criticism by authors such as G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, David Jones, Christopher Dawson, J.R.R. Tolkien, as well as Anglo-Catholic writers such as T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers.

Sometimes undergraduates are given opportunities only available to graduate students. That's the case for architecture majors in The Catholic University of America's sacred space and cultural studies concentration within the School of Architecture and Planning.

One of the courses, taught by Julio Bermudez, associate professor and director of the sacred space and cultural studies concentration, is "Sacred Space Studio," a graduate-level course that brings in world-class architects to work with students. This year, they brought in Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa as a professor in residence. Last year, they hosted architect Craig Hartman.

"Students explore how to use architecture to help others in their search for God," said Bermudez. "Students explore the importance of religion in daily life and how the spiritual realm relates to the physical. Certainly this is something you can't find in other schools of architecture."

While the studio is generally only for graduate-level students, this fall nearly half the students were undergraduates who were allowed to take part.

Human Embryology

Then there are classes that are so imbued with Catholicism that one can't imagine them being taught anywhere else. That's the case with the enormously popular "Human Embryology" course at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio. The course has been taught since the 1980s by now semi-retired professor Edwin Bessler, a zoologist by training.

"I was inspired to create the course after attending an Operation Rescue prayer chain in Pittsburgh," said Bessler. "The intensity of good and evil was so great that two words ran through my head: 'Teach them.' That's how the course and Franciscan's human-life minor came into being."

The course has been so popular that even with two sections of it offered each fall and spring, Bessler still has a waiting list.

Why is it so popular? "Schools do a great job training everyone for occupations such as accountant and dentist, nurse and lawyer, but do a lousy job preparing people for the most common vocation of marriage and family," said Bessler. "Students take this course because they crave to change the world and this course touches on fundamental issues."

Bessler opens each class with a prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the unborn. The course covers the events from fertilization to birth, all through a Catholic lens. The course examines all the issues relating to fertility and conception and the bioethical issues such as contraception, in vitro fertilization and abortion.

According to the "Biology 203" course description, "special attention is given to the event of fertilization, the first eight weeks of development, development and function of the placenta, fetal circulation, the hormonal control of ovulation and pregnancy, parturition, anomalies of development and infertility." The course can be used as part of the science core.

Nursing major Kimberly Doudna, of Fairbanks, Alaska, said that the course appeals to students of every major.

"It's known as one of the classes you want to take and you know you're not going to get it anywhere else," said Doudna. "Professor Bessler provides clear, factual data along with many examples, stories and anecdotes."

Asked how it might differ from a similar course offered at a secular school, Doudna said that the course's focus is on "protecting the dignity of human life from the first moment of conception."

"I work in the Catholic teachings, no matter the topic," said Bessler.

Describing one image he shares with students, Bessler says he had an artist create an image "of Jesus in the consecrated Host next to a human person in a fertilized egg and the words 'Hidden Yet Present.'"

"A fertilized egg doesn't look like us, just as a consecrated Host doesn't look like Jesus, yet it is," he explained.

Bessler said the highlight of his career was found on the final exam of a female student who had attended Catholic schools all her life. "On her final exam, she wrote: 'I came to this course pro-choice. I'm leaving being pro-life.'"

Truthful View

Whether it's literature, leadership, biology, architecture or business, the distinct offerings of Catholic colleges and universities demonstrate that faith and the Church touch on all subjects.

"Often families choose faithful Catholic colleges because of the spiritual life and campus culture, but these colleges are just as unique in the classroom," said Patrick Reilly, founder and president of the Manassas, Va.-based Cardinal Newman Society. "When they claim fidelity to Catholic teaching, it's not just a matter for theology, but promises a truthful view of man and the world, informing every topic from scientific development and historical relevance to business strategy and literary criticism."

"In an increasingly secular culture, I don't think there is a single college subject that could be taught in a truly 'neutral' way," added Reilly. "It either embraces popular assumptions about what is important to man or it looks to an ultimate purpose informed by Christianity, which only a Catholic college — and only a *faithfully* Catholic college — can do with integrity."

Tim Drake is based in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

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New Evangelization Draws Students to New Colleges

Catholic Identity Surmounts Tough Economic Times

BY JOSEPH PRONECHEN
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

The economy might be experiencing one of its worst times, but Catholic colleges seem to be experiencing their best times, all things considered, because of their commitment to Catholic identity.

The Augustine Institute in Denver, which offers graduate degrees on campus and through distance education, saw record enrollment this past year. "One big draw for us is our program," said Edward Sri, provost and professor of Scripture and theology. "Particularly, our distance-education program is booming."

The distance program was launched in 2008, and by fall 2011, it had more than 200 students. Students like how the DVD format makes them feel part of a live class, plus the flexibility of the program means they can "maintain their work and revenue and responsibilities on the home front with their families and still work on their master's degree," Sri said.

Additionally, the institute's graduate program is competitively priced at \$365 per credit hour.

Students also "know the school stands out for being completely faithful to the magisterium and teachers dedicated to the New Evangelization," said Sri. "That's the point we hear the most from students, in addition to the high-quality video of the distance program."

Ave Maria University officially opened its Florida campus in 2003. Jim Towey's appointment as president and CEO of Ave Maria early in 2011 was followed by the arrival in September of the largest incoming class in Ave Maria's history.

Enrollment jumped 22% from the previous year, and the school is already looking at a 35% increase from 2011, according to Towey.

Ave Maria's uniqueness is what Towey attributes to the record numbers. "It stands as a place where excellence, affordability and Catholic values meet in full measure," he said via email.

The school benefits from the generosity of the university's founder, Thomas Monaghan, and many donors. And with generous scholarships, the net cost of tuition and fees is remarkably competitive — "even more impressive when one considers that the campus is only a few years old and offers state-of-the-art facilities," the president observed.

Another essential draw is how "the university respects the values instilled at home by the parents of our students. Ave Maria University seeks the advancement of human culture, the promotion of dialogue between faith and reason, the formation of men and women in the intellectual and moral virtues of the Catholic faith, and the development of professional and pre-professional programs in response to local and societal needs."

Enrollment is growing elsewhere, too.

"Our enrollment is definitely growing," said Derry Connolly, president of John Paul the Great Catholic University in San Diego.

"We have a compelling program that people want," he said. The media focus is especially appealing to students (see story on CD). In addition, there's the recent biblical theology graduate program, which is offered online as well as on campus. Since the online biblical master's degree began in the fall of 2009, the enrollment has risen to 45.

Tuition plays its part, too, in the college's appeal. The president said it is still significantly less than at big Catholic schools: "That works out well for us."

The College of Saint Mary Magdalen in Warner, N.H., draws people for unique reasons, according to Tim Van Damm, vice president of advancement and admissions.

Not only does the college thrive because of its rigorous Great Books liberal arts education — this is the only college in the country that grants the apostolic catechetical diploma for undergraduates on behalf of the Holy See. The college also includes two years of art and music as part of its program, which appeals to many students.

Another draw is the college's rebirth. "We're in a period of re-founding and looking to grow the school significantly over the next couple of



CHRIST-CENTERED. The University of Mary, whose chapel is shown here, has seen enrollment rise in recent years, as have other Catholic schools. Courtesy of University of Mary

years," Van Damm said. "In the last year we have a new president, name and vision. For students, this is an exciting time, a rebirth of the college."

And tuition is also key. "We intentionally kept our tuition low," Van Damm said, "so we can make a world-class education affordable for families sacrificing to enable their sons and daughters to go to an academically serious place where their faith is going to be encouraged and built up."

At Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy in Ontario, Canada, enrollment is growing slowly but surely, according to senior development officer Maria Reilander. The student body is 10% American.

"Our students are drawn by our tuition, the Catholicity, orthodoxy and spiritual environment, and the safe atmosphere," she said. "The students really appreciate the simpler life here." The "simpler life" includes a small-town atmosphere.

Although the school relies a lot on donor support, low tuition is a draw for students. Tuition is \$5,950 Canadian for the year — \$11,000 with room and board. As Reilander said, "That's a big reason why we're still on peoples' radars."

At Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, Calif., the average enrollment continues to grow, too, with 370 students, a 20% increase, for next year.

"The idea of a serious Catholic liberal arts education using the Great Books and involving students in an active way in their education continues to hold an attraction for a significant number of people," said Michael McLean, president of Thomas Aquinas.

McLean described how the school's two-week summer program for 120 high-school students has proven to be an excellent pipeline to enrollment. Close to 50% who attend go on to apply for admission to the college.

Even in these difficult economic times, donors remain generous. "Thanks be to God we've been able to raise scholarship funds sufficient to provide financial assistance to deserving students and families," McLean said, "so we're able to make our education very affordable in these times. Our tuition and room-and-board rates compare favorably with schools in our category."

In Merrimack, N.H., The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts freshman class has grown by 25% in each of the past two years.

"We are on track to continue this growth rate in fall 2012," said Charlie McKinney, vice president for institutional advancement.

The school notes several reasons for this growth. First, the college has a low student-to-faculty ratio and a strong academic program.

Second, a variety of programs allow students to augment their studies in meaningful ways, such as through the Guild Program, which trains them in woodworking, art, baking and music, or through internship programs in areas like law, business, publishing and politics. Also, this is the only college that sends every student to Rome

for a full semester at no extra cost.

McKinney observed that when families are pinched financially, they begin to look hard at the return on their investment, concluding: "At a fraction of the cost of major universities, they find in Thomas More College the benefits of attending a small Great Books college along with the opportunities normally associated with larger institutions."

Wyoming Catholic College in Lander, Wyo., is also meeting the challenges for many of the same reasons. Mark Randall, vice president for institutional advancement, believes it has two distinct advantages as a smaller, newer college.

First, a smaller budget and less administrative bureaucracy allow the college to be quite nimble reacting to the economic situation. Second, the college has a nationwide base of benefactors very keen on seeing it succeed as a start-up college. One donor recently told him, "We've seen the great things small Catholic liberal arts institutions like Thomas Aquinas College can do. We want to give Wyoming Catholic College the same chance."

Now in its fifth year, Wyoming Catholic has done quite well drawing students to the school because of its mission and liberal arts degree.

"Moreover, they are attracted to our Outdoor Leadership Program [see accompanying story in this section], something that no other college in the U.S. provides," he said. "And they appreciate that their Catholic faith is not going to be undermined here, but, rather, enriched and appreciated."

While the University of Mary in Bismarck, N.D., is not new, it has new qualities and vision that are meeting the challenges of the times.

"We're the most affordable Catholic college and university in the country, as far as we know," underlined Father James Shea, the president, about the \$13,000-per-year price. "Here you get a world-class education that's affordable."

"Serious Catholic families are looking for a good place where their students can get a quality education in a values-based Catholic environment and where they can be confident in the safety and security of their students," he said. Bismarck ranks as one of the country's safest cities.

After he became president in 2009, Father Shea rolled out the Catholic Scholars Program, where graduates of a Catholic high school anywhere in the country receive free room and board, courtesy of donors.

"The reason we do that is we're trying to build a real culture on the campus which is amenable to the things of faith," Father Shea explained.

As the new president, he has steered the school to a stronger Catholic identity. Attendance at daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, confession and Bible study are increasing, as is enrollment.

"It's an answer to prayer," he said. "God has been really good to us."

Joseph Pronechen writes from Trumbull, Connecticut.

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