

Embracing the Mission: Catholic and Non-Catholic Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Institutional Mission and School Sense of Community

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Abstract

This study compared the perceptions of the mission identity and mission-driven campus activities of faculty ($n = 305$) and staff ($n = 584$) at a large urban Catholic university. Moreover, it compared employees who were self-identified as Catholic ($n = 375$), Christian ($n = 204$), other faiths ($n = 161$), or no religious preference ($n = 159$). Multivariate analysis (controlling for social desirability responding) indicated a main effect for religious preference. Roman Catholic employees, more than employees from the other three categories, believed that the institution's mission-driven activities, reflecting the characteristics of the patron saint of the university and offering faith-formation opportunities, are important programs and initiatives. Implications suggest that Catholic universities may be settings for Catholic and non-Catholic faculty and staff, enabling support of the institution's mission, varied programs, and identity.

Mission statements transform long-term institutional goals into concrete action by explicitly defining purpose and unifying staff behavior.¹ Clear and meaningful mission statements support institution performance² and staff efficacy,³ as well as profit and net

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¹ Ira M. Levin, "Vision revisited: Telling the story of the future," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 36 (2000): 91-107.

² Zachary Scheaffer, et al., "Mission Statement and Performance: An Evidence of 'Coming of Age'," *Organizational Development Journal* 26.2 (2008): 49-62.

³ Shelley A. Kirkpatrick and Edwin A. Locke, "Direct and indirect effects of three core charismatic leadership components on performance and attitudes," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 81 (1996): 36-51.

worth.⁴ Schools which have administrators and faculty who embrace their institution's mission produce students who support key values like honesty, generosity, and compassion;⁵ these schools also report higher school performance.⁶ Accordingly, staff and faculty hold a pivotal role in sustaining the spirit and identity of a university.

Some faith-based, higher education settings proposed priority hiring for individuals that explicitly embrace their mission, known as *hiring for mission*, in an effort to promote their institution's mission, vision, and values.⁷ Because religious institutions have mission statements that reflect the complex values and objectives inherent in faith-based organizations,⁸ this practice may include hiring policies that explicitly promote hiring individuals within that institution's faith.

In an effort to examine the merits of *hiring for mission* within religious institutions of higher education, Sullins⁹ compared 1290 Catholic and non-Catholic faculty from more than 100 Catholic colleges and universities. Sullins found that Catholic faculty were more supportive of their school's Catholic identity than non-Catholic faculty, and schools with a majority-Catholic faculty were more supportive of their Catholic identity than those schools without a Catholic majority.

However, Sullins did not explore the nature of the mission statements that might promote acceptance by faculty. That is, it is possible that Catholic institutions embrace diversity of faiths among faculty, staff, students, and all constituents. Also, his work focused on faculty only, without examining how other employees at Catholic institutions (e.g., staff) might embrace the mission. In short, much remains unknown about support for the complex factors of faith-based missions by faculty

⁴ J. Robert Baume, et al., "A longitudinal study of the relation of vision and vision communication to venture growth in entrepreneurial firms," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 83 (1999): 43-54.

⁵ James H. Davis, et al., "Mission possible: Do school mission statements work?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 70 (2007): 99-110.

⁶ Janet A. Weiss and Sandy Kristin Piderit, "The Value of Mission Statements in Public Agencies," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9 (1999): 193-224.

⁷ Patricia T. van der Vorm, "The Well-Tempered Search: Hiring Faculty and Administrators for Mission," *Academe* 87 (2001): 34-36.

⁸ Chris Bart, "A comparative analysis of mission statement content in secular and faith-based hospitals," *Journal of Intellectual Capital* 8 (2007): 682-694, and Sarah Bonewits Feldner, "Living our mission: A study of university mission building," *Communication Studies* 57 (2006): 67-85.

⁹ D. Paul Sullins, "The difference Catholic makes: Catholic faculty and Catholic identity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (2004): 83-101.

and staff of varying religious affiliation. The present study examined the relationship between religious affiliations (e.g., Catholic vs. Christian vs. other faiths) among both faculty and staff, utilizing Ferrari and Velcoff's¹⁰ *DePaul Mission and Values (DMV)* instrument. The *DMV* allowed us to explore the mission identity and mission-driven activities of a faith-based, Catholic, urban university using a psychometrically sound inventory appropriate for staff and faculty's perceptions. In the present study, we focused on DePaul University.

DePaul's Mission Statement

DePaul University is a private, teaching university with more than 23,000 students educated at several metropolitan campuses in the Chicago area (see Filkins and Ferrari for details)¹¹. The university's benchmark characteristic is that it is an "*urban, Catholic, and Vincentian*" institution which expresses its vision through the values inherent in these concepts. The *urban* mission and values of the university are expressed by delivering quality education to locations in, and immediately around, the city of Chicago. The university states that it expresses its *Catholic* mission and values by direct service to the poor and economically disenfranchised through programs such as student engagement in volunteer and community service directed at impoverished communities.¹² Murphy¹³ noted that although it is a Roman Catholic school of higher education like other institutions, DePaul University invoked *Vincentianism* (referring to the namesake of the school, Saint Vincent DePaul) through respect for human dignity, diversity, and individual "personalism" (see also Sullivan [12]).

In the present study we focused on gaining a more complete understanding of institutional perceptions and a sense of community among faculty and staff of different religious affiliations, extending the work by Sullins.

¹⁰ Joseph R. Ferrari and Jessica Velcoff, "Measuring staff perceptions of university identity and activities: The mission and values inventory," *Christian Higher Education* 5 (2006): 243-261.

¹¹ Joseph W. Filkins and Joseph R. Ferrari, "The DePaul Mission and Values Projects," in *Assessing Character Outcome in College*, ed. T.R. Dalton, S. Russell and Kline (New Jersey: Jossey-Bass, Inc, 2004), 81-91.

¹² Louise Sullivan, *The Core Values of Vincentian Education* (Niagara, NY: Niagara University Press, 1997).

¹³ J. Patrick Murphy, *Visions and Values in Catholic Higher Education* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1991).

Method

Participants

A total of 305 faculty and 596 staff (33.4% personnel compliance) actually completed the on-line survey. All university employees were affiliated with a medium sized, faith-based, urban Midwestern university serving over 23,000 students across three main campuses located in and around Chicago, IL.

For the Faculty sample (270 men, 135 women; M age = 45.7 years old, $SD = 10.21$), participants worked at campus sites located in the downtown, urban center of the city ($n = 129$), in a metropolitan sector of the city ($n = 1157$), or a suburb of the city ($n = 19$). These faculty members typically self-identified as Caucasian (79.9%), and either Roman Catholic (33.4%) or Christian (26.2%); they had been employed at DePaul an average of 8.4 years ($SD = 7.9$), and most were either tenured (33.3%, $n = 102$) or part-time adjuncts (30.5%, $n = 93$), as opposed to tenure-track (19.7%, $n = 60$) or full-time visiting faculty (18.1%, $n = 49$).

For the sample of Staff (394 women, 190 men; M age = 38.6 years old, $SD = 11.3$), participants worked at campus sites located in the downtown, urban center ($n = 353$), the metropolitan sector ($n = 132$), or the suburbs ($n = 54$). Staff participants typically self-identified as Caucasian (71.3%) and Roman Catholic (53.4%); had been employed at DePaul an average of 6.2 years ($SD = 5.7$) in such administrative settings as student services (45.3%), facilities and operations (8.9%), advancement and procedures (16.3%), or administrative and information services (28.6%).

In addition, we categorized participants into one of four self-reported religious preferences. There were 375 participants (273 Staff, 102 Faculty) who self-identified as *Roman Catholic*, and 204 participants (124 Staff, 80 Faculty) who described themselves as *Christian/Non-Catholic*. Also, there were 161 participants (88 Staff, 73 Faculty) who identified themselves as *Non-Christian/Other faith* individuals, and 159 participants (109 Staff, 50 Faculty) who self-reported as *Non-practicing faith* individuals.

Psychometric Scales

All participants were administered Ferrari and Velcoff's *DePaul Mission and Values (DMV)* instrument, a 39-item survey divided into two sections believed to be reflective of mission statements among

contemporary urban, faith-based (Catholic) higher education institutions. One section contained questions, rated along 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*), based on the university's benchmark institutional identity. Ten items assessed whether or not respondents perceived the university as *inclusive and innovative*; that is, the institution is inclusive of persons from all backgrounds, innovative in operational procedures, takes risks in an entrepreneurial way, pragmatic in educational focus, remains relevant in a changing society, keeps its urban identity, and fosters mutual understanding and respect for others. The other six items reflected the *Catholic pluralism* aspects of the mission relating to the university's goal of inviting all faiths to examine Catholicism and other faiths, providing curricula on Catholicism and other faiths, offering ministry and programs for Catholicism and other faiths, while expressing its primary religious heritage. With the present sample, coefficient alphas were acceptable for the institution as innovative and inclusive (0.855) and Catholic pluralism (0.818) subscales.

The second section of the *DMV* inventory included twenty-three items, each rated along a 4-point scale (1 = *not at all important*; 4 = *very important*), on the relevance of a set of *mission-driven activities* supporting the values and vision of the school in each of three benchmark areas. The *urban and global engagement opportunities* subscale included eight questions that reflected the importance of supporting the mission of the surrounding urban area (e.g., service learning programs) and global social engagement activities (e.g., study abroad and having international campus sites and students; coefficient alpha = 0.879). The *institution's religious heritage* subscale included nine questions on the importance of a set of specific activities held at the university (e.g., heritage grants for students, annual on-campus Catholic lecture series for faculty and staff, and overseas trips to visit the formative places in Europe experienced by the patron saint). With the present sample, the overall coefficient alpha was 0.902. Finally, the *Catholic and other faith-formation opportunities* subscale included six questions reflecting the importance of faith-based activities, such as Catholic and interfaith worship services, religious education and spiritual programs, and sacramental and other faith worship opportunities. With the present sample, the overall coefficient alpha was 0.879.

All participants completed parts of Royal and Rossi's¹⁴ *School Sense of Community* (SSOC) scale, a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). This measure is divided into three

¹⁴ Mark A. Royal and Robert J. Rossi, "Predictors of within-school differences in teachers' sense of community," *Journal of Educational Research* 92.5 (1999): 259-266.

subscales; however, for the present study we only included the thirty items focusing on the relationships among participants and *coworkers*, and the twenty-one items examining the employee's relationship with university *administrators and officials* (we omitted the subscale devoted to teacher-student relationships). With the present sample, the overall coefficient alpha on the SSOC/coworker subscale was 0.822 and on the SSOC/administration subscale was 0.797. Royal and Rossi¹⁵ found scores on their *SSOC* subscales were predicted most accurately by indices on perceived support by the administration for innovative activities in and out of the class, and by the number of available school-related activities present at their institution.

In addition, all participants completed Reynold's revised *Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale—Form C*,¹⁶ a 13-item true/false one-dimensional measure assessing a respondent's global tendency to give socially appropriate responses. This new self-report inventory, designed to measure employee perceptions, is a revision of the original 33-item Marlowe-Crowne Scale, and the short Form C used in the present study has strong reliability and validity (see Reynolds¹⁷). With the present sample, the overall coefficient alpha was 0.768.

Procedure

All faculty (i.e., tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure track) and staff (full and part-time) at the present university were requested to complete on-line (in counterbalanced order) the *DMV* inventory, the *SSOC* scale, and the social desirability measure, over a period of six weeks. When this survey was conducted, the present institution had about 700 faculty from the varied colleges and schools, and approximately 2,000 eligible staff involved in overall academic, student, or business affairs of the university. All information was confidential and recorded anonymously by a research associate in an Institutional Research office. As an incentive to complete these items, participants' names were entered in raffles for free I-Pods, CDs, and Amazon book gift certificates. It should be noted that there was no overall sense of reactance or negative feedback in completing the measure.

¹⁵ Mark A Royal, "Predictors of within-school," 259-266.

¹⁶ William M. Reynolds, "Development of reliable and short forms of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 38 (1982): 119-125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Results

Preliminary Analysis

We first explored whether there were significant differences between faculty and staff in their self-reported social desirability responses. Staff, compared to faculty, reported significantly higher social desirability tendencies, $t(890) = 2.58, p < .01$. We then conducted further analyses separately for faculty and for staff. Next, we performed *zero-order correlates* between scores on the *DMV* scale and *SSOC* measure with social desirability, separately for faculty and staff. Social desirability was significantly related to mission identity inclusion and innovation for faculty ($r = 0.220, p < .001$) and for staff ($r = 0.244, p < .001$). For staff only, social desirability was significantly related to *SSOC*/coworkers ($r = 0.164, p < .001$) and *SSOC*/administration ($r = 0.160, p < .001$). Therefore, we entered social desirability scores as a covariate in all further analysis.

Multivariate Analysis

We conducted a 2 (status: faculty vs. staff) by 4 (religious group: Catholic vs. Christian vs. other faith vs. nonreligious) *MANCOVA*, with social desirability as covariate, on self-reported *DMV* and *SSOC* scores (see Table 1 for all mean scores). Results indicated only a significant multivariate effect for religious group, Wilks' Lambda = .833, $F(21, 1855) = 5.824, p < .001$. Uni-variate analysis indicated significant differences on two of the *DMV* subscales, namely: programs reflecting the patron saint of the institution, $F(3, 652) = 6.04, p < .0001$, and faith-formation program opportunities, $F(3, 652) = 28.51, p < .0001$. There were no significant main or interaction effects by employment status or religious group on either *DMV* institutional identity subscales or *SSOC* with coworker or administration subscales.

Discussion

This study compared support for a large, urban, Catholic university's mission and values among staff and faculty of varying religious affiliations (Catholic, non-Catholic/Christian, non-Christian, and non-religious). We found that Catholic employees believed that activities reflecting the patron saint for the school (Saint Vincent DePaul) and

Table 1. Mean Scores on Institutional Mission and School Sense of Community Scales By Religious Identity Groups¹⁸

	Roman Catholic (<i>n</i> = 375)	Christian/ Non-Catholic (<i>n</i> = 204)	Other Faith (<i>n</i> = 161)	No Religion (<i>n</i> = 159)
<i>DePaul Mission & Values:</i>				
institution is innovative & inclusive	57.19 (9.16)	57.67 (9.60)	57.72 (8.58)	55.48 (10.31)
Catholic pluralism	33.68 (6.18)	34.02 (5.24)	33.16 (5.01)	32.95 (5.86)
global/urban engagement activities	25.94 (4.83)	26.04 (4.97)	26.81 (5.14)	25.89 (5.23)
Catholic patron saint activities	26.65 (5.71)	25.47 (6.32)	24.67 (6.63)	23.85 (6.79)
faith-formation activities	17.43 (4.57)	14.50 (4.55)	14.12 (5.27)	12.69 (5.02)
<i>School Sense of Community:</i>				
relationship with coworkers	106.01 (9.88)	105.44 (13.11)	105.35 (10.66)	102.96 (14.17)
relationship with administration	72.63 (9.31)	72.75 (10.39)	72.84 (9.47)	70.07 (10.69)

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the *DMV* and *SSOC* subscales for each of the four religious groups. *Post hoc comparisons* (Newman-Keuls, $p < .05$) were performed on both *DMV* subscales reflecting the mission-driven activities. As noted by the table, Roman Catholic employees believed that the institution's mission-driven activities reflecting the patron saint of the university and faith-formation opportunities were more important programs and initiatives than did employees from the other three categories.

activities promoting faith-formation were more important than did employees from all other groups. These results partially confirm Sullins' finding that Catholic faculty were more likely to support a Catholic identity than were non-Catholic faculty.

However, each religious category showed indistinguishable support for the pluralistic, inclusive, and innovative nature of this school's identity, as well as for its global/urban engagement activities. Arguably, the *Catholic pluralism* and *innovative & inclusive* subscales reflect the core values of this university's identity and this identity is undoubtedly Catholic.¹⁹ These minor differences witnessed among faculty and staff of

¹⁸ Note: Value in parenthesis is standard deviation. Subscripts with different letters are significantly different (Newman-Keuls, $p < .05$).

¹⁹ Example items from the *Catholic pluralism* subscale include: "I support DePaul's current approach to expressing its Catholic identity" and "I believe that DePaul invites all inquirers to freely examine Catholicism, other faith traditions and other secular values systems in light of their respective contributions to the human enterprise."

varying religious affiliation do not easily conform to a strict separation in which non-Catholic individuals support its secular identity or Catholic individuals support its religious identity. The differences appear more nuanced. While faculty and staff showed equal support for the identity, they differed in their level of support for the expression of this identity through mission-driven activities. There are innumerable reasons for such differences. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to distinguish these claims, we believe it is vitally important that such nuances be explored more thoroughly in future research.

For some institutions, the intent of *hiring for mission* is to increase support for the institution's Catholic identity by giving preferential treatment to Catholic faculty and staff candidates in the hiring process; this is based on a premise that Catholic faculty and staff are more supportive of a Catholic mission. The present study examined one Catholic institution, and found that such a relationship may not always be true. Therefore, the main implication of these findings is that hiring Catholic faculty and staff in Catholic institutions may not always elicit the desired result of increased support for an institution's Catholic identity. More research is required to identify ways in which *hiring for mission* may bring about the desired outcome.

Finally, staff and faculty also showed equal support for sense of community with administrators and coworkers. Sense of community among administrators and coworkers predicted many diverse aspects of institutional interaction, such as administrator responsiveness to staff concerns, coworker willingness to help, and school service response to employee needs.²⁰ This outcome provides further evidence that a strong community can be developed among individuals of all faiths working within Catholic institutions.

The present study, of course, had limitations. All data were collected at a single university, located in an urban setting, and with a large student body. It is unclear whether or not the present results would replicate in Catholic institutions that are different in profile. The diverse nature of missions within Catholic and other faith-based institutions makes assessing and understanding the relationship between religious affiliation and institutional support more complicated. Just as religious affiliation might positively or negatively influence support for a Catholic

²⁰ Mark A. Royal and Robert J. Rossi, "Individual level correlates of sense of community: Findings from workplace and school," *Journal of Community Psychology* 24 (1996): 395-416.

identity, the nature of that specific institution's Catholic identity could influence unequal support from staff and faculty of different religious affiliations. A future study would include a larger sample that contains staff and faculty from multiple Catholic universities and a psychometrically sound instrument that is tailored to each university's unique mission and identity. Also, support for an institution's mission and identity can be operationalized by researchers and embodied by stakeholders in many different ways.

We provided perspectives of faculty and staff by assessing their attitudes (i.e., agreement or disagreement) towards this institution's mission identity and mission-driven activities. Further examination may benefit from collecting behavioral data from faculty and staff that assesses tangible support (e.g., attendance) of mission-driven activities. Related, the measure of institutional mission identity and mission-driven activities (the *DMV*) has yet to be generalized for broader use or adapted for other specific schools. Unfortunately, few other published measures exist for Catholic higher education institutions that might explore the complex dimensions of faith-based mission statements. Concern was voiced by another author²¹ over the deficit in—and lack of utilization of—such measures and how, without such tools, only anecdotal evidence gathered on staff and faculty of diverse religious affiliations may be assessed.

Consequently, we believe that accurately evaluating the merits of *hiring for mission* within Catholic institutions will require much more extensive research. The psychometric properties of the *DMV* and other similar measures must be evaluated within and among institutions. The present study demonstrated that, while there are clearly some differences in support among employees of varying religions, all groups may be equally supportive toward many dimensions of an institution's mission and values. Such assessments have implications for the sense of community among the varied stakeholders of the institution. Similar examinations must be continued at other religious institutions of higher education, and a more detailed analysis of the influence *hiring for mission* might have on the campus community (including students) is necessary.

²¹ Louise Sullivan, "Catholic Higher Education—a Review Article," *The Heythrop Journal* 49.5 (2008): 860-867.