

Higher Education and the Lasallian Mission in an Age of Inequality

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The Idea of a Free Market

A “market” is a place of buying and selling; but a market is not so much a geospatial location as it is a set of relationships between individuals and their decisions regarding which products to produce or purchase, careers to pursue, or companies to start, build, or sell. These relationships are characterized by the exchange of goods or services, the medium of which is, usually, money. The phrase “free market” typically refers to a market that is not regulated by some non-market force or mechanism, such as a government or a monopoly.

The operation of a free market is determined by supply and demand. Producers develop and offer goods to match current or potential consumer demand. Consumers determine the price of these goods through their purchase behaviors supported by the income they earn in the labor market. Strong competition among producers emerges in this system as companies try to create demand for their goods and services by offering new or improved options, or lower prices. Insofar as it is desirable to have new and improved goods and services at lower prices, this competition produces beneficial outcomes. Competition also undermines monopolies that would otherwise exist at the expense of the consumer. This is the famous ‘invisible hand’ mechanism, mentioned by Adam Smith:⁵ The self-interested economic activity of producers and consumers under the constraints of market-based competition produces socially beneficial outcomes. The value of a free market, according to Smith, is that it is a self-regulating mechanism that spontaneously generates an equilibrium between supply and demand without government planning. Ideally, the equilibrium price of goods and services, as well as their quantity, will automatically reflect shifts in supply and demand.

Those economists who promote the idea of a free market do so because they believe that free markets have the potential to spur efficiency and generate economic growth. Efficiencies are achieved because producers are incentivized to provide goods and services for which there is a demand; to seek out cost reductions; to improve labor practices, and to innovate. These efforts then foster economic growth: producers invest in machinery and facilities, and the race to innovate leads to gains in knowledge and technology. All of this economic activity creates jobs and incomes for people, allowing for population growth, which in turn increases demand, creating a virtuous cycle of ever-increasing economic growth.

This vision of a self-regulating market automatically advancing the best interest of society while powered only by individuals pursuing their own self-interested ends has influenced some economists to argue that the best way to solve problems of public policy and advance social well-being is through market mechanisms. This view is known as “market fundamentalism.”

Market fundamentalists will typically argue that the deregulation of industries that are run as government monopolies and the introduction of free markets into services that were once provided on a non-market basis will produce greater efficiencies and better outputs. Moreover, markets are a non-biased way of allocating goods and services. The operation of a market transaction is blind to a person's race, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation. At a global level, it is suggested that market transactions effectively prevent countries from going to war.

Critics have long observed that markets do not always produce positive outcomes. Monopolies emerge that raise prices beyond their equilibrium level; economic activity is a major source of environmental pollution; and economies are subject to boom and bust cycles. For the market fundamentalist, the answer to these problems is less regulation and more markets. The invisible hand will erode the power of monopolies; creating a pollution market will use the power of supply and demand to reduce pollution to an optimal level; busts are simply the market correcting itself. In short, the market fundamentalist sees an unbridled form of capitalism, a society organized as an unregulated market place in which all goods and services are sold at a price determined by the hidden hand, as the panacea for our economic as well as societal ills.

Not everyone shares this optimistic belief in the intrinsic benevolence of a free market. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Pope Francis expresses concern that

today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.

Pope Francis goes further to point out that

in this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.⁶

According to Pope Francis, the unbridled capitalism promoted by market fundamentalists operates on “a logic of profit at any cost, of giving in order to receive, and of exploitation without looking at the person.”⁷

The Pope's rebuke to market fundamentalism is not merely an ideological position. A growing body of empirical evidence shows that unbridled capitalism produces extreme inequalities in the distribution of wealth. The recent *Global Wealth Report 2015* states

estimates suggest that the lower half of the global population collectively own less than 1% of global wealth, while the richest 10% of adults own 88% of all wealth and the top 1% account for half of all assets in the world.⁸

Thomas Piketty argues that socioeconomic inequalities arise from two key economic factors (i) capital ownership and the ability to realize returns from capital investment (including inherited wealth), and (ii) wage inequality.⁹ Piketty points out that throughout most of the past several centuries, wealth was highly concentrated among the high strata of society, though the chaos of the World Wars and Depression disrupted this norm and led to an increase in economic equality during the mid-to-late twentieth century. However, this increase in equality was only temporary due to differences in the rates of economic growth and the return on the investment of existing wealth. Economies typically grow at a slow rate (World GDP growth hasn't topped 5 percent since 1976, according to the World Bank),¹⁰ while the return on invested wealth is typically much higher. As a result, wealth is increasingly concentrated among the rich because their investment returns will almost always outpace the capital that is created in society through normal means of economic growth. Indeed, Goldin and Katz draw attention to American economic activity taking an abrupt turn, starting in the 1970s, away from the previously experienced strong productivity and inclusive prosperity.¹¹ During the latter quarter of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century, increasing inequality has gone hand-in-hand with flat or declining "real" (i.e., adjusted for inflation) incomes.¹²

Education and Inequality

The provision of education has a role in alleviating growing inequality.¹³ Technological advances create a demand for individuals with appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities. The increased significance of technology places increased emphasis on education. According to their research, Goldin and Katz found that the declining rate of growth in educational attainment to be "the most important factor increasing educational wage differentials since 1980" and "a major contributor to increased family income inequality."¹⁴ Reasons for the slowdown in educational attainment rates include (but are not limited to) rising tuition rates and limited government investment.¹⁵

The market-fundamentalist prescription for education is to treat it as a commodity for which there is a certain level of supply and demand. Under such a system, the cost of tuition and fees will be dictated by the market. Each school will set their prices as high as they can, with in-demand schools charging the highest levels of tuition, and over time, the market will reach an equilibrium. The operation of the market does not ascribe judgment on the intrinsic worth of what is bought and sold.¹⁶ The hand of the market is blind to anything other than consumer demand. The value of the item is determined by a consumer's willingness and ability to buy it. The market fundamentalist reminds us that educational consumers are always free to decide whether the price of a school is worth the cost.

This approach might sound attractive at first, but the idealized view of the free market is blind to the coercive mechanisms in operation. The "free choice" to attend a school based on personal motivations, cost, and expected outcomes is not actually a free choice at all. In the context of the United States, it is increasingly necessary to attain at least a bachelor's degree to access careers that can sustain a middle-class way of life. A student who does not go to college is in most cases effectively excluded from socioeconomic advancement. This is particularly problematic in the context of continuing deindustrialization and the disappearance of good "blue-collar" jobs.

Beyond this, whole segments of society are *de facto* excluded from acquiring any higher education or attending their preferred school because of deep inequalities and growing poverty.

Even though numerous studies continue to show that obtaining a college degree produces a strong return on one's investment and increases earnings,¹⁷ the reality that economic inequality limits the choices of low-income students is reflected in statistics showing who attends and finishes college in the United States. Wealthy students are more likely to earn college degrees than poorer students, by a wide margin. Fifty-four percent of people from families in the top quartile of income earn a bachelor's degree by the age of twenty-four, compared to just 9% in the bottom quartile.¹⁸ The degree of inequality is more pronounced at what are often considered higher-quality schools, too. According to Carnevale and Stroh, 70% of those attending the most competitive colleges in the US are from families in the highest quartile group for income, compared to the less than 5% of students who are from the lowest quartile.¹⁹

Despite gains in making higher education more accessible over the past decades, college campuses are still overwhelmingly dominated by wealthy students. Students from poor families and racial minorities are still disproportionately underrepresented on campuses across the country. This is not because the poor simply value higher education less and/or are unwilling to pay for it, but instead the poor *cannot* afford higher education. The so-called free market does not leave the poor room for choice in this matter.

Defenders of the free-market will insist that student loans can alleviate this problem. However, student loans ultimately make higher education more expensive for the poor due to the interest charged during repayment. Furthermore, such loans also redistribute income away from the borrowers to the wealthy who profit in the loan making, thereby creating more inequality. As a result, the high costs of higher education and the student loan system acts as a massive entry fee that people must pay to get access to the high-paying jobs that require a college degree.

Inequalities in educational attainment and the personal economic benefits of earning a college degree result in separating the population into the haves and the have-nots, with the wealthy experiencing an entirely different way of life than the poor. As Robert Reich pointed out, the affluent have engaged in a "secession of the successful" and are increasingly concentrated in "homogenous enclaves" where they rarely have contact with those less fortunate than themselves.²⁰ In their comparison of high-income and low-income neighborhoods, Pendall and Hedman find that these neighborhoods are often "physically separate from one another, often by fairly large differences."²¹

A consequence of these class divisions is that there is a strong potential for the devaluation of human life. Studies show that exposure to out-groups, such as those belonging to different races, nationalities, and sexual orientations reduces prejudices and increases individuals' acceptance of out-group members.^{22 23} As such, many policies and laws are in place to promote diversity in the classroom (or at least prohibit intentional segregation) in order to achieve these desirable social benefits. However, achieving a classroom that is diverse in social class is difficult. (Although, as we shall see in the next section, De La Salle was able to achieve it in his time.) At public primary and secondary schools in the United States, diversity in the classroom is restrained by the school district's boundaries, meaning that the "secession of the successful" has led to increases in

classrooms segregated by family wealth and social class. This homogeneity in the classroom is arguably worse at private schools, which are financially inaccessible to the poor, and the cost of higher education furthers the problem in our nation's colleges.

Without interacting with members from backgrounds different than their own, it can be difficult for individuals to understand the struggles of those from different social classes and empathize with them. Instead of relying on first-hand experiences with the poor, the wealthy may rely more on harmful stereotypes about the lower class. As evidence, many states and local governments have public policies that critics argue stigmatize the poor or treat them with increased suspicion, even in the absence of supportive data, such as laws targeting the homeless or drug testing programs for welfare recipients.

When education is treated like a commodity the student-teacher relationship is transformed: Students become consumers and teachers become service providers. In a free market, a service is only valuable if it is in demand, and in this case the demand is created by the student. Thus, the student gains a newfound power at the expense of the teacher, for it is the student who can dictate what their education should be. Teachers become subject to market pressures to adjust class offerings, curricula, assignments, and grading to what the market demands. If the market demands less-challenging classes, then classes will be made less challenging. We can no longer envisage teaching as a vocation that involves modeling virtue for students if teachers are service providers, because the teachers' ability to provide guidance and correction will be limited by the market's decree that the customer is always right.

The Problem of Inequality and Poverty: De La Salle and the Mission

Lasallian schools were founded to educate the poor. The story of their foundation is well known: John Baptist de La Salle, who was at the time the Canon of the cathedral at Rheims, was approached by Adrian Nyel, who was concerned about the upbringing – or perhaps the lack of an upbringing – of the children of the poor. Everyday their parents worked long hours just to subsist, leaving the children to roam the streets. They received no formal education. Nyel wanted to found a school where they would be taught free of charge. The schools, of course, had to be free of charge because otherwise the target group could not attend. De La Salle took up this task and founded the first schools. But schools need teachers, so De La Salle founded the Institution of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to supply that demand. Everything De La Salle did, from founding the schools to drawing up rules governing the lives of the Brothers, was for the sake of a single purpose: to address the problem of poverty as it existed in his society.

Pre-revolutionary France was marked by deep class divisions. Class divisions then, as now, make it difficult for members of different classes to achieve real community with each other. This was something De La Salle experienced first-hand. He was from the wealthy bourgeoisie, well-educated and comfortable. But the first Brothers were, in his words, “for the most part rough, unrefined and uneducated men.”²⁴ Yet De La Salle invited them into his home, much to the consternation of his family.

There was a two-fold problem here for De La Salle. Not only did he find it difficult to relate to the rough and unrefined Brothers, but that lack of refinement and their lack of education, made

them less than ideal teachers. For De La Salle believed that the solution to the problem of poverty was to provide what we now call social mobility: the ability to escape the traps of poverty and enter into bourgeois society. This point is confirmed by a later development: As the schools became famous, better-off artisans and petit bourgeois families, who could afford fees, began to send their children to the schools. But De La Salle maintained his insistence that no one should pay fees. But why let those able to pay free ride? Luke Salm, in his biography of the founder, makes the point that the presence of better off children allowed poor kids to learn how to interact with people further up the socio-economic ladder; and this laid the foundations for future social mobility.²⁵ There are two points here: Young children have not yet internalized the class hierarchy and mix together freely; but if De La Salle charged fees of some and not others, he would have reproduced the class system within the schools, and this would likely have expressed itself as those children matured. Instead, all those children were placed together in a classroom and taught as a cohort – one of De La Salle’s pedagogical innovations.

De La Salle also established effective equality among the Brothers by making the common ownership of property part of the constitution of the nascent community. In the *Memorandum on the Habit*, which according to Luke Salm is, “the earliest and most precious of the autobiographical writings... that has survived,”²⁶ De La Salle writes, “[T]he members share all their goods and live a common life.”²⁷ De La Salle’s rejection of property is uncompromising. In a letter to a Brother Robert, he writes “You must love poverty . . . Although our Lord could have been very rich, he was very poor, so you must imitate this divine model.”²⁸ Famously, De La Salle practiced what he preached when, during the famine of 1683-1684, he gave away all his wealth. He might not have done this, and instead reasoned that it is better to use his wealth to found a school rather than to just give it away. But the ultimate purpose and mission was to address the problem of poverty, and during the famine, the need was to provide bread. This episode from the founder’s life is an example of what we would now call a commitment to “social justice.” He promoted the well-being of the poor at the expense of his own wealth.

De La Salle’s insistence on providing a free education to all was a source of much difficulty and trouble for the early Institution. Other schools looked at De La Salle as someone who was undercutting their market. In fact, this is an understatement; for by offering for free what was previously sold, the Brother’s schools stood completely outside of the market, and threatened to make it moot. Why would anyone pay for something that is freely available? The Institution was treating education not as a commodity, but as a common property that anyone could avail of if they so wished. This was revolutionary because, along with the mixing of the social classes, it was changing the way society worked, and the way people thought about things like education, in far-reaching and fundamental ways.

Of course, the schools are no longer free. Before the better-known Revolution, the schools were paid for by money that came from parish authorities and private gifts. While philanthropic giving remains a source of income, nowadays the schools must, in many cases, charge fees. But nevertheless, the Founder’s example and the mission implies that education should not be treated as a commodity to be bought and sold according to market principles. For to do so flies in the face of the mission to provide an education to the poorest members of society.

De La Salle's attitude towards poverty can initially seem incoherent. On the one hand, he makes the alleviation of poverty his life's mission, and yet he binds the Brothers to a vow of poverty. But when we examine the details the contradiction disappears. Although the first Brothers were often very poor indeed, they had a roof over their heads and access to food (though it was sometimes precarious). But the vow of poverty was not meant to reduce the Brothers to the level of what we might call "grinding poverty"; instead it was, as we have seen, a vow to give up personal possessions and live a life of perfect economic and financial equality. The rules set down by De La Salle were designed to allow the Brothers to devote themselves entirely to their mission. In that sense the rules liberated the Brothers. But the poverty of the people who concerned De La Salle was of a different kind. It forced them to virtually abandon their children during working hours. The contradiction disappears when we see that the opposition is between the kind of grinding poverty that forces people to make choices for themselves and their children that deform the shape of their lives, and a liberating *propertylessness*.

Poverty is relative to context. What we consider poor today might not seem poor to De La Salle. Poverty is also relative in the sense that it only exists on the basis of a comparison with the standards of living enjoyed by others. If there existed only one human being, s/he could not be poor. Granted s/he would have to struggle to subsist, but s/he would struggle like any other nonhuman animal in the state of nature, and we do not consider them to be poor. Thus, poverty is the result of a distinct set of social relations in which humans exist.

A person is poor when s/he exists in a social context marked by an extreme imbalance in the distribution of, and access to, those goods that are required to live a decent human life. The imbalance must be extreme because if it is not then we do not have poverty. In today's world, a millionaire is much less wealthy than a billionaire, but a millionaire is not poor in any relevant sense. Poverty exists when the economic imbalance produces "haves" and "have nots."

The proximal cause of poverty is simply the inability of the poor to access enough of the goods required to live a decent life. We might think this results from natural shortages, but when we examine the details of events like famines, we find that shortages occur because access to those goods is monopolized by the non-poor. Poverty results from gross economic inequality.

In this light, we might say that the mission of the Institute is to provide students with the skills and characteristics that allow them to access a great share of the goods requisite for a decent life, just as De La Salle educated young boys in the practical skills and manners they needed to scale the social ladder. But he worked in the context of an early modern Europe on the cusp of the industrial revolution. We work in another context. Today we can see that the prevailing economic orthodoxy systematically produces gross economic inequality and thereby poverty. As Piketty shows, financial capitalism entrenches inequality and makes the problem of poverty intractable because economic growth is almost always outpaced by the return on invested wealth.²⁹ The prevailing set of economic relations is not a natural phenomenon; rather, it is the result of policies adopted based on certain ideas about how to run an economy. These policies are not narrowly restricted to economic policy; they also influence wider social policies and ways of thinking. The mission of the schools cannot be fulfilled if we ignore the source of poverty; moreover, the spirit of the schools is betrayed if we embrace the beliefs and ideas that

are the source of the problem. If the treatment of the problem maintains the underlying condition, then that treatment is a bad one.

Continuation of De La Salle's Schools

In light of the unique position of Lasallian schools, we believe that it is important for the institution to maintain its adherence to these foundational principles in the face of market challenges, or pressures, to adopt a more capitalist orientation. We believe there are three operational areas that can play a particularly valuable role including (i) leveraging the international network of Lasallian schools and programs (ii) targeting advancement initiatives and (iii) maintaining Lasallian mission formation efforts.

Leveraging the International Network of Lasallian Schools

The discussion of educational inequality and marketplace coercion perspective raises the issue of prohibitive tuition costs which limit access and choice. The worldwide network of Lasallian colleges and universities represents an international initiative to offer high quality education to those struggling to overcome such barriers. Although Lasallian schools are not free of tuition costs today, they do offer more affordable options. Many programs within these schools target underserved populations through scholarships, free-tuition programs, and other tuition-sponsored initiatives. Serving the poor and those otherwise limited in their educational options continues to be a primary goal of this network of schools.

How these individuals are served is at the heart of Lasallian education. Educational programs are designed to raise the learner's knowledge and skills to prepare them to be able to be successful both professionally as well as personally throughout their lives. As many learners seek to ensure a good life for themselves through their educational pursuits, a Lasallian education can serve as a leveling mechanism through access to and design of educational program offerings. Strong ties to practice-oriented education allows learners to prepare for professional pursuits that provide opportunities for better wages and economic standing. Beyond the classroom, study abroad experiences offer students first-hand exposure to the opportunities and challenges faced by others. By travelling to other countries, students live their education by interacting with local individuals and company representative who share their perspectives, by sharing in cultural practices, and by developing the capabilities needed to flourish in differing contexts. Additionally, internship and practicum experiences offer real life workplace opportunities allowing students to convert classroom theory into practice. The Lasallian network of colleges and universities has the unique advantage to share, build, and grow educational programs beyond the capabilities of a single institution.

Yet, contributions are made beyond cost and educational offerings. Underlying issues of inequality and poverty are being actively researched within the Lasallian network of colleges and universities. The research streams under study encompass a range of topics speaking to related issues to inequality. These topics include food, nutrition, and health; sustainability and the environment, and education and learning innovations. Collaborative research initiatives offer another approach to addressing inequity by seeking better ways to enhance the lives of many.

The Lasallian network of colleges and universities includes 57 institutions of higher education spread across 16 countries. This worldwide network offers tremendous value through its vast array of individual members and their collective abilities. More specifically through educational initiatives and collective research activities there is the potential for a considerable contribution to be made in fostering a better understanding of global issues of inequality and providing possible remedies. Collaboration among network colleges and universities opens up tremendous opportunities for leveraging regional strengths and creating innovative and leading edge educational programs including internships and study abroad experiences.

Targeting Advancement Initiatives

Operating with the mission to service the poor, Lasallian colleges and universities place significant importance on ensuring access to as many individuals as possible. To do so, efforts are focused on cost control as well as fundraising and development activities. This is not unique to Lasallian colleges and universities. All higher education institutions expend considerable effort in the area of cost containment and advancement. However, Lasallian institutions may feel a greater urgency to support and foster these activities in order to do more to ensure an affordable educational option is offered to as many learners as possible. To ensure the longevity of the institution's mission, developing creative and effective advancement initiatives will continue to be of significant importance. Serving to offset the economic inequalities that limit so many from pursuing educational opportunities is a driving force of advancement initiatives and a key reason for focused institutional support to be directed to this area.

The fruits of such targeted advancement programs can already be found at schools like Lewis University and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. Lewis University's Mission Fund is a fundraising program that was created to specifically aid financially at-risk students. Since its inception in 2006, the Mission Fund has been used to allow over 250 students to continue their education at Lewis after experiencing severe financial hardship and exhausting all other forms of financial aid and support. The Mission Fund is supported through direct fundraising appeals, earmarked donations during the annual Campus Campaign, and an annual formal fundraising gala held in downtown Chicago. Likewise, at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, the First Generation Initiative (FGI) is an example of fundraising focused on addressing high-potential, high-need students. The FGI program provides heightened financial, academic, and social support to students who otherwise could not have accessed college. Currently the FGI program funds 36 scholars who each receive approximately \$46,000 in scholarship funding per year. The Mission Fund and the FGI program are just two examples of Lasallian fundraising targeted to closing the growing academic achievement gap.

As Lasallian colleges and universities move forward, one overall goal should be to make the universities less reliant on tuition and fees and become more accessible to the poor. In doing so, reexamining tuition discounting policies may serve as a good starting point. The "discount rate" is the percentage of charged tuition and fees that are returned to the student body in the form of scholarships and grants. There is a trend among private colleges and universities towards increasing the discount rate given to students in order to attract incoming students and make themselves more affordable in the educational marketplace. The average discount rate at private colleges and universities increased from 38% in 2005 to 48.6% in 2015.³⁰ The problem with such

high discounting is twofold. First, the practice of discounting is not universally known among incoming students and their families, particularly first-generation college students. Those who are unaware of the practice will not realize that the “sticker price” of the college is not an accurate estimate of the price actually paid and may never apply because they will not think they can afford it. Secondly, when discounting is applied in an across-the-board fashion, the end result is that disadvantaged students still end up paying the same amount as wealthier students. Since the mission of Lasallian universities is to educate, especially to the poor, there should be a clear policy in place to ensure that discounts go disproportionately to the poor. If universities feel the need to discount their tuition and fees in order to remain competitive with other schools in the marketplace, they could instead lower their “sticker price” tuition to attract students and still ensure that the discounts go to those with the most financial need. By remaining focused and highly engaged in fundraising to fund unique programs and address discounting challenges, Lasallian colleges and universities will continue to address socioeconomic inequities providing access to education to those who otherwise would continue to be unserved.

Maintaining Lasallian Mission Formation Efforts

“Together and by Association” is a rally call for the Lasallian community. With the declining number of De La Salle Christian Brothers there is a significant effort underway to ensure the values and principles of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is passed along to the lay members of the Lasallian network. How this is being accomplished is through an ongoing commitment to Lasallian formation experiences that introduce and excite laypersons to the institution’s mission. A range of formation experiences are available to the laity. Programs such as the International Association of Lasallian Universities Leadership Program in Rome, the Buttimer Institute for Lasallian Studies, the Collegium Colloquy on Faith and Intellectual Life seminars, and many more offer rich learning experiences for laity.

As Lasallian educators, we “pay practical attention to the real relationships between people, to the purposeful integration of budding personal convictions and talents, and to the persistent cultivation of human principles.”³¹ The building of such relationships between teachers and their students, between De La Salle Christian Brothers and laypersons, between Lasallian educators in one region and another begins with an understanding of the Lasallian mission and the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. As a result of the institution’s members participating in the mission formation experiences the mission of the institution continues to sustain its longevity. This effort to inculcate those within the Lasallian community represents a commitment to keep education from falling victim to corruption and becoming reduced to a transactional exchange.

The mission-centric educational experience offered by Lasallian universities serves to shape students for the rest of their lives. This unique approach separates Lasallian schools from their public rivals as the value of a Lasallian education extends beyond discipline-specific learning. It offers students opportunities to explore concepts and experiences grounded in ethics, service, leadership, and life-long learning. By enriching the lives of students both professionally and personally, Lasallian universities deliver a greater return on investment than their public-school rivals. Given today’s cost of obtaining a university education, Lasallian universities are well positioned to address students and their parents’ concern for receiving significant value for their investment.

Conclusion

With many benefits coming from a free market system, this paper has outlined a note of caution when it comes to the role of education within such a system. One primary risk is the commodification of education. In such a situation, market forces determining the cost for tuition and fees may leave many without “free choice” to access the college of their choosing or to access college at all. Moreover, when education is treated as a commodity the student-teacher relationships can be compromised by turning students into consumers and teachers into providers.

Playing an important role in offsetting these challenges is the delivery of education by the Lasallian schools and other like institutions. Drawing on the work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to educate the poor and operating to address underserved populations, Lasallian colleges and universities continue to build relationships and foster learning that will better the life of each and every student. Given the widening gap of academic achievement, the work of the Institution has never been more important. As such it is critical that the success of the Lasallian schools continues. Fostering network linkages, engaging in fundraising, and sharing the Lasallian mission represent three identified actions that can play an important role in ensuring successful continuance. As competing colleges and universities continue to increase tuition and fees reflective of what the market can bear and serve students as consumers at the expense of lost student-teacher relations, Lasallian colleges and universities need to leverage their competitive assets (worldwide network of institutions, fundraising abilities, and mission) to ensure an alternative for those caught in the grip of inequity.

Endnotes

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