

Developing Effectiveness in a Lasallian University

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Developing Academic Excellence

The Mission-Vision of universities usually embraces two significant goals, which are contextually defined. The first is effectiveness in student development and the second is academic excellence, the outcomes of which are the significant contributions made by both its graduates and faculty that impact society towards a desirable transformation. In Lasallian universities, there is a third significant goal—access and equity in education, a tradition of more than 300 years, which began with our Founder, St. La Salle.

Effectiveness is the capacity or power to produce a desired effect, while “academic excellence is a characteristic of an institution, where members are performing at the level of highest expectation, and where this is both demanded and nurtured.” [1] Defining indicators of excellence as consisting only of one set applicable to all universities may not be fair as the mission and vision, students, resources, and culture within which a university operates vary. Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency for universities to dream of joining the ranks of those considered to be in the top 50 in the world; hence, making those already there the benchmark.

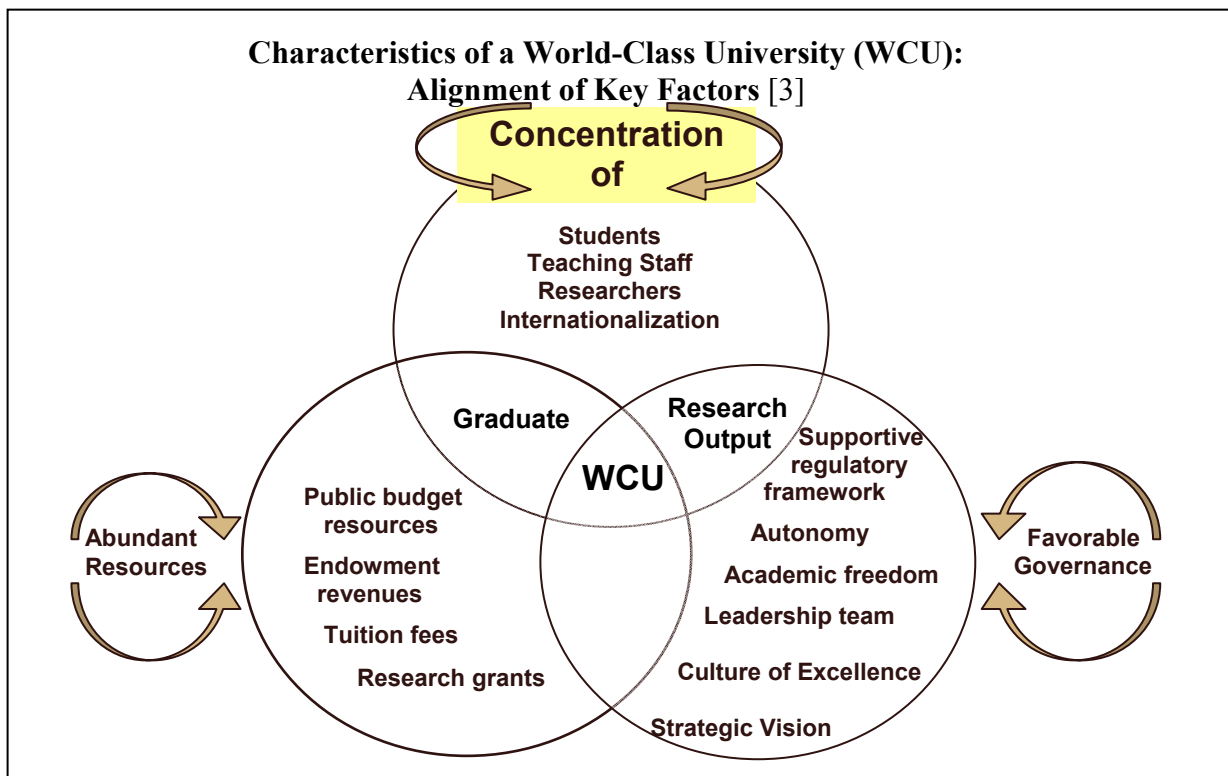
Two of the better known international surveys of universities that define the criteria used in such rankings are the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Survey (SHJT) and the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES). In the more prestigious Shanghai survey, the two main criteria of excellence are: research and publications, and prestigious international awards received by its faculty and alumni, such as the Nobel Prize and the Fields Medal. The Times Supplement criteria are not exactly the same, where research and publications carry only a 20% weight, faculty-student ratio 20%, international faculty and students 10%, and a whopping 50% given to peer and recruiter reviews, which are perception-based.

Both do not seem to agree on the criteria to use in determining excellence. Though the indicators used are few, simple enough to be understood, and most of them quantifiable, they do not completely capture the diverse aspects of academic quality, human formation, and the mission-vision of universities. Many universities don't agree with the narrow focus of these criteria; yet many use them just the same, to be reached within a given period, in the hope perhaps of becoming competitive and a member of the top 50 in the world. At the top of this list are American universities led by Harvard University, which, and together with some other universities, were established and began as Christian educational institutions but are now considered more secular in orientation.

A Comparison of Ranking Criteria between Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SHJT) and Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) [2]









Category	SHJT	THES
Institutional Characteristics		International Faculty Score (percentage of international staff) 5%
Instructional Characteristics		Faculty/Student Ratio (staff-to-student ratio) 20%
Research Reputation	Award Score (total no. of staff winning Nobel prizes and Fields Medal) 20%	Citation/Faculty Score (No. of citations for academic papers generated by each staff member) 20%
	Nature and Sciences Score (No. of articles published in nature and Science between a certain period) 20%	
	HiCi Score (the no. of highly cited researchers in broad subject categories in life sciences, medicine, physical sciences, engineering and social sciences) 20%	
	SCI score (the total no. of articles indexed in Science, Citation Index-expanded, Social Science Citation Index, and Arts and Humanities Citation Index) 20%	
	Size (the weighted score of five indicators divided by the no. of full time equivalent academic staff) 10%	
Student Characteristics		International Student Score (percentage of international students) 5%
Others	Alumni Score (the total no. of the alumni winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medal) 10%	Peer/Recruiter review score (a scale from 1 to 5 (distinguished) to rate peer schools' academic programs) 40%/10%

The World Bank studied universities considered excellent and world class and identified the alignment of key factors true for all of them. These three factors are: abundant resources (in










tuition fees, research endowments and government grants), concentration of talent (in the best and the brightest university students, faculty, and researchers, whose outputs get international recognition), and favorable governance, where leadership vision is strategic, academic freedom is guaranteed, and the regulatory framework is supportive of a culture of excellence.

Some universities that either find the criteria used in ranking world class universities unrealistic, or a deviation from their mission, ignore international surveys, and define their own mission-vision, goals and relevant indicators of quality. Indicators are “general dimensions of academic quality that the members of a university academic community have identified as essential” [4] to becoming effective. For example, the Colorado Legislature has identified their higher education indicators of quality as follows:

Higher Education Indicators, Colorado Legislature [5]	
	Quality Indicator 1 – Graduation Rates
	Quality Indicator 2 – Freshmen Retention and Persistence Rates
	Quality Indicator 3 – Support and Success of Minority Students
	Quality Indicator 4 – Achievement Scores on Licensure Exams
	Quality Indicator 5 – Institutional Support Expenditures
	Quality Indicator 6 – Undergraduate Class Size
	Quality Indicator 7 – Faculty Teaching Workload
	Quality Indicators 8,9,10 – Indicators Selected by Academic Departments

Thammasat University in Thailand subscribes to the same indicators with the addition of the following: research and publications, faculty qualifications and teaching performance evaluation, student exchange participation and scholarships granted.

Thammasat University Annual Performance Indicators [6]	
Colorado indicators plus the following:	
	Graduate Destination (Employed, Further Studies, Unemployed)
	Master and Doctoral Thesis Publications (International, National)
	Faculty Research & Publications (International, National)
	Students’ Response to Teaching Quality (Teaching Performance Evaluation)
	Number of Exchange Students (Inbound and Outbound)
	Number of Tertiary Staff (full-time, part time, graduate degree earned)
	Scholarships (Number of Scholars, and Total Expenditure)

At De La Salle University in Manila, although we did not participate in the Times Higher Education Survey some five years ago, based on data they gathered from our website, we landed in no. 392 among world class universities, and no. 1 among Philippine private universities. The year after, we ranked no. 415 and only second to a Jesuit university in Manila. Curious to find out why we fell some 23 ranks lower in just one year, I inquired from the Times Higher Education Office and was told that they revise the more specific indicators and their weights depending on feedback they receive. We thought that if their specific criteria are not even stable from year to year, why should we take the results of the survey seriously?

We then decided to update our academic community defined institutional indicators of quality, classified into faculty, students, and institution-related.

De La Salle University Indicators of Quality

Faculty

- Faculty Qualifications (graduate degree earned, etc.)
- Faculty Teaching Performance Evaluation
- Full-time – Part-time Faculty Ratio
- Faculty – Student Ratio
- Faculty-Non-Teaching Staff Ratio
- Faculty Exchanges (inbound, outbound)
- Faculty Research (institutional and externally-funded)
- Faculty Research Publications (national, international)
- Faculty Engagement (instruction, committees, student consultations, volunteer work)

Students

- Entrance Exam Scores of Freshmen
- Student General Education Exam Scores (after the first 4 terms of residency)
- Ratio of Admission to Graduation (per batch)
- Professional Board Exam Scores and Passing Percentage
- Membership and Engagement in Student Organizations
- Student Exchanges (inbound, outbound)
- Full-Time Equivalent Scholars
- Employment Rate (within 6 months of graduation)
- Access to Major Related Fields of Work
- Involvement in service activities that benefit the marginalized

Institutional

- Accreditation Levels
- Number of Centers of Excellence
- Amount of Funds Generated (donated to the University)
- Research and Publications Expenditure
- Library and Information Expenditure
- Laboratories Expenditure
- Scholarships Expenditure
- Salaries and Benefits Expenditure
- Per student tuition and fees vs cost of education of a student to the university
- Major Awards Received (Institutional, Faculty and Students)
- Campus Safety and Security

These indicators are expressed in terms of targets or performance indicators (below). These targets can be expressed as annual, 3-year, or 5-year targets, monitored and assessed annually, with the expectation that the outcomes get better from year to year. The assessment results serve as inputs in the annual university planning workshop where appropriate revisions in processes and resource allocation are made accordingly. In effect, what this means is that we do not compete to fulfill the excellence criteria defined by external private entities; rather, we compete with ourselves and see to it that we progressively become effective, and move closer annually to our definition of effectiveness and excellence.

De La Salle University

Examples of Target-Based Performance Indicators

1. Student passing percentage in licensure examinations is 30% above the national average
2. 20% of mainstream students who need financial assistance are on full scholarships
3. 70% of graduates are involved in a program/ project/organization serving the marginalized

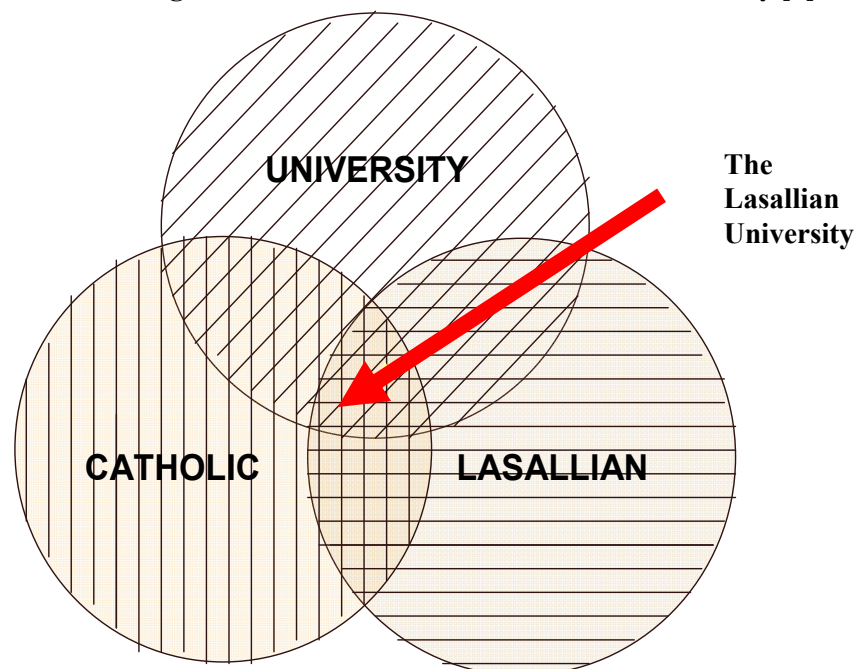
It seems paradoxical but our experience has shown that the more we focused and worked hard to reach our own definition of excellence and not criteria dictated from the outside, the more we tended to meet externally-determined criteria, such as those required to become a National Center of Excellence in specific disciplines, which are defined by our National Commission on Higher Education, and the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities that awarded us the first highest accreditation level granted to a private Philippine university in 2002.

All these, however, would not have happened if we did our own thing individually, and went on separate ways, pursuing varied directions. We value a conscious and deliberate effort to plan together as a university community, define our vision and goals, determine our own criteria of excellence and effectiveness, specify their indicators of fulfillment, monitor and assess performance, and make the necessary revisions when needed, to ensure that there is movement closer to reaching the university vision and goals.

The Catholic Lasallian University

In addition to becoming more effective and reach academic excellence as a university, our identity is also Catholic and Lasallian. In their article “Lasallian Assessment: Charism and the University,” our Lasallian colleagues Tristano, Fox, Luedtke, and Schaefer (2009) illustrate the essence of a Lasallian University as the integration among three fundamental concepts – university, Catholic, and Lasallian.

An Integrated View of the Catholic Lasallian University [7]



So much has been said about Catholicity and the Christian character of universities in various lectures and publications. Many conferences and congresses have also been devoted to its discussion. Yet, we continue to grapple with how we can be more effective in this regard, particularly in the development of an academic community that will form our students to become genuine Lasallians for life, who will not only become excellent professionals, but committed to serving others, especially the marginalized. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus in his article “University of a Particular Kind” said that, “Today, the Christian University is in crisis ... a crisis created by the ambition to imitate other kinds of universities that claim to be universities pure and simple...a crisis created by competing to belong to the second tier of schools that do not aspire to be Christian universities...a crisis of faith.” Then he asked, “What does it profit a university to attain the second tier but lose its soul?” [8]










Pope John Paul II identified the challenge of the 21st century as follows:

The challenge of the 21st century is to humanize society and its institutions through the gospel: to restore to the family, to cities, and to villages a soul worthy of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. [9]

Fr. Ignacio Ellocuria, SJ specifies this in his speech, “The Task of a Catholic University”:

A Christian university must take into account the gospel preference for the poor...what it does mean is that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those without science; to provide skills for those without skills; to be a voice for those without voices; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to make their rights legitimate. [10]








These can be done credibly and more effectively with academic excellence. Our own Superior General, Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, in his keynote address to Lasallian university presidents and administrators at ENCUESTRO IX, identified what he called clues to illuminate the Lasallian mission at the tertiary level. He began with the Catholic spiritual and intellectual tradition and then identified the principles and central values of the Lasallian mission.

Clues to Illuminate the Lasallian Mission At the Tertiary Level [11]	
Principles and Central Values of the Lasallian Mission	
	Human dignity
	Community: the common good
	Opting for the poor
	Rights and responsibilities
	The role of government and subsidiarity
	Servants who look after creation
	Promotion of peace and development
	Participation
	Global solidarity and development

Brother Alvaro likewise specified the spiritual and pedagogical legacy of St. La Salle, which were taken from the “Meditations for the Time of Retreat,” and then identified the axes where the influence of Lasallian universities can be felt.

Clues to Illuminate the Lasallian Mission... [12]

The Spiritual and Pedagogical Legacy of La Salle: Principles from the “Meditations for the Time of Retreat”

-  We are a community of individuals chosen to rebuild today’s unjust society
-  We are a community of followers who are signs of His redeeming power
-  Principle of participation in the work of the Spirit
-  We are a community of prophets passionate about God and those entrusted to us
-  Principle of judgment to give an account of our administration
-  Eschatological principle in the specific fabric of relationships.
-  We are a community of servants of hope.

Axes Where the Influence of Lasallian Universities Can Be Felt [13]

1. Excellence in what we do – quality education within social and political realities
2. Teacher formation
3. Research on the roots of poverty and the application of children’s rights
4. Faith that is committed to action and transformation... a passion for God and for the poor

From these, it is evident that Lasallian is not just for the Brothers. The Lasallian values and principles specified by Br. Alvaro are the same values lived by good persons of integrity, who genuinely care for others and perhaps, also an ideal we wish on ourselves. St. LaSalle established the La Salle school before and for which he founded the Institute, and on purpose called its lay religious members Brothers to emphasize the fraternal relationships that are to develop among themselves, with lay colleagues, and the students. Lasallian spirituality is the spirituality of a teacher like you and me. The Lasallian mission is not just the Brothers’ mission, but our mission as much as it is theirs. That is why it is called our shared mission.

The big question, the answer to which is most certainly not an easy one, is: how do we integrate all these, and together move towards effectiveness and excellence in a Lasallian university? More specifically, how shall we concretize them in university-relevant and clear terms, to facilitate the work to be done in this regard by administrators and faculty members, tasked to integrate academic excellence and Lasallianess in the subjects taught and their relationships with the students? Though like secular universities, we too aim to be academically excellent, our end goal is not exactly the same because we do not exist at the behest of commercial interests, and we want our graduates not only to become outstanding in the professions, we are equally concerned with forming them to become persons of integrity, who will serve, rather than dominate others, especially the marginalized. Admittedly, there is tension in the balancing act between these. Most certainly, this is a very challenging, most demanding goal and I am not sure anyone has the exact right formula yet, by which this goal can be maximally achieved.

Our students are no longer like us and global developments happen at a rapid pace. Though our Lasallian mission remains the same, its context has changed and we must respond to the sign of the times. While some of us still go to meetings with paper and pen in hand, our students carry laptops anywhere and everywhere. The Internet presents the students with what to us adults is a bewildering range of options while to the students, that is simply a natural and expected part of life. While most of us continue to believe in the Church, most students express serious doubts,

and seem to say, “I believe in God but not in the Church.” No university and none of us exercise any control over these developments, and this is where our focus and emphasis on Lasallian core values and fraternal relationships come into play...to accompany and inspire our students such that given so many options, their free choice will be more focused on what is life giving rather than on bragging rights; on shared blessings more than on accumulations good for one; and to begin to understand that more than the institution per se, the Church is substantially us.

In the Philippines, we continue to be challenged by this reality and grapple with how we can best respond to it. Two years ago we began seriously and deliberately to discuss alternative ways of meeting this challenge, ways relevant to the culture of both Philippine society in general and to our universities in particular, given the nature of our students and faculty, and the kind of contribution we wish to make in the society of which we are part.

We began by defining our Lasallian fundamentals: 1) academic excellence; 2) the formation of persons; 3) focus on relationships especially that between teacher and students; 4) the development of integrity among the students, which to us means honesty, together with a sense of gratefulness, paying it forward in the service of others; and 5) nurturing of an academic community culture that will encourage and enable all these to be realized.

We then formulated our Lasallian Guiding Principles of Education, from which the more specific characteristics of Lasallian schools, learners, educators and educational experiences were defined.

Principles of Lasallian Education in the Philippine District [14]

As inheritors of the Lasallian legacy and collaborators in Lasallian mission, we are convinced that:

- Lasallian education is a mission and ministry
- Lasallian education is infused with the spirit of faith
- Lasallian education is marked by zeal
- Lasallian education is exercised as a communion in mission
- Lasallian education forms disciples and citizens, prophets and professionals, transforming society to realize God’s Kingdom truth, justice, love and peace

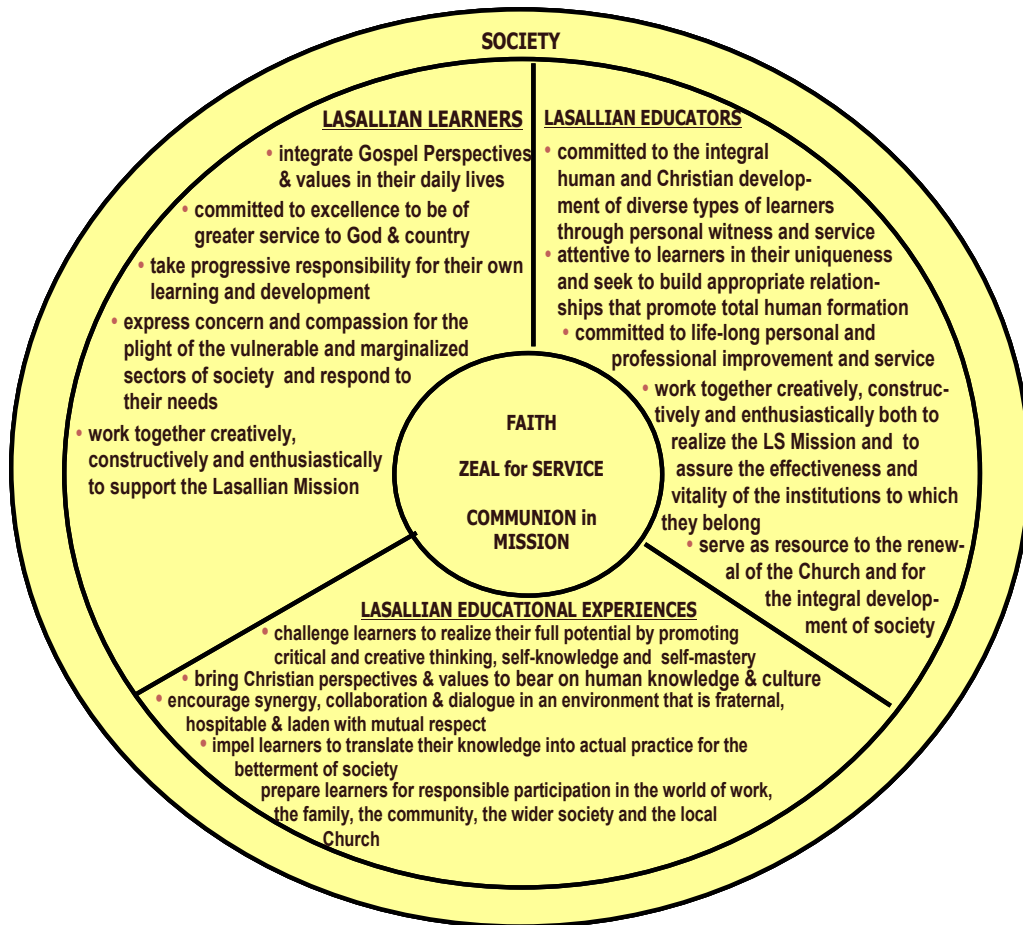
Guided by these principles, we believe that Lasallian schools are educational communities, where all sectors:

- Participate in the Church mission
- Are committed to assuring the integral human and Christian development of learners
- Are co-responsible for creating a culture and climate conducive to learning and character formation
- Are stakeholders in solidarity
- Are committed to continuous renewal and transformation

For simplicity and ease in understanding, we developed an illustration to show the specific characteristics of Lasallian educational experiences, and of Lasallians, towards which we all strive. Lasallian educators are expected to be service-oriented professionals who are genuinely committed to the human and Christian development of learners; to attend to learners and build appropriate relationships that promote human formation; are committed to lifelong learning;

work together for the effectiveness and vitality of the school and the Lasallian mission; and to serve as resources for church and nation. Leaders and administrators in Lasallian schools are expected to formulate policies and processes, and to initiate practices, that will encourage, support and further the development of these school and faculty characteristics. These are made part of administrator accountabilities as criteria in their performance evaluation. Lasallian learners are viewed as unique and gifted individuals who strive to integrate the gospel in the conduct of life, are committed to excellence for service, take progressive responsibility for their own learning, express concern and compassion for the marginalized, and work together to support the Lasallian mission. Lasallian educational experiences on and off campus are expected to be dynamic processes that challenge learners to self-knowledge and self-mastery, critical and creative thinking; bring Christian perspectives and values to bear on knowledge and culture; encourage synergy and dialogue in a fraternal and respectful manner; translate knowledge into practice for a better society; and prepare learners for responsible participation in work, the family, the community, society, and the local Church.

Lasallian Educators, Learners and Educational Experiences



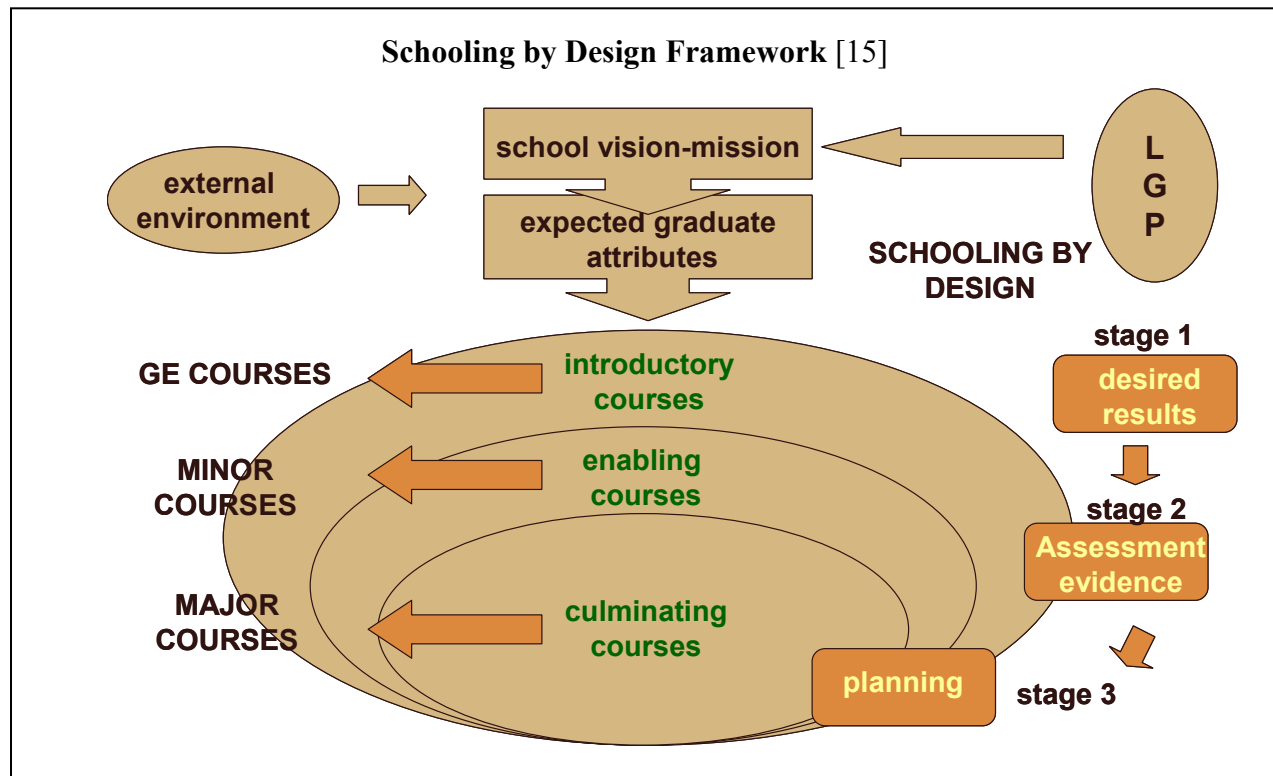
Every faculty member is expected to implement enabling instructional strategies and to ensure the formation of learners to meet the characteristics defined as Lasallian. These are made part of faculty responsibilities and part of the criteria for evaluating teaching performance.

Description of the Lasallian Leader

	Exceeding Standard	Practicing Standard	Approaching the Standard	Missing the Standard
1. Faith & Spirituality				
Personal relationship with God				
Presence of God				
Faith vision (vision of Christian faith life culture)				
Virtue and integrity				
Openness to God's will				
Trust in Divine Providence				
2. Zeal in Service				
Educational vision faithful to the Gospel				
Fraternal climate and culture				
Concern for the poor and marginalized				
Culture of excellence				
Responding to educational challenges				
3. Community Building				
Collegial respect				
Nurturing commitment and Lasallian Identity				
Solidarity and collaboration with academic community				
Conflict resolution				

All these took us about two years to do and though it was not easy, primarily due to the extensive communication, numerous consultations with school communities, feedback gathering, and several revisions, it was all worth it because what used to be very general, unclear statements about what is fundamentally Lasallian in a university, which tended to be interpreted in many different ways, have become clearer and more focused. Given Philippine culture, our current level of national development, as well as realities in industry, we believe these principles support Lasallian education and mission, are concrete enough to be integrated in school policies and programs, and yet provide enough elbow room for a school to make them relevant to its level of development, school culture, nature of students and faculty and program niche.

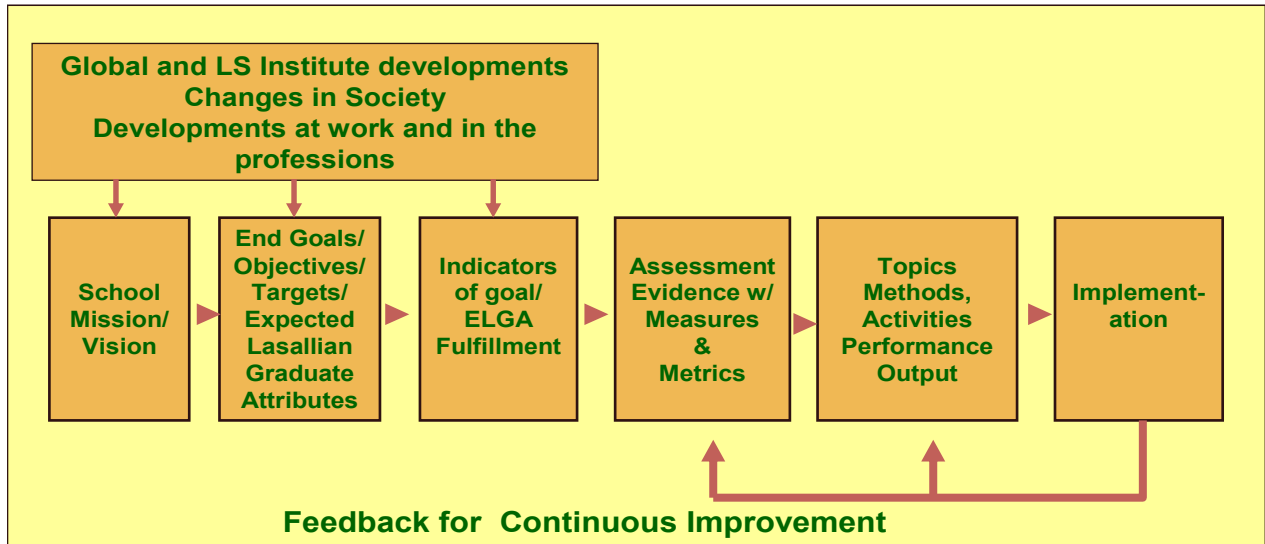
This is where we are in the Philippine District: revising policies accordingly, defining accountabilities, and training general education teachers on the integration of the Lasallian Guiding Principles into the subjects they teach via what we call the Expected Lasallian Graduate Attributes, which the teacher identifies based on the Lasallian Guiding Principles, and includes as part of course objectives. At this time, this is done only in general education subjects taken by students in their first four terms of university residency.



To facilitate the work of general education teachers, we train them in the use of the Schooling by Design Framework by Wiggins and McTighe (2007) where from the Lasallian Guiding Principles and the university mission-vision, the teacher defines the end-goal in the appropriate Lasallian Graduate Attributes expected to be developed among the students, then the assessment evidence in rubric form, before deciding topics to take up, activities to conduct, and the students' final performance output. A reverse planning method is used in this framework where the end goal is the first to be defined and where assessment, topics to take up, methods, activities, and the performance output are all determined by the end goal. Though it is global and Lasallian Institute developments, changes in society, and the requirements of work and the professions that are regularly monitored to ensure that the university vision and goals continue to be relevant, it is the results of assessments that are used to further refine the processes and manner of integration of the Lasallian Guiding Principles and their implementation in academic programs.

We gave ourselves five years from the time we began, to fully integrate the Lasallian Guiding Principles in the University.

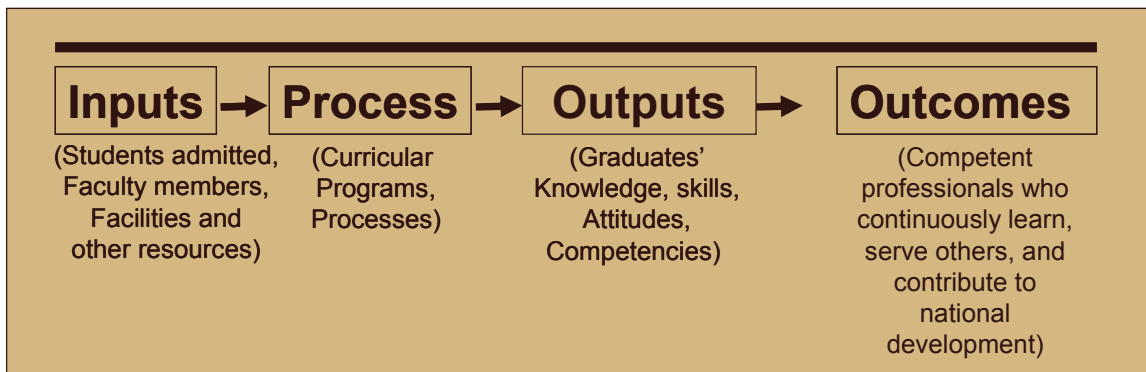
**A Process Model for the Integration
of Lasallian Guiding Principles (LGPs) in Philippine Lasallian Schools**



Alternatives in Assessing University Effectiveness

We are also working on the appropriate kind of assessment we can conduct to determine our level of goal fulfillment, which is proving not to be an easy task at all, given the fact that many other factors influence our students such as family, peers outside the university, the media and society in general, over which we exercise no control. The systems process is the most basic general framework by which this can be illustrated where university inputs and processes determine outputs, such as graduates' knowledge, skills and attitudes which can in turn develop into outcomes that serve as indicators of whether or not the university mission is being fulfilled. In this regard, conducting tracer studies of graduates or even just continuing communication with graduates is important and helpful.

Surrounding Environmental or Contextual Factors[14]



Indicators of quality and/or performance indicators are the more specific gauge of what most likely contributed to the outputs, eventually, the outcomes. Hence, these are used as criteria in the assessment of university effectiveness.

Alternatives in the Evaluation of University Effectiveness

- Assessing Outcomes
 - Measurement of educational outcomes in skills and capabilities acquired by graduates and the recognition they gain in further competition
 - Ex.: GRE scores, honors won, or promotion/achievement at work
 - A “performance indicator” is a policy relevant statistic, number or qualitative description that provides an indication that the university, some aspect of it, or the university system is performing as it should

Examples of Target-Based Performance Indicators

1. Student passing percentage in licensure examinations is 30% above the national average
2. 20% of mainstream students who need financial assistance are on full scholarship
3. 70% of graduates are involved in a program/project/organization that aims to serve the marginalized

“A performance indicator is a goal or policy relevant statistic, number, or qualitative description that provides an indication that the university or some aspect of it is performing as it should.” [16] Its reference point is a target performance over time, is evaluative, issue driven, and used for improvement as they connect outcomes to structure and process, taking inputs into account. While they can certainly be used to enhance the quality of education, research, community service, and other functions of a university, “performance indicators are not facts carved in stone. They are, at best, interpreted as indicative, suggestive, or diagnostic.” [17]

Another method of assessing university effectiveness is by measuring the value added to the students by the formation and training received from the university from the time they are admitted to the time they graduate. Though this is a better method of assessment, especially for gauging effectiveness, it is difficult to conduct as the impact of education may take time to see, particularly its outcomes, and may have also been influenced by factors outside the university.

The Ohio State University uses the Balance Scorecard Method in assessing its performance where from its vision, organizational areas deemed necessary for the achievement of the vision are defined, then relevant questions are asked, and targets are set and assessed regularly. In becoming internationally recognized in research, teaching, and service, for example, development in all five criteria is considered critical.

Ohio State University Balance Scorecard [18]

Vision: become internationally recognized in research, teaching and service

Five organizational areas deemed needed for achievement of vision:

1. Academic Excellence – What is the university’s contribution to the creation of new knowledge?
2. Student Learning – How effectively does the university transfer knowledge to students?
3. Diversity – How does the university broaden and strengthen its community?
4. Outreach and Engagement – How effectively does the university transfer knowledge?
5. Resource Management – How well does the university develop and manage resources?

Alternatives in the Evaluation of University Effectiveness [19]

- Expert assessment
 - Accreditations
 - Nomination of program for expert assessment such as the Templeton Guide
- Survey/Self reports of alumni on what learnings/skills developed in the university helped them most at work, family, social life
- Participation in national surveys of education effectiveness

Some universities rely on expert assessments external to universities such as accrediting organizations and national surveys, where the findings and recommendations are used to enhance university processes to reach a higher level of achievement. Other universities conduct their own self-surveys of graduates specifically on which knowledge and skills developed while in the university that later helped them in work, family, and social life, as well as their recommendations on how their alma mater can become more effective.

As performance assessment results become the springboard for more significant achievements, there are universities that deliberately prefer multiple evaluations of performance; hence, in addition to their own assessments, they participate in relevant national surveys, apply for accreditation, and nominate their better programs for specific awards. In each case, the feedback gathered is used to enhance and strengthen university functions and processes for greater effectiveness.

In their research on student engagement and success, Kinzie, Schuch, and Whitt (2005) identified seven common educational practices in 20 American colleges and universities with strong records of student success, accompanied by questions meant to be diagnostic in nature.

Common Educational Practices in 20 US Colleges and Universities With Strong Records of Student Success [20]

1. A Living Mission and Lived Educational Philosophy (What is valued and rewarded? To what extent are guiding principles reflected in teaching and learning? etc.)
2. Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning (Do students receive specific, timely feedback from teachers? Are teaching and learning centers used by faculty and available to students? etc.)
3. Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment (Are facilities and services adapted effectively for teaching and learning? Does campus climate positively influence student learning and success?, etc.)
4. Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success (Challenges and support are consistent with needs of students? Are students at risk identified and helped? Students assume a fair share of responsibility for their own learning?, etc.)
5. Improvement Oriented Ethos (Is the school monitored and improved continuously? Innovation is valued and fostered? Individuals and offices are accountable in the collection and use of reliable and valid data?, etc.)
6. Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality and Student Success (Student learning is accepted as everyone's responsibility? Where do student learning and success appear in the agenda of institutional leaders?)
7. Ultimately, It's About the Culture (Do operating policies, resources, programs and practices clearly support the mission? To what extent do they support/inhibit student learning and success?)

In another study by Douglas Bennett (2001) on “Assessing Quality in Higher Education,” four key elements of successful learning environments were identified:

Four Key Elements of Successful Learning Environments [21]

1. Learner centered – teacher attends to the background, beliefs, knowledge and skills of students
2. Assessment centered – continuous feedback on what is being learned with revisions made as needed
3. Knowledge centered – attention given to what is taught, how it is taught and what understanding and mastery of its contents look like
4. Community centered – intellectual camaraderie, collaborative learning, continuous learning in community outside the university

If one looks at both sets of practices associated with student success and compares them to what are essentially Lasallian in a university, namely academic excellence, student centeredness, value for fraternal relationships, shared responsibility for the fulfillment of the university mission-vision, and a university culture that develops and nurtures these, one will find student success practices sounding like an echo of the essential characteristics of a Lasallian university. The desire for our universities to become more Lasallian is apparently also the means to become effective in student development and a movement closer to academic excellence.

What Saint La Salle did in the schools he established more than 300 years ago was not in essence any different. He gave the poor children of his time the gift of hope, by giving them access to a Lasallian education, where the limits imposed by meager resources led to what must have been a truly innovative method at that time, simultaneous instruction. His concern for effectiveness generated a community culture and a system that included practices that served to develop among the students faith, zeal, responsibility, sharing, and caring for classmates. His value for quality education resulted in the emphasis on the continuing education of teachers for which St. La Salle is also known.

Though the context has changed, for which adjustments have to be made, the Lasallian mission remains essentially the same, where access to and equity in education, effectiveness in student development, and academic excellence are the continuing goals in Lasallian schools, all over the world.

End Notes

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