

Mann, William. Annotation of “The Role of Mission in Strategic Planning Development and Execution at a Lasallian Catholic University” by William Bisset, Ph.D. dissertation., Seton Hall University, 2014. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, no. 3 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota: 2015).

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## ANNOTATION

Bisset, William, “The Role of Mission in Strategic Planning Development and Execution at a Lasallian Catholic University.” Ph.D. dissertation, Seton Hall University, 2014, 134 pages.

The stated purpose of this study “was to explore how administrators at a Lasallian-sponsored Catholic university remain committed to institutional mission in its undergraduate education program at a time when external pressures require the institution to consider operational strategies that may run counter to its institutional ideals” (14, 54, 56, 58).

This qualitative case study (14, 47-48) analyzed “the way in which senior administrators worked with one another [and “navigated through tensions that arose with other senior level administrators”] ... in an effort to achieve specific mission-related goals outlined in the university’s strategic plan” (15-16, 47-48). “Three major themes emerged [ii-iii, 58-59, 97] as having the greatest impact on [the] administration’s ability to remain mission-centered while executing strategic-planning initiatives”: a) “the influence of finances on strategic planning initiatives” (60-69); b) “philosophical differences between vice presidents and their managers on how to maintain institutional mission while executing strategic planning initiatives” (69-81, 101-102); and c) “divergence across campus when balancing mission and strategic planning goals” (81-92).

While considering in the first chapter (1-20) the great distinctiveness of institutions, the author notes that “revenue-generating tuition policies are prime examples of strategies that elicit tension between a college’s mission and its operating goals” (1, 84-87, 97-98) and that “institutional culture and a school’s connection to its history and tradition strongly impact the priority mission plays in daily and long-term decision making” (2, 94). He goes on to note that “small, enrollment-driven institutions such as faith-based colleges and universities are particularly vulnerable when adverse circumstances arise” (5, 99-101), that there is a lack of clear and reliable data on whether or not the relatively recent practice of having mission officers actually influences policies and management at Catholic colleges and universities (7), and that “colleges focus too rigidly on the mission statement itself rather than enacting the mission in practice” and on whether or not their institutions “operate in a manner consistent with their missions” (8-9).

As the “financial stability of an institution is commonly a key driver in planning” (10), certain challenges emerge when faced with: a) “developing operating needs of the institution while remaining conscious of an institution’s mission-related objectives” (10-11, 95), b) balancing one’s original history and mission with the need to adopt “business paradigms that require continuous change and market response” (12), and c) balancing “new courses of action with the traditional values and norms of an institution” (14).

In his review of the literature in the second chapter about mission and identity in American Catholic higher education (21-46), Bisset identifies a number of challenges found in the intersect

of the vitality of mission and strategic planning. He uses Haughey's *Where is Knowing Going?* (2009), with data characterized as coming primarily from faculty, to critique Morey and Piderit's *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (2006), with data characterized as coming primarily from administrators and with an approach characterized as "indoctrination ... on issues relating to Catholic identity" (24). Citing Wilcox and King's *Enhancing Religious Identity* (2000), he notes that "many Catholic college administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, and students are unsure of what Catholic identity means and why it has become an important issue" (25).

Citing Gallin's *Negotiating Identity* (2000), he notes that "today Catholic colleges and universities are negotiating, questioning, and defining their Catholic identity with four major constituencies that are rarely in harmony with one another: the Roman Catholic Church, state and federal government, the broad American higher education community, and the internal constituencies of faculty, students, parents, and administrators" (31). In citing Gray and Cidade's *Catholicism on Campus* (2010), Bisset notes the "challenges for colleges searching for ways to market their Catholic identity to prospective students [today's Millennial Catholics] who may possess attitudes and opinions directly counter to the Catholic Church and its teachings" (37).

Bisset notes that "constantly at odds ... are a Catholic college's ability to remain mission-centered while maintaining a consciousness of market forces that affect an institution's ability to attract and retain students capable of benefiting from the unique educational opportunities available for Catholic colleges and universities" (35). This seems to be one of the major sub-themes of the dissertation. The "observation that Catholic colleges and universities should constantly have one eye on market-based realities and one eye on mission-based aspirations while managing tensions between them" (92) is the backdrop of most of Bisset's dissertation.

In the presentation of his key findings in the fourth chapter (58-94), the author also observes that a) "participants alluded to the undertone of *mission creep* in the institutional culture" (59, 87) and b) the "existence of organized anarchies ["organizations comprised of people who make decisions in different ways and to different degrees ... decision making is inconsistent"] as a sub-theme" of his findings about the "philosophical differences between vice presidents and their managers" (75).

Finally, the dissertation, in its fifth chapter (95-114), concludes with the author making four recommendations: a) "improve communication between administration and board of trustees" (107-109); b) "mandate orientation programs for all new employees" (109); c) "conduct open forums for senior administrators throughout the year to evaluate the role of mission in strategic planning execution" (110); and d) "form an institutional effectiveness committee to assess connectedness between mission and strategic planning execution" (110-111). Furthermore, Bisset suggests "future research on the role of mission in strategic planning development and execution" by all of the Lasallian colleges and universities around the world (112).