

Gossen, Timothy. Annotation of “The Impact of Mission Formation Programs on Senior Administrators at Lasallian Catholic Institutions in the Midwest District.” *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (Christian Brothers Conference: 2023).

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## ANNOTATION

Quinn, Marisa J. “The Impact of Mission Formation on Senior Administration at Lasallian Catholic Institutions in the Midwest District.” EdD dissertation, Regent University, 2019. 89 pp.

The introduction of the study states that “the landscape of Catholic higher education leadership in America has shifted from being predominately priests and religious leaders” to lay leaders charged with “maintaining and perpetuating the Catholic identity according to the sponsoring order’s charism in new ways” (1). Catholic universities were established by sponsoring congregations as a manifestation of their mission and charism. The De La Salle Christian Brothers have been partnering with lay administrators for many decades and have established formation programs with the desire to influence lay leadership to transform the “mission in their vision and daily operations” of the ministry (1).

The background of the problem being studied focused on Catholic higher education and the change in leadership from vowed religious to lay as religious congregations who have traditionally sponsored these institutions have seen fewer individuals joining the religious order (1). The dissertation specifically focused on the De La Salle Christian Brothers, the Lasallian educational philosophy and core values, and Lasallian partnership in association in American higher education (4). The statement of the dissertation focused on “keeping the mission” with the change of leadership from religious to lay (5).

The purpose of the study was “exploring the impact mission formation programs have on senior administrators at institutions sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers located in the Midwest District of the United States” (6). Three research questions were used: (a) was participation in mission formation programs influential for senior administrator’s leadership? (b) has the formation received contributed to mission integration in senior administrator’s vision and administration? and (c) has the senior administrator been personally transformed by mission formation programs? (7). To assist the reader, the dissertation defined various terms (7-12).

The method of the study was phenomenological as it “began with the collection and examination of documents to understand mission, the structure of senior administration, and profile of each institution” (13). Mission statements, websites, and formation opportunities offered were each reviewed, prior to various leaders being asked to participate in the study.

The participant sampling was a purposeful sample (specifically a homogeneous sampling). The individuals interviewed were Lasallian administrators from the Midwest District’s institutions of higher education. Key individuals were chosen because of their leadership role. Presidents’ Cabinet members with the title of vice president or similar titles were chosen from the three institutions (13). Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations – such as self-reporting through interviews, level of engagement in formation programs, and that only one of three Lasallian Districts in the USA was represented – were studied were identified (14).

A comprehensive literature review was shared with the areas of focus being the overview of American higher education: Harvard to today (16); brief history of Catholic higher education in America (20); introduction to Lasallian education (30); role of the lay leadership in Catholic higher education (36); and mission as the foundation of a Catholic institution (38). The phenomenological research design was a collection and examination of documents such as the mission statement, structure of administration, profile of the institution, and formation programs offered as well as in-depth interviews (44). The Midwest District Formation director was interviewed “to provide context [to each institution’s structure] and determine if there were formation opportunities specifically for higher education.”

The interviews were scheduled with participants, conducted through video conferencing, and were recorded. Each interview was transcribed. The researcher also took notes during the sessions. The researcher asked “ten open-ended interview questions to collect demographics, historical information, and experiences of the participants” (46). To establish additional context, in-depth interviews of chief mission officers also provided information about onboarding, mission formation opportunities offered, and their perspective on the impact of mission formation programs on leadership. Inductive coding was used for the data analysis (47).

The study was “comprised of fifteen participants, two of whom were chief mission officers and thirteen senior administrators.” Two chief mission officers suggested other administrators to interview at two of the institutions, while a list of the president’s Cabinet members was used for the third institution (51). The median years of service of the interviewees was 11.47 years; 55% self-disclosed they were Catholic; and 77% indicated that they had participated in a Lasallian formation program. The findings of the study “reinforce the literature indicating the laity must be educated and formed in the mission and charism of the sponsoring congregation” (61). The study found that when administrators are “adequately formed through mission formation programs, the mission is understood and transmitted into their leadership, vision, and daily operations of the institution” (61). The study also found that administrators were transformed by the mission formation programs and found their “vocation and deeper meaning for life within it” (62).

A discussion of the concepts of “together and by association,” mission formation, vocation, and Lasallian Catholic identity were noted (68). Recommendations for practice – such as strengthening mission onboarding, prioritizing leadership mission formation, the inseparable but distinguishable co-identity, and mentorship – were identified (72). Recommendations for future study were: (a) expand the study nationally or internationally; (b) explore the relationship between tenure and lived experience; (c) study the impact of informal mission formation programs; and (d) consider faith affiliation in understanding and implementation (74). The researcher stated that “those who participated in formal programs are able to clearly articulate the institution’s mission and translate it into their leadership, vision, and daily operations” (75). The study found the need for a partnership between the De La Salle Christian Brothers and lay administrators in these institutions was critical and needed for mission integration.