

# **The Verbiage of Vision: Mission and Identity in Theologically Conservative Catholic Colleges and Universities**

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*Since Ex Corde Ecclesiae, Catholic colleges and universities have made a conscientious effort to better embed a declaration of religious identity and its defining values and guiding principles into their institutional mission and vision statements. So too has a new wave of Catholic colleges and universities whose leadership has accused Catholic higher education of compromising faith to conform to an increasingly secular world. A content analysis of the mission and vision statements from a nationwide sample of these institutions was performed and key linguistic components found to constitute a well conceived, viable and easily diffused institutional vision were isolated. Findings reveal significant stylistic differences across religious institution types in terms of vision, clarity, complexity, pragmatics, optimism, and their use of language to unify the campus community. How mission and vision statements can better serve as guiding, governing and promotional documents is discussed.*

Recently, religious conservatives have accused Catholic higher education leadership of compromising faith to conform to an increasingly secular world (Bollag 2004; Shlichta 2009) and failing to teach young people about a Catholic, moral life (Drake 2007). According to Miscamble (2007):

Catholic universities in the United States possess a certain Potemkin Village quality. While their buildings are quite real, what goes on within them has increasingly lost its distinctive content and come to resemble what occurs in secular institutions of higher learning. Students emerge from Catholic schools rather unfamiliar with the riches of the Catholic intellectual tradition and with their imaginations untouched by a religious sensibility. (Miscamble 2007: ¶12)

Marsden (2001) has suggested that “religious colleges, instead of feeling that they are under pressure to become more like their secular counterparts, should take pride in the religious character of their education, attempting to strengthen it rather than weaken it” (Marsden 2001: 11).

In response, a spurt of Catholic immersion schools has occurred (see Morey and Piderit 2006; Redden 2007). This wave of theologically conservative colleges mirrors a similar wave in the 1970s, when institutions that include Christendom College, Magdalen College, Thomas Aquinas College, and Thomas More College of Liberal Arts were founded. They were created in response to Vatican II, which called for a respect for modern learning, the autonomy of the social sciences, and a greater role for lay Catholics in running Catholic institutions. “These two waves of new colleges are very much a reaction to a perceived failing at the other Catholic colleges” notes Reilly (as cited in Redden 2007: ¶12), president and founder of the Cardinal Newman Society, an organization dedicated to renewing and strengthening Catholic identity at America’s Catholic colleges and universities. “Pope John Paul II said that the only reason a Catholic institution exists is to evangelize,” said Derry Connelly, president of the immersion John Paul the Great University. “I would have a tough time looking at the vast majority of Catholic universities and saying that their primary goal is evangelization” (cited in Drake 2007: ¶8).

These new colleges are small and largely define themselves by their commitments to the Magisterium, the Church’s authority on doctrinal teachings (Skojec 2003). All of them are public about their acceptance of the Church’s canon law mandatum for theology faculty (Drake 2007). Many have adopted a “great books” approach—that is, a large core of required liberal arts courses, stressing the reading of classics of western civilization, starting from ancient Greece and Rome, in history, philosophy, literature, and theology. Most accentuate the Church’s liturgy and sacraments as a part of daily life on campus; students and faculty members attend Mass frequently—often available in Latin—and strive to maintain a conservative campus life, where there are separate dorm facilities for men and women, and premarital sex is strictly forbidden (Bollag 2004). “There are students and families,” notes Richard Yanikoski, president and CEO of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (cited in Redden 2007), “that have a strong desire for this kind of insulated, overtly Catholic, small and traditional campus” (Redden 2007: ¶21).

“We strongly recommend [these schools] and consider them to be among the best 10% of Catholic higher education. We’re hoping to be able to help steer more students to these schools,” notes Reilly (as cited in Drake 2007: ¶15). These immersion colleges aspire to train graduates who will raise a strong and orthodox Catholic intellectual voice in the debates over stem-cell research, gay marriage, and other sociopolitical issues (Bollag 2004). To date, a higher percentage of their graduates are choosing the priesthood or other religious vocations when compared with

other Catholic schools (Drake 2007). The impact these schools will have is not in the numbers attending or graduating, but, according to Reilly (cited in Drake 2007), “in the great pressure that they bring to bear on other Catholic colleges to meet academic and Catholic identity standards” (Drake 2007: ¶15).

Although the rationale for and aspirations of these new institutions are clear, they, like other colleges and universities, must also “carefully and purposefully articulate these strategies” (Ayers 2002: 28). Doing so is necessary to attract and retain students, facilitate public perception, improve communication among campus constituents, and allow the academic and religious missions to be more central to the way the institution conducts its business (see Guy-Sheftall 2006).

The purpose of this investigation is to provide a baseline measurement of the articulated mission and identity of immersion Catholic colleges and universities. This investigation will provide a comparative content analysis to that performed by Abelman and Dalessandro (2009), which examined the institutional vision of these schools’ less theologically conservative counterparts. By doing so, it will reveal the current state of utility of the inspirational and pragmatic rhetoric in declarations of institutional vision in Catholic higher education, determining whether these schools are effectively communicating their mission, vision, and religious identity among campus constituents, between administrators and the faculty, and allowing the academic and religious missions to be a central ingredient in the way the institutions conduct their business.

### **INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND IDENTITY IN CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION**

According to Mixon, Lyon, and Beaty (2004: 400), “today’s religious colleges and universities are on the horns of a dilemma”—that is, many schools are sacrificing a distinctive religious identity as they move toward a stronger academic reputation. This conflict is particularly apparent in American Catholic colleges and universities, which have existed for more than 200 years but have not yet resolved what it means to be Catholic (Garrett 2006; Morey and Piderit 2006). At issue are the institutional characteristics of Catholic identity and their defining values, guiding principles, and stewardship (see Gallin 2000; Hellwig 2000; Murphy 1991; Provost 2000; Steinfels 1997; Wilcox and King 2000; Young 2001). “One can only read the mission statements of some Catholic universities with some sense of regret,” lamented Langan and O’Donavan:

The very vagueness of their language and the indeterminacy of the general commitments leave one with the sense that the decline of some institutions may be advanced, that the conjunction between a vibrant Catholicism or a Catholic culture and the university appears increasingly faint. (Langan and O'Donovan 1993: 76)

In response to Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which listed "essential characteristics" of the identity of Catholic colleges and universities (cited in Estanek, James, and Norton 2006), Hellwig<sup>1</sup> provided administrators with concrete and practical ways of implementing and communicating the Catholic mission of their institutions. The first and most significant was "a public profession of the Catholic identity in institutional statements and public documents" (Hellwig 2004: 115).

Institutional vision is the means by which a college or university's identity, character and worldview are identified and communicated to the academic and outside communities. It is here, in these declarations of purpose, that an institution's aspirations are recognized, commitment is established and expectations are reinforced (see Fox 2003; Pekarsky 1998). Institutional vision defines the kinds of human beings the academic establishment is attempting to cultivate (Abelman and Molina 2006) and recognizes the skills, sensibilities, values, attitudes, and understandings students should be acquiring during their education (Fox 1997).

For most colleges and universities, institutional vision takes the form of a mission statement, a vision statement, or both. Mission statements typically define the historical, physical, social, fiscal, religious, and political contexts in which that institution exists (Banta, Lund, Black, and Oblander 1995; Marom 2003) and are displayed as a recruitment and marketing tool (see Kirp 2003; Golden 2010; Murphy, 1987; Welton and Cook 1997). Vision statements complement these characteristics, but transcend them as well. They form a set of aspirations for enhancing the quality of higher education that is distinctive, coherent, and appealing (Marom 1994; Miller, Bender, and Schuh 2005).

According to Morphew and Hartley (2006: 457), these statements have become ubiquitous in higher education, with strategic planning and student support services predicated on their formulation. After all, "a shared sense of purpose has the capacity to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate to external constituents. A clear and distinct mission helps distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not."

A “well conceived vision,” according to Pekarsky (1998: 280), is “an informing idea that is shared, clear and compelling.” An institutional vision that is *shared* has the capacity to embrace, inspire, and motivate those within an institution by communicating the common characteristics of its key constituents (Hartley 2002). A vision must be *clear* enough to offer genuine guidance in making educational decisions and setting priorities on all levels of the learning community (see Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, and Smith 1999) and help distinguish between activities that conform to institutional identity and imperatives and those that do not (Morpheus and Hartley 2006). An institutional vision that is *compelling* generates enthusiasm and optimism among the stakeholders (Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl 2004; George 2000), and inspires them to transform vision into a pattern of meaningful activity (see Baum, Locke, and Kirkpatrick 1998; Kirkpatrick, Wofford, and Baum 2002). Optimism enhances organizational outcomes, particularly during times of transition, uncertainty, or turbulence (see also Bunker 1986; Hart, Jarvis, and Lim 2002; Pillai and Meindl 1998).

Communication scholars have discovered that in order for any innovative, pioneering, or motivating idea such as institutional vision to be generally accepted, readily adopted, and widely distributed to others by its stakeholders, it must possess components above and beyond Pekarsky’s notion of *shared*, *clear*, and *compelling*. Rogers (2003; 2004) and others (see, for example, Deffuant, Huet, and Amblard 2005; Valente 1995; Vishwanath and Goldhaber 2003; Wejnert 2002) have found that four additional attributes are salient and powerful predictors of adoption and diffusion: *relative advantage* (e.g., Are ideas or innovations presented in a way that they can be successfully transformed into general or specific actions that generate benefits?); *complexity* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations solid and concrete?); *compatibility* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations suitable and appropriate to the target audience?); and *observability* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations pragmatic?).

More than 80% of all secular colleges and universities have made major revisions in their mission and vision statements within the last decade (see Association of American Colleges 1994; Birnbaum 2000) in response to new challenges and an increasingly competitive marketplace. Since Hellwig’s (2004) provision of pragmatic guidelines, “mission statements, learning objectives, and strategic planning at Catholic colleges are focusing on their Catholic identity and how it is best portrayed” (Garrett 2006: 245; see also Nichols 2005; Woo 2005). Estanek, James, and Norton (2006: 200) reinforce this observation, confirming that “a vision for the

distinct mission of Catholic institutions of higher education has been articulated and implemented.” This, the authors suggest, has been achieved through explicit references to foundational heritage and sponsorship, the groups of historical and current constituents the school serves, and how the institution defines its educational enterprise. Specific outcomes such as intellectual development and the education of the whole person, service, leadership, and citizenship are typically included in the mission statements of Catholic schools.

Despite changes in the content of institutional statements and public documents of Catholic colleges and universities, it has been suggested that these messages still fail to resonate on their campuses and are not successfully reaching key constituents (see Cernera 2005; Sullins 2004). In an extensive and detailed content analysis of the vision and mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities, Abelman and Dalessandro (2009) found that these statements do little to effectively articulate a unification among the community of students, faculty, and staff, or coordinate their vision of the institution with that of the administration. They are less likely than other types of religious schools to address the pragmatic benefits of a religious education. “It is not easy,” observes DiGiacomo (2007: 78), “to recover that sense of mission and to restore its lost vitality.” Morey and Piderit (2006: 117) argue that “if the Catholic intellectual tradition is to positively influence the campus community . . . it must have traction with the students. Current and future students and their parents have to find merit.”

What of the new wave of immersion Catholic colleges and universities, particularly in light of their accusations that Catholic higher education leadership has abandoned faith to conform to an increasingly secular world (Bollag 2004; Shlichta 2009) and is failing to teach young people about a Catholic moral life (Drake 2007)? Although the rationale for and aspirations of these new institutions are clear, are they carefully articulating and purposefully communicating their strategies? To address this issue, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What constitutes institutional vision in theologically conservative immersion Catholic higher education as compared with other Catholic schools?

RQ2: To what extent are expressions of institutional vision in immersion Catholic colleges and universities in possession of the linguistic components that facilitate acceptance, adoption, and wide diffusion by stakeholders?

The literature on the diffusion of innovations suggests that the nature of the institution’s social system—in particular, the size and complexity of



its infrastructure—influences what is perceived to be innovative (see Rogers, 2004; Wejnert, 2002) and, thus, whether or not that innovation will be accepted, adopted, and relayed to others. Similarly, it has been suggested that an academic community's awareness of and access to any formal declarations by its leadership may be a function of the nature of the institution (Abelman, Atkin, Dalessandro, Snyder-Suhy, and Janstova 2007; Rozycki 2004; Velcoff and Ferrari 2006). This includes the size of its student enrollment (see Kuhlmann 2004), its academic mission (e.g., highest degree granted; see Abelman and Dalessandro 2009; Ayers 2002; Baldwin 2005) and its mode of operation (e.g., public or private; see Abelman 2011; Boerema 2006; Bryson 2004). It is also likely that the religious orientation of an institution may play a significant role. As such, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: Is there a relationship between the religious orientation (e.g., orthodoxy) of a Catholic institution and the linguistic components of its institutional vision?

### METHODS

The theologically conservative immersion Catholic colleges and universities that comprise the sample ( $n = 11$ ) were compiled by school classification reported in *Inside Higher Education* (see Redden 2007) and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (see Bollag 2004). A listing of these institutions can be found in Appendix A.

Using the Carnegie Foundation's Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2008) as a guideline, a stratified, random sample of thirty schools each from public and private doctorate-granting, master's-granting, and baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities were selected from a population of all U.S. and Canadian institutions of higher education. This resulted in a total sample of 180 institutions.<sup>2</sup> Institutions with Roman Catholic affiliation were identified and verified using a roster of membership institutions provided by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities ( $n = 21$ ). A listing of these institutions can be found in Appendix B.

*Unit of Analysis.* A school's web-based representation of its institutional vision served as the unit of analysis for this investigation. This information was accessed and downloaded from each school's web site by four trained coders. This was accomplished by searching the home page for direct links to mission and vision statements. If none were accessible, the institution's search engine was utilized by typing "vision statement" and "vision" and selecting the option that contained the institution's vi-

sion statement. After the initial search, an additional search for “mission statement” and “mission” was conducted. As with the previous search, the mission statement was included in the analysis. If no vision or mission statement, or equivalent document, could be found through the web sites, electronic versions of school catalogs were accessed and searched.<sup>3</sup> The text of each school’s institutional vision statement was classified as a “mission statement,” “vision statement” or containing “both a mission and vision statement” by a team of two coders.

*Computerized Content Analysis.* The text of each school’s institutional vision was processed through DICTION (Version 5.0), a text-analysis software program that codes and compares content using social scientific methods for determining the linguistic elements in a verbal message (see Hart 2001). On the basis of a thorough examination of the words included in each DICTION dictionary, six constructs that corresponded with what Pekarsky (1998) identified as *shared*, *clear*, and *compelling*, and what Rogers (2004) and his colleagues defined as *relative advantage*, *observability*, and *complexity* were adopted.<sup>4</sup> Because each construct is measured using a different formula comprised of different dictionaries, their respective DICTION scores per se are not comparable. Instead, comparisons relevant to the mean scores of each construct can be made. This is the same methodology reported in Abelman and Dalessandro (2009), which should be consulted for more information about the DICTION formula and examples of key words employed to compute scores.

In order to investigate DICTION score differences in the expressions of institutional vision across Catholic schools and immersion Catholic schools, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. To determine if the linguistic components of vision statements and mission statements for immersion Catholic colleges and universities were significantly different, a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANOVA) was conducted. The dependent variables included the six predefined linguistic components, with the expression of institutional vision (mission or vision) as the independent factor.

## RESULTS

The first research question addressed the composition of expressions of institutional vision at Catholic colleges and universities. Of the twenty-one Catholic institutions in the sample, every institution (100%) presented a mission statement as part of its institutional vision, and ten institutions (47.6%) also presented a vision statement. Approximately 66.7% of the Catholic baccalaureate-granting institutions ( $n = 3$ ), 45.5% of the Catholic



master's-granting institutions ( $n = 11$ ), and 42.8% of the Catholic doctorate-granting institutions ( $n = 7$ ) presented a vision statement.

Of the eleven immersion Catholic institutions in the sample, every institution (100%) presented a mission statement. Only two institutions (18.2%) had a clearly identified and labeled vision statement. None of the immersion Catholic baccalaureate-granting institutions ( $n = 6$ ) and 40% of the Catholic master's-granting institutions ( $n = 5$ ) presented a vision statement.

The second and third research questions inquired about the linguistic components of these expressions of institutional vision. The means, standard deviations, and range for DICTION scores for each of the linguistic components, on which this series of ANOVAs and other points of comparison are based, can be found in Tables 1 through 3.

Several statistically significant differences ( $p < .01$ ) in the linguistic components of the composite institutional vision statements were found across institutions. The institutional vision presented by the immersion Catholic colleges and universities was considerably more *shared* ( $F [1, 32] = 38.28$ ), more *clear* ( $F [1, 32] = 29.76$ ), more *complex* ( $F [1, 32] = 39.97$ ), and possessed greater *relative advantage* ( $F [1,32] = 39.22$ ) and more *observability* ( $F [1, 32] = 33.12$ ) than the institutional vision offered by their less conservative counterparts. The composite institutional vision presented by immersion Catholic colleges and universities was also found to be less *compelling* ( $F [1, 32] = 28.34$ ) than that presented by other Catholic institutions.

To best assess the desired linguistic components within mission and vision statements, these documents were isolated and extracted from the composite expression of institutional vision. They were then independently subjected to content analysis. The means, standard deviations, and range for DICTION scores for each of the linguistic components in mission statements and vision statements can be found in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

The mission statements employed by the immersion Catholic colleges and universities was considerably ( $p < .01$ ) more *shared* ( $F [1, 32] = 39.54$ ), more *clear* ( $F [1, 32] = 31.05$ ), more *complex* ( $F [1, 32] = 44.21$ ), and possessed greater *relative advantage* ( $F [1, 32] = 38.72$ ) and more *observability* ( $F [1, 32] = 33.45$ ) than the institutional vision offered by their less conservative counterparts. The mission statements presented by immersion Catholic colleges and universities were also found to be considerably less *compelling* ( $F [1, 32] = 25.77$ ) than those presented by other Catholic institutions.

The vision statements employed by immersion Catholic colleges and universities were found to be significantly ( $p < .05$ ) less *shared* ( $F [1,32] = 26.78$ ), less *clear* ( $F [1, 32] = 21.65$ ), less *compelling* ( $F [1, 32] = 27.34$ ),

**Table 1**  
**Composite Institutional Vision**  
**Catholic and Immersion Catholic Schools**  
**Mean DICTION Scores**

|                    | <b>Linguistic Components</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Range (H-L)</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| Shared             | Catholic                     | 47.8     | 2.95      | 65.87–42.54        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 53.9     | 2.47      |                    |
| Clarity*           | Catholic                     | 5.5      | 0.35      | 4.32–5.97          |
|                    | Immersion                    | 4.9      | 0.42      |                    |
| Compelling         | Catholic                     | 65.2     | 3.57      | 74.92–49.66        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 56.2     | 3.21      |                    |
| Complexity         | Catholic                     | 52.8     | 7.90      | 84.19–47.30        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 69.4     | 5.43      |                    |
| Relative Advantage | Catholic                     | 40.2     | 3.28      | 58.45–33.43        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 54.1     | 3.17      |                    |
| Observability      | Catholic                     | 39.7     | 2.56      | 57.35–27.95        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 48.5     | 3.41      |                    |

\*low score is equivalent to a high degree of clarity

less complex ( $F [1, 32] = 27.09$ ), possessed less relative advantage ( $F [1, 32] = 18.95$ ) and less observability ( $F [1, 32] = 17.87$ ) than the vision statements offered by their less conservative counterparts.

Significant differences in mission statements and vision statements on the dependent variables were found (Wilk’s  $\Lambda = .72$ ,  $F = 43.57$ ,  $p = .01$ ), with mission statements being more shared ( $p = .001$ ), more clear ( $p = .01$ ), more compelling ( $p = .05$ ), more complex ( $p = .001$ ), and having greater observability ( $p = .001$ ) and more relative advantage ( $p = .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

At a conference on the future of religious colleges, Reverend David M. O’Connell<sup>5</sup> (O’Connell 2000) noted that, for a religious-based college or university, “religious identity must be coupled with a mission that reinforces the identity or the identity falls flat. Mission must be derived and flow from a distinctive identity in visible, tangible ways” (O’Connell 2000: ¶23). The author called attention to Baylor University, the largest Baptist university in the world, as a casebook example. Its mission statement, in part, reads:

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**Table 2**  
**Mission Only**  
**Catholic and Immersion Catholic Schools**  
**Mean DICTION Scores**

|                    | <b>Linguistic Components</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Range (H-L)</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| Shared             | Catholic                     | 49.8     | 2.95      | 68.72–43.73        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 61.2     | 4.73      |                    |
| Clarity*           | Catholic                     | 5.5      | 0.36      | 4.29–6.13          |
|                    | Immersion                    | 4.8      | 0.47      |                    |
| Compelling         | Catholic                     | 64.9     | 3.21      | 78.32–48.61        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 58.7     | 3.51      |                    |
| Complexity         | Catholic                     | 53.8     | 7.90      | 86.32–49.33        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 77.7     | 5.11      |                    |
| Relative Advantage | Catholic                     | 43.2     | 3.41      | 65.75–34.77        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 58.3     | 3.27      |                    |
| Observability      | Catholic                     | 45.1     | 2.98      | 62.38–35.93        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 53.6     | 3.17      |                    |

\*low *score* is the equivalent to a high degree of *clarity*

The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment . . . dedicated to Christian principles. (O’Connell 2000: ¶24)

“It is a religious academic institution that identifies the way religion impacts its academic activities; it has a distinctive religious academic mission,” noted O’Connell (2000: ¶25). He also called attention to Brigham Young University, owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly called the Mormon Church), which announces that its mission

is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life [and that within] a broad university education . . . all students should be taught the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . central to the Church’s purposes. (O’Connell 2000: ¶28)

“No doubt there what BYU is or does. The reality of the situation and, therefore, the fundamental urgency in all of this conversation about the future of religious colleges,” suggested O’Connell (2000), “rests in their ability to be distinct and to translate that distinctiveness into a religious institutional academic mission” (¶29).

**Table 3**  
**Vision Only**  
**Catholic and Immersion Catholic Schools**  
**Mean DICTION Scores**

|                    | <b>Linguistic Components</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Range (H–L)</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| Shared             | Catholic                     | 41.1     | 3.09      | 66.70–37.81        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 51.6     | 6.34      |                    |
| Clarity*           | Catholic                     | 5.6      | 0.49      | 4.98–6.06          |
|                    | Immersion                    | 5.9      | 0.58      |                    |
| Compelling         | Catholic                     | 67.9     | 2.97      | 75.19–51.71        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 54.2     | 5.37      |                    |
| Complexity         | Catholic                     | 52.9     | 9.06      | 56.90–37.13        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 46.3     | 4.33      |                    |
| Relative Advantage | Catholic                     | 37.2     | 8.76      | 52.02–24.41        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 46.9     | 10.23     |                    |
| Observability      | Catholic                     | 34.7     | 5.34      | 71.47–38.78        |
|                    | Immersion                    | 46.3     | 5.34      |                    |

\*low score is the equivalent to a high degree of clarity

For Catholic colleges and universities, mission and vision statements must also serve as a public profession of the institution’s Catholic identity (Hellwig, 2004). Wilcox (2000) suggested that “‘without a vision, the people perish.’ That utterance in the Book of Proverbs (29:18) goes to the heart of the current controversy surrounding the religious identity . . . of Catholic colleges and universities” (Wilcox 2000: xv–xvi).

In an assessment of Catholic higher education twenty years after *Ex Corde*, House (2010) concluded that

[t]he landscape of Catholic higher education has changed appreciably, with the renewal of a vibrant Catholic identity at several colleges, as well as the creation of new Catholic institutions rigorously faithful to church teachings. . . . Those new and renewed Catholic colleges have woven *Ex Corde* deeply into the fabric of their missions, curricula, hiring practices, governance, and student life. (House 2010: ¶15)

Evidence of this can be found in Abelman and Dalessandro (2009), which noted that Catholic schools do an excellent job of delineating the institution’s priorities and emphasizing its key characteristics—its religious identity—to constituents, while many other religious schools do not. They

do so by employing highly optimistic and inspirational language, which, suggest George (2000) and others (see Kuh 2001; Senge 1990), is an essential component of engagement in a learning community.

Interestingly, though the language in the mission and vision statements of Catholic colleges and universities ably represents institutional priorities and identity, it does comparatively less to effectively unify its community of constituents—that is, its students, faculty, staff, and the church. It also places less emphasis on articulating the pragmatic or practical benefits of the institution’s religious education. These findings reinforce Morey and Piderit’s (2006) recommendation that a Catholic education “must have traction with the students” (Morey and Piderit 2006: 117) by more explicitly addressing the merits of a Catholic education. To date, the institutional vision of Catholic schools still lacks traction and requires additional attention if this is to be achieved.

The immersion Catholic colleges and universities that are examined in this investigation certainly have traction. The language employed in their institutional visions is designed to unify its constituents. Its message is unambiguous and concrete, and emphasizes the realities of its institutions’ heritage and the more pragmatic outcomes of an orthodox Catholic education.

There are advantages to offering an institutional vision that emphasizes the pragmatic benefits of a religious education. The most practical advantage is that these documents serve as recruitment and marketing tools (see Kirp 2003; Murphy, 1987; Welton and Cook 1997). In the competitive sport of college selection, mission and vision statements are often the first point of contact or reference for prospective students seeking a religious education. The website of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, for example, suggests that,

[t]o find out just how religiously-affiliated a college is, start by reviewing the school’s mission statement. This will indicate how much emphasis the school puts on the academic, social and spiritual aspects of college and what is to be gained by this. (National Association for College Admission Counseling 2008: ¶3)

In addition, mission and vision statements are serving as the first point of comparison for prospective students considering a Catholic education (see Drake 2007). Ave Maria’s School of Law, for example, purposefully and dramatically emphasizes *relative advantage* and *observability* in its mission statement:

Ave Maria offers state-of-the-art facilities and technologies, and a curriculum enriched by a grounding in natural law and the enduring truths of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Graduates are

prepared to practice law with the highest level of skill and professionalism in law firms, public service, business, higher education, the judiciary, and national, state, and local government. (cited in Skojec 2003: ¶16)

Similarly, the Young America's Foundation (2008)—a major outreach organization of the conservative movement—generates an annual “Top Conservative Colleges” list that “features ten institutions that proclaim, through their mission and programs, a dedication to discovering, maintaining, and strengthening the conservative values of their students” (¶3). *Relative advantage* and *observability* have been identified by communication scholars as linguistic attributes that are salient and powerful predictors of the adoption and diffusion of institutional vision. Clearly, they are also attractive selling points for an institution, and their significance in mission and vision statements cannot be overemphasized. In fact, Young America's Foundation's 2007–2008 list<sup>6</sup> included three immersion Catholic schools—Christendom College, Franciscan University of Steubenville, and Thomas Aquinas College—with Thomas More College of Liberal Arts receiving honorable mention. Only one other Catholic school, St. Vincent College, made the list.

What immersion Catholic colleges and universities lack in their institutional vision is *vision*. The research reported here found that 48% of the sample of Catholic colleges and universities has a vision statement. Other recent research has reported that approximately 35% percent of all secular colleges and universities have a vision statement (see Abelman and Dalessandro 2009), 28% of the “Christ-centered” religious schools affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (2008) have a vision statement, and 14% of religious schools affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have a vision statement (see Railsback 2006). In contrast, approximately 18% of immersion Catholic colleges and universities have a vision statement. In addition, linguistically, these statements pale by comparison to those of less conservative Catholic schools—that is, they are significantly less clear, less compelling, and less complex.

Although mission statements typically define the physical, social, fiscal, and political contexts in which the institution exists, vision statements form a set of aspirations for enhancing the quality of higher education. The mission statement “is about the here and now,” suggested Lewis (2005), “but vision describes the future” (5). The mission statement reflects the realities of its institution's environment, but the vision statement drives these realities (Hartley 2002). According to O'Connell, “once the distinc-



tive identity of the religious college is established, the future of the institution depends upon the way in which that identity influences or impacts the academic enterprise and life beyond it” (O’Connell 2000: ¶23). This information is typically found in an institution’s vision statement.

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The normative DICTION scores presented in Tables 1–3 provide the means for any college or university to assess its own institutional vision and determine how its inspirational and pragmatic rhetoric matches up with other institutions. The purchase and application of DICTION is required to generate comparative scores. Of course, other software packages (e.g., LIWC, TextSmart, Wordstat) can be employed to assess institutional vision and provide pre- and post-revision scores on comparable versions of the linguistic components employed in this investigation.

Another option would be to visit the web sites of the institutions identified in this investigation as scoring high on specific linguistic components (see Table 4, preceding appendices below), access the institutional vision statements, and visually compare those documents with that of one’s own institution. Stonehill College, for example, followed this protocol during the revision of its mission statement in 2006. According to the school’s President, Rev. Mark T. Cregan:

We wanted to refine the Stonehill mission statement so that it is more concise, memorable, and, therefore, more usable. We wanted to do so in a way that was also consistent with our history. And, we wanted an aspirational mission statement—one that inspires and guides us as we execute our strategic plan. To generate a starting point, the Committee researched the mission statements of other Catholic colleges and universities including those sponsored by the Congregation of Holy Cross. (Cregan 2008: ¶8)

To facilitate this process, the institutional vision statement of Loyola University of Chicago is presented in Appendix C. This is a good example of a well-balanced statement—that is, one that generated a high DICTION score on most of the six linguistic components across its mission and vision statements. Its DICTION scores for the composite statement, mission statement only, and vision statement only are provided, as are indicators of whether the score is above the mean for all Catholic institutions in the sample.

Although immersion colleges as a whole exhibit exemplary mission statements that emphasize the pragmatic outcomes of an orthodox Catholic education, their vision statements are less impressive. “Articulating a

clear and authentic vision,” notes Cesareo (2007), “remains an ongoing but essential challenge for Catholic institutions of higher education” (18), and this is certainly the case with the new wave of immersion colleges. If these institutions wish to improve their capacity to inspire and motivate those within the campus community and effectively communicate to external constituents, they would do well to devote some energy and resources to the articulation of a clear and compelling vision.

**Table 4**  
**Top Catholic and Immersion**  
**Catholic Colleges and Universities**  
**By DICTION Scores**

| <b>Samples of Institutional Vision Statements</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Shared</b>                                     | <p><b>Saint Paul’s College 57.16</b><br/>                     “Our Mission: A Cooperative quest. The College uses innovative approaches in the teaching-learning setting that expand the educational horizons for its students. In a cooperative quest to meet the demands for increased technological skill, faculty and students are encouraged to experiment, explore, and develop new approaches to learning leading to knowledge, mastery of technical and critical thinking skills, development of individual expression, and the discovery of truth.”</p> <p><b>Holy Spirit College 61.23</b><br/>                     “It is the MISSION of all members of the Holy Spirit College community to work collaboratively in promoting the intellectual, spiritual, physical, emotional, social and moral growth of our students in a caring Christian environment in the Catholic tradition.”</p> |
| <b>Clarity</b>                                    | <p><b>Marquette University 5.10</b><br/>                     “OUR VISION is to provide a Catholic, Jesuit education that is genuinely transformational, so that our students graduate not simply better educated but better people, and to do so with such excellence that when asked to name the three or four best Catholic universities in America, people will include Marquette as a matter of course.”</p> <p><b>Magdalen College 4.48</b><br/>                     “The mission of the College is to give an integrated Catholic liberal arts education: to teach and form its students intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually.</p> <p>“The mission is accomplished through the rigorous study of works by great thinkers, close personal interaction between teachers and students, and a vibrant community life.”</p>  |

## Mission and Identity in Theologically Conservative Catholic Colleges

| <b>Samples of Institutional Vision Statements</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Compelling</b>                                 | <p><b>Rosemont College 66.64</b><br/>           “Rosemont College is a community of learners dedicated to excellence and joy in the pursuit of knowledge. Rosemont college seeks to develop in all members of the community open and critical minds, as well as the ability to make reasoned moral decisions. Rooted in Catholicism, and guided by the educational principles of Cornelia Connelly and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rosemont College values trust in and reverence for the dignity of each person, diversity in human culture and experience, persistence and courage in the promoting justice with compassion.”</p> <p><b>Wyoming Catholic College 63.75</b><br/>           “Wyoming Catholic College is committed to offering a liberal arts education that steepens its students in the awesome beauty of our created, natural world and imbues them with the best that has been thought and said in Western civilization, including the moral and intellectual heritage of the Catholic Church. The College strives to promote a love of learning, an understanding of natural order, and the quest for virtuous living so that its graduates will assume their responsibilities as citizens in a free society.”</p> |
| <b>Complexity</b>                                 | <p><b>Marian College 83.30</b><br/>           “Marian College is committed to the education of the whole person, striving to nurture intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, psychological, social, and physical dimensions. The College’s personal concern for students serves as the foundation for academic and student life as well as professional experiences. College programs integrate professional preparation with a liberal arts foundation. The College embraces justice, compassion, and service to the local and global community.”</p> <p><b>Thomas Aquinas College 83.86</b><br/>           “We hold with confidence that the human mind is capable of knowing the truth about reality, that living according to the truth is necessary for human happiness, and that truth is best comprehended through the harmonious work of faith and reason, under the guidance of the Church’s common doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas. We understand the intellectual virtues to be essential to the pursuit of truth and to the life of reason it presupposes, and we consider the cultivation of those virtues to be the primary work of Catholic liberal education.”</p>  |
| <b>Relative Advantage</b>                         | <p><b>University of Notre Dame 47.40</b><br/>           “The University seeks to cultivate in its students not only an appreciation for the great achievements of human beings, but also a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice, and oppression that burden the lives of so many. The aim is to create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice.”</p> <p><b>Ave Maria University 55.39</b><br/>           “The University takes as its mission the sponsorship of a liberal arts education curriculum dedicated, as articulated in the apostolic constitution <i>Ex Corde Ecclesiae</i>, to the advancement of human culture, the promotion of dialogue between faith and reason, the formation of men and women in the intellectual and moral virtues of the Catholic faith, and to the development of professional and pre-professional programs in response to local and societal needs.”</p>   |

| <b>Samples of Institutional Vision Statements</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Observability</b>                              | <p><b>Emmanuel College 49.19</b><br/>“Our Vision: To be recognized for the excellence of our academic and student life programs and for our achievements in educating students with the skills and values necessary to succeed professionally and personally. An Emmanuel education challenges students to become critical thinkers, ethical decision makers, and contributing members of the local community and the global society.”</p> <p><b>Campion College 56.44</b><br/>“At Campion College, we believe that a university is more than bricks and mortar, that education does not stop when classes end. The Jesuit philosophy of “Cura Personalis” or “Care for the Whole Person” is reflected in the College’s encouragement of students to pursue a well-rounded approach to their development—intellectually, spiritually, and socially. By combining this experience with studies in Arts, Fine Arts, Sciences, and Pre-Professional Programs, graduates leave with the communication, research, creative-thinking, and decision-making skills necessary to succeed in today’s rapidly changing world.”</p> |

**APPENDIX A**

Sample of Immersion Catholic Schools (n = 11)

Ave Maria University  
Campion College  
Christendom College  
Franciscan University of Steubenville  
John Paul the Great Catholic University  
Magdalen College  
Southern Catholic College  
Thomas Aquinas College  
Thomas More College of Liberal Arts  
University of Sacramento  
Wyoming Catholic College

**APPENDIX B**

Random Sample of Other Catholic Schools (n = 21)

Clarke College  
Dominican University of California  
Edgewood College  
Emmanuel College  
Gannon University  
Holy Cross College  
King's College  
LeMoyne College  
Loyola Marymount University  
Loyola University of Chicago  
Marian College  
Marquette University  
Mount Saint Mary's College  
Regis University  
Rosemont College  
Saint Joseph's College  
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota  
Saint Paul's College  
Saint Thomas University  
Stonehill College  
University of Notre Dame

## APPENDIX C

### Institutional Vision of Loyola University Chicago

#### **Mission**

We are Chicago’s Jesuit Catholic University—a diverse community seeking God in all things and working to expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith.

#### **Vision**

Loyola University Chicago is the school of choice for those who wish to seek new knowledge in the service of humanity in a world-renowned urban center as members of a diverse learning community that values freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of truth and care for others.

Our Jesuit Catholic tradition of education prepares students for extraordinary lives that will reflect the following characteristics:

- Commitment to excellence: Applying well-learned lessons and skills to achieve new ideas, better solutions and vital answers
- Faith in God and the religious experience: Promoting well-formed and strongly held beliefs in one’s faith tradition to deepen others’ relationships with God
- Service that promotes justice: Using learning and leadership in openhanded and generous ways to ensure freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of truth and care for others
- Values-based leadership: Ensuring a consistent focus on personal integrity, ethical behavior in business and in all professions, and the appropriate balance between justice and fairness
- Global awareness: Demonstrating an understanding that the world’s people and societies are interrelated and interdependent

**DICTION Institutional Vision Scores**

|                  | <b>Shared</b> | <b>Clarity</b> | <b>Compelling</b> | <b>Complexity</b> | <b>Relative Advantage</b> | <b>Observability</b> |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Composite</b> | 50.28*        | 5.79           | 62.00             | 47.50             | 44.32*                    | 43.42*               |
| <b>Mission</b>   | 45.23         | 5.57           | 60.86             | 48.14             | 40.48                     | 44.85                |
| <b>Vision</b>    | 55.98*        | 5.78           | 68.07*            | 42.46             | 45.25*                    | 45.35*               |

\* = value is more than the mean (for “Clarity,” less than the mean) calculated from all Catholic institutions  
Note: Copied by permission of Loyola University Chicago



## Notes

1. Former president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.
2. The sample was originally selected for Abelman, Dalessandro, Janstova, Snyder-Suy and Pettey (2007), an analysis of the academic advising operations of four-year institutions as reflected in institutional vision documents. Consequently, the number of Catholic institutions reported here is the result of true random sampling that did not specifically isolate or purposefully target religious institutions.
3. All searches were duplicated for quality control and inter-coder reliability exceeded .95 across all websites.
4. One relevant attribute from the literature, *compatible*, could not be measured by the software because the construct is based on highly subjective and contextual information that cannot be coded by computer.
5. At the time, president of the Catholic University of America.
6. The Young America's Foundation's criterion for selection reads as follows: "The listed colleges offer an alternative to the liberal status quo, because they allow and encourage conservative students to explore conservative ideas and authors. They offer coursework and scholarship in conservative thought and emphasize principles including smaller government, strong national defense, free enterprise, and traditional values. Furthermore, they avoid trends in academe by continuing to study Western Civilization instead of straying toward the study of Marxism, feminism, sexuality, postmodernism, and other distractions that do not give students a complete understanding of our country, our culture, and its founding principles" (Young America's Foundation 2008: ¶3).

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