Nature and Extent of Catholic Identity Communicated through Official Websites of U.S. Catholic Colleges and Universities

Stephen F. Gambescia
Drexel University, Pennsylvania
Rocco Paolucci
Open Learning Research Project

The advent of the Internet has significantly changed how organizations interact with their customers and constituents in the areas of marketing, information sharing, and engagement processes. College and university (hereafter "college") websites have become major communication venues for prospective students to learn about schools of interest to them (Klein, 2005; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Stoner, 2004). Websites have taken major supporting roles in communicating the mission, purpose, objectives, academic programs, and student activities of a college. These forms range from something formal, such as official documents, policies, procedures, and student handbooks, to the narratives and blurbs answering, "Why come to St. Elsewhere College?" or "What is the St. Elsewhere College difference?" There is a gradation of accuracy, clarity, and quality of information on websites, as colleges continue to develop ways to ensure accurate information and give the appropriate authoring authority. They balance this careful review protocol against getting "just in time information" posted to be responsive to their viewers. However, one should expect that a college explicate to prospective students and other constituents, at some level of accuracy, the salient features of its character and identity through the many pages of its website. After all, this can be considered its "first promise" (Solan & Gambescia, 2010) to the student for what he or she should expect in the college experience.

Catholic colleges have been defining or redefining their "Catholic culture" since modernity (Gleason, 1995). Some critics have contended or demonstrated that many Catholic colleges have become "disengaged" from the influence of their religious sponsors or no longer practice the precepts of their founding mission (Burtchaell, 1998; Morey & Piderit, 2006). Other scholars have shown that changes within the religious academies need to keep in mind the historical influences (Cohen, 1998); and, therefore, colleges deserve some latitude and understanding before judging their fidelity to their traditions and purpose.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II released the encyclical *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, which,

among other directives, asks that "every Catholic university…make known its Catholic identity, either in a mission statement or in some other appropriate public document" (n. 2 §3). More dramatically the pope asked that university officials freely and consistently express their Catholic identity. University leadership should ensure that faculty, staff, and administrators, at the time of their appointment, are informed of the university's Catholic identity and its implications, and, most importantly, about their responsibility to promote, or at least to respect, that identity. Presumably, colleges that are ostensibly Catholic "express" this identity to all prospective and current students in many forms, including most recently via their websites. If a college claims to "be Catholic," then it is fair to assume that this identity be clearly and unambiguously publicly explicated.

Understandably, Pope John Paul II's encyclical has generated much discussion among boards of trustees, senior leadership, and faculty in Catholic colleges in America (McMurtrie, 1999). Some colleges have found this to be a healthy discussion, as it has stimulated these communities to reflect and recommit to their Catholic identity (Currie, 2000; House, 2010; Komonchak, 1997; Wolfe, 2002). Others have found it to be a setback to the progress that Catholic colleges have made in gaining respect from their peer secular institutions that their faculty has credible, unbiased scholars who can participate in intellectual inquiry unfettered by an external agent (Heft, 1999). It is likely that these discussions will continue in public discourse (Fain, 2010; Santorum, 2008), especially given that the paying parents in a struggling economy are becoming even more circumspect about where they send their children to school and ask if the school really delivers on the promise that they are given by the multiplicity of marketing materials.

Coincidentally, just about the time when Catholic colleges were seriously looking at how they would operationalize the principles of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the Internet, and specifically home pages of organizations, became a major recruitment tool for new students (Johnson, 2000). If the official websites have become what many would consider the most public of communication venues, then one would expect that an ostensibly Catholic college express its identity to prospective and current students clearly and unambiguously on its home page.

The purpose of this study is to assess the nature and extent of ways in which U.S. Catholic colleges publicly explicate their Catholic identity through their official websites. Regardless of the range in the quality of websites, a reasonable expectation is that these colleges communicate at some level their Catholicity. Findings from this study will assist college leadership and reli-

gious sponsoring entities and Catholic college associations to understand the degree to which their Catholicity is communicated to prospective students and the colleges' many constituents. More specifically, academic administrators, college leaders, and boards of trustees (those who "conduct" Catholic colleges) may want to examine, or most likely reexamine, the ways in which they communicate their Catholicity. Does the messaging comport with the founding mission of the Catholic college? Do the goals and educational philosophy of their academic programs significantly reflect a Catholic influence? Does the portrayal of student life and expectations articulated for prospective employees of the college look any different from a secular college? Would a visitor to the website readily see that the college is a Catholic college?

Catholic Identity

Renewed interest in Catholic colleges to identify and promulgate their Catholic character has generally coincided with the assessment movement in higher education (Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006). The movement reached an apex with the 1990 apostolic constitution by John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. Translated as "from the heart of the Church," the document held that

> a Catholic University, by *institutional commitment*, brings to its task the inspiration and light of the *Christian message* [emphasis added]. In a Catholic University, therefore, Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities. In a word, being both a University and Catholic, it must be both a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative. (n. 14)

The constitution identifies the four essential characteristics of a Catholic college as:

1. Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
2. Continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;
3. Fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the

Church; and

4. Institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal, which gives meaning to life. (n. 13)

These directives reverberate through every aspect of Catholic higher education, and since its release the range of stakeholders from boards of trustees, college presidents, chief academic officers, faculty, students, and, more specifically, the faculty teaching religion and theology in U.S. colleges have discussed what *Ex corde Ecclesiae* means to their respective colleges (Langan, 1993). How does a particular college or the U.S. Catholic colleges in toto respond? How can they be more deliberate and intentional about their Catholic identity? (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, & Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2003; Estanek et al., 2006; Frabutt, Nuzzi, Hunt, & Solic, 2008; Gray & Cidade, 2010). For example, colleges reexamined their mission statements, student academic outcomes, student life activities, co-curricular activities, hiring practices of both staff and faculty, and, probably the most controversial, the preparation and practice of theology faculty. However, one relatively simple and straightforward action for a college to articulate its Catholic identity is to have this identity publicly professed in its important institutional documents and communiqués. While much of identity theory focuses on the personal level of self, identity with group, corporate, or organizational entities often gives attention to their public identity (Janosik, 1999). This current study looks at one major way to assess this pubic profession of Catholic identity: Catholic identity via official university websites.

Pope Benedict XVI (as cited in Grocholewski, 2008) noted in a speech to Catholic educators at the Catholic University of America, in April 2008, that "First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth" (p. 157). These believers commit to learn and be faithful to Catholic Church doctrine, laws, and teachings, and these believers participate in sacraments, especially the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Vatican Council II, 1965). The members of this faith strive to live moral lives, search for truth, recognize the fount of all truth (McCormick, 1986), and commit to seeking justice for all human kind (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2010). Those who are not Catholic and work on these campuses should commit to respect the beliefs and practices of those who are Catholic (John Paul II, 1990). A

Catholic college is on par with the scholarly and teaching objectives of other universities, but has essential Christian characteristics. Catholicism should be vitally present and operative in its mission, objectives, and everyday activities (Launderville, 2002).

Research Examining College Websites

There is little research examining academic fidelity of college websites. Most publications are driven by the marketing and communications professionals who have not examined whether these websites clearly articulate mission. Several research studies have been conducted reviewing mission statements of online degree programs and adult continuing education programs' newspaper advertisements. For example, Gambescia and Paolucci (2009) assessed the prominence of academic fidelity attributes for online degree program offerings as presented to prospective students via universities' official websites. The study assessed the level of visibility given to online degree programs on close to 250 university websites, identified the range of attributes of university online degree programs as presented on the websites, and measured how the academic fidelity and integrity attributes compared with other attributes used to market online degree program offerings to prospective students. The authors identified eight major attributes used by universities to market their online degree programs. Solan and Gambescia (2010) identified, categorized, and analyzed attributes used in print advertisements in a metropolitan daily newspaper to promote adult continuing education degree programs. Although this study was not assessing university websites, it did identify the range of attributes used by 4-year universities and colleges in their print advertising to attract prospective students to their programs. The study found that expediency, flexibility, and convenience were by far the most prominent featured attributes used to market adult continuing education degree programs. The authors were surprised to learn that these attributes far outdistanced the intrinsic benefits to the learner, such as the student's personal growth, professional development in the current job, and development of an affinity for learning for learning's sake or what some adult learners may refer to as the love of learning. These former attributes also were used more than information about the faculty, quality of the curriculum, or reputation of the college.

Paolucci and Gambescia (2007), in an earlier study, reviewed university websites to identify the range of general administrative structures that universities are currently using in offering online degree programs. A typology

emerged of six general administrative structures: (1) academic department, (2) continuing education/professional studies unit, (3) distance education unit, (4) consortium, (5) alliance, and (6) outsource. Although this study was not about university marketing efforts, the research exposed that reports, commentaries, and articles generated from those with an economic interest in distance learning (i.e., higher education marketing consultants, online course-ware companies, technology companies) or third-party industry news writers covering online-based distance learning overstated the level of administrative changes taking place in higher education up to this point. At that time, research about the administrative structures used for online degree programs were mostly qualitative in nature with many being case based and anecdotal. Paolucci and Gambescia used empirical, quantitative research using the largest sample group of universities to date (N = 239).

This current study continues to explore how colleges communicate their academic fidelity and integrity to prospective students and other constituents via their official websites, but narrows this to how well Catholic colleges communicate their Catholicity. Catholic colleges would have similar offerings to the many colleges studied in previous research mentioned above, but the current study isolates how prominent the Catholic character and identity are displayed.

Method

Authentic Catholic identity of a college can be exercised in many ways. Catholic teaching and discipline are to influence "all university activities," and "any official action or commitment of the university is to be in accord with its Catholic identity" (John Paul II, 1990, n. 47). Major activities in a college are in the areas of teaching, co-curricular events, service to the college, service to the community and beyond, and research. The authenticity of these activities as Catholic cannot all be assessed simply by a reader reviewing the college's official website. For example, the rationale for the general education or core curriculum meeting the Catholic mission may not be evident from material posted to the website. A fair assessment of the strength of the curriculum as having a Catholic bent understandably requires a thorough review of the core curriculum documents from the faculty senate and a review of the goals and learner objectives of discrete courses. Evidence that there are co-curricular educational activities that address Catholic Intellectual Tradition, authentic Catholic theology, or Catholic spirituality would necessitate a longitudinal study, versus a snapshot in time from viewing a website. Although several ac-

tivities would be quite difficult to assess from the college website, if not at all visible, and some activities may only be episodically available, it is fair to expect that enough Catholic "markers" are visible to lead the reader, and most importantly the students and faculty, to believe that the college is true to its Catholic identity. Therefore, the approach in this study is to first identify basic markers that one would expect a Catholic college to display on its official website to prospective students and the colleges' constituents, thereby providing an aggregate accounting for how the Catholic colleges in the United States are doing in explicating their Catholicity.

This approach was selected because of the public nature of college websites. After all, websites have clearly become one of the most public of vehicles for a college, eclipsing in reach and frequency the traditional communication outlets (e.g., view books, pamphlets, newspaper advertisements). This study explores what current students and other constituents see as the first promise in the college experience, if choosing a Catholic college. This current study does not use a sample but evaluates all of the Catholic colleges in the United States, giving a better understanding of the impressions they are making in the aggregate.

Markers Examined to Assess Catholic Identity

For the purposes of this study, we used several markers to assess the nature and extent for how colleges explicate their Catholic identity via their websites. Certainly there are several ways that Catholic colleges can communicate their commitment to Catholic identity and the value they put in communicating that via their website may or may not have been well vetted among college leaders and the faculty. There is no readied literature on Catholic identity via university websites; however, we believe the markers below meet the spirit of colleges expressing their publicly professed identity to prospective and current students. Catholic colleges are explicating *clearly and unambiguously* their Catholicity on their websites when they include information or markers such as the ones chosen for this study.

We believe that these seven markers represent the spirit of the four essential characteristics of a Catholic college as expressed in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. There are other markers, to be sure, such as centers and institutes of Catholic teaching and research, but we believe that these seven markers meet a high publicly professed Catholic standard.

Catholic on home page. The first marker is a statement on the home page

that the college is currently "Catholic," not simply historically Catholic. One would assume this to be the most basic marker. A goal of any organization's home page is to give immediate and even lasting identity. Using the term Catholic on the home page is a reasonable expectation.

Affiliation with sponsoring Catholic entity. A second marker for this study was whether the college explains on its webpage and ideally links from the home page (e.g., "History" or "About Us") that there is active and significant sponsorship from a recognized Catholic religious order or Catholic diocese. Colleges of all types (private, public, religious) take pride in their mission; therefore, one would expect that Catholic colleges articulate their mission as it relates to some aspect of their Catholic tradition. Sponsorship takes several forms, such as governance; teaching; spiritual, intellectual, and service influences; and significant commitment of resources (e.g., financial, real estate).

Lead academic statement. The college should clearly state in what can be considered its major statement of academic purpose, goals, or objectives that students receive an education that is influenced by one or more of the following Catholic elements: Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic theology, Catholic Church doctrine and teachings, Catholic spirituality, and Catholic social justice. This marker borrows directly from the four essential elements identified by *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, including commitment to the Christian message and service.

Human resources page. Another marker identified for this study was whether the college clearly states in the jobs section or human resources section that the college is Catholic and expects that current and prospective employees, including faculty, will recognize and respect its mission and purpose. This reflects *Ex corde*'s call for Christian inspiration of individuals and the university community.

Catholic worship. The college should demonstrate that there is Catholic worship, devotions, sacramental opportunities (e.g., place(s) of worship, liturgical offerings, prayer services, devotions, Holy Day activities, active campus ministry, formal faith exploration activities), and such evidence or the link to evidence is no more than two clicks from the home page. Such high-level placement shows that the college values these activities in the overall experi-

ence for members of this campus community. This reflects the need for Catholicism to be "virtually present and operative" (John Paul II, 1990, n. 4).

Catholic social service. The college should demonstrate evidence of Catholic service, including opportunities to serve the poor and disadvantaged, service learning opportunities, formal programs to learn about and participate in social justice, and support of formal programs of Catholic-based volunteer corps (e.g., Jesuit Volunteer Corps.). John Paul II (1990) stated "institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and the human family" (n. 13) is essential for Catholic colleges. This marker reflects this characteristic.

Catholic heritage. The college should provide evidence of its Catholic heritage on its website by using photographs, images, or symbols that are clearly identified as Catholic (e.g., places of worship, crucifix, members of the clergy or religious order, patron saint artwork or statue, highly recognized Catholic symbols). Catholic colleges are to express "institutional commitment" to Catholic identity (John Paul II, 1990, n. 14). Symbols are one important form of expressing this commitment.

Website Review Protocol

Universities selected for analysis came from the list of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States prepared by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (2010). After removing seminaries from the list, a total of 206 colleges were reviewed, including 2-year and 4-year colleges. The protocol for reviewing these schools' websites to identify these seven markers was as follows:

1. Go to the official home page of the college under review.
2. Carefully examine the home page to determine the presence of any Catholic identity markers.
3. Move to the appropriate webpages from the home page to assess the presence of Catholic identity markers if not readily found on the home page (e.g., lead academic purpose statement, human resources webpages).
4. Once links are found beyond the home page, carefully review material and record the presence or absence of Catholic identity markers and make comments or annotations as needed.

5. Copy what appears to be the lead academic statement of the college for further evaluation. A second review of the college's lead academic statement should show how the college states or does not state that students receive a Catholic education.

A more specific explanation of our review of the evidence for each marker on these websites is as follows:

- Is Catholic stated as the college's affiliation on the home page?
- Is an explanation of the presence of sponsorship by a Catholic religious order or church diocese easily found and clearly stated? Make annotations if needed.
- Search for and identify the college's major statement of academic purpose or objectives or what the college believes are the educational outcomes. After reading the statement, is it clear that students receive an education that is guided by the precepts of Catholicism? Keep statement for further analysis.
- Is there evidence in the human resources webpage that current and prospective employees, including faculty, will recognize and respect the college's Catholic mission and purpose?
- Is there evidence that there is Catholic worship, devotions, and sacramental opportunities, and can this be found by "clicking through" no more than two clicks away from the home page?
- Is there evidence of significant service opportunities by students that has a Catholic social service and/or social justice context?
- After moving through the numerous webpages to answer the information above, can the reader get the sense through symbols, photographs, and images that this is a Catholic college?

To begin, a random set of 20 colleges in the sample were reviewed to ensure consistency in understanding of the categorization and assessment of the seven markers. After consistency was established, all 206 college websites were reviewed. In looking for the presence of these markers, the process of reliability ranges from a straightforward step to steps that are iterative. For example, the marker to see if the word Catholic is used on a college's home page is straightforward and unlikely to be overlooked. We went to a single page and looked for a single word. However, to search for and identify the college's major statement of academic purpose or objectives required much more

review, as colleges placed this statement in various locations on their websites and used various ways to communicate the statement. Some colleges had a brief and formal academic purpose statement. Other colleges used longer narratives and a list of educational objectives, or language that could be considered for marketing or branding purposes. To determine if a college gave evidence of its Catholic heritage on its website by using photographs, images, or symbols that are clearly identified as Catholic is a more subjective judgment, calling for re-review and more discussion. At some level these markers have *res ipsa loquitar* utility. Conducting this review of all seven markers necessitated reading through a minimum of 12 pages on a college's website. However, in most cases the reviews were 20 pages and beyond, which gave us good exposure to the website in which to make an assessment on the extent of Catholic identity given to a reader of these websites (see Table 1). We discussed any questionable material to see if it qualified as a clear and unambiguous Catholic identity marker. More details related to the validity and reliability of the method are discussed in the findings and limitations of this study where concrete examples are given for how these colleges explicate their Catholicity. It is important to note that the purpose of the study is not to judge the design of the website or how effective the information is at communicating a college's Catholic identity; the purpose is to determine the presence of and to some extent the nature of Catholic markers.

Findings

The main purpose of this study was to measure how Catholic colleges were doing in the aggregate in explicating their Catholic identity; not necessarily to see how one college measured up on these attributes. However, it is useful to know how many attributes of the seven a college is using. Again, we recognize that if a college is missing a single or even several attributes this does not necessarily impugn Catholic identity, but given the reach and frequency at which a website communicates a college's mission, purpose, and goals to prospective students and constituents, it stands to reason that Catholic colleges would want to be using more rather than fewer of these attributes. As shown in Table 2, 16 of the 206 colleges (7.7%) had all seven attributes present on their websites. Seven of the colleges actually showed no attributes. One-third of the colleges used five or more attributes. About 47% of the colleges used fewer than four attributes. On average, a Catholic college used 3.7 out of the 7 Catholic identity attributes identified for this study.

Table 1

Seven Catholicity Markers Tracked on Official College Websites

Marker	Webpage Exposures	Disposition	
"Catholic" on home page	1	Present	Not present
Affiliation with sponsoring Catholic entity	2 - 3	Explained	Not explained
Lead academic statement	2 - 4	States Catholic influence	Does not state Catholic influence
Human resources page	3 - 4	Employees respect Catholic mission and identity	No statement about employees' obligation to respect Catholic mission and identity
Catholic worship	2	Two clicks to campus ministy	More than two clicks from campus ministry
Catholic service	4 - 6	Evident	Not evident
Catholic heritage	5 - 10	Symbolism strong	Symbolism weak

The most common of the seven markers examined in this study was giving the history and explanation of an affiliation with the Catholic sponsor and the religious influence, as almost 90% of the colleges made this clearly evident (see Table 3). Colleges gave great detail for the history of their sponsorship and evidence of contributions of the sponsorship was provided throughout many of the pages. Naturally, the most common place where this was discussed was in the "mission" or "history" link on the colleges' home pages. Some colleges integrated their sponsorship tradition message throughout campus life (e.g., making references to a Jesuit tradition in the academic, co-curricular, and student life activities; John Carroll University, 2010). Some colleges included their sponsorship tradition in the very name or extended logo name. For example,

Table 2

Extent of Seven Catholic Identity Markers Used by Catholic Colleges on Official Websites (N = 206)

Number of Markers Present	N
0	7
1	15
2	30
3	45
4	41
5	33
6	19
7	16

Table 3

Frequency of Seven Markers Used on College Websites (N = 206)

Marker	N
Catholic on homepage	82 (40%)
Affiliation with sponsoring Catholic entity	184 (89%)
Lead academic statement	81 (39%)
Human resources page	58 (28%)
Catholic worship	158 (77%)
Catholic service	87 (42%)
Catholic heritage	118 (57%)

Wheeling College changed its name to Wheeling Jesuit University (2010). Stonehill College (2010) notes that it is a "Catholic college founded by the College of the Holy Cross." Manhattan College's (2010) website has "Celebrating LaSallian education since 1853" front and center on its website. Trocaire College (2010) notes on its home page that it is "In the Catholic Mercy tradition."

The second most common marker used by the colleges was easy access to information about worship, devotions, liturgical services, and other Catholic devotional activities. More than three-fourths (76.7%) of the colleges had a link to the campus ministry or spiritual life of the campus no more than two clicks from the home page. Students who want to be involved in Catholic faith-related activities would have an easy time in identifying these activities and know the people to contact. The most common place for the campus ministry link was under a main link on the home page usually marked "student life." A few colleges have the actual link to campus ministry or "spiritual life at St. Elsewhere college" on the home page.

The next most common marker used by colleges was the use of photographs, images, or symbols that communicate Catholic heritage and identity. More than 57% of the colleges used such symbols throughout their webpages at such a level where a viewer would see the college as clearly identifying with its Catholicity. Of the markers, this could be considered "subjective" in that it depends on the route traveled by the viewer on the website and what a viewer relates as symbolically Catholic. However, as previously stated, in conducting the examination of a college's website for the markers in this study, we viewed at a minimum 12 pages of the college's website and in most cases the views were closer to 20 pages. This should give a college ample space in which to post symbols and photos that project its Catholicity.

The next most common marker used by Catholic colleges is a visible explanation of student involvement in service (42.23%). Service is conducted in a number of ways on these campuses, such as a required service activity or project before graduation, co-curricular service activities, opportunities to volunteer assistance to the poor and disadvantaged in their communities, programs of social justice, and service through a formal entity on campus, such as an institute or center for social justice. This marker was one that had the most variability for where information was located. Several colleges gave strong impressions that service and social justice were part and parcel to the educational experience. For example, Loras College (2010) notes on its home page that students are "active learners, reflective thinkers, ethical decision makers, respon-

sible contributors." There is a prominent image of students conducting service on the home page with the title "engaged citizens." Other colleges lacked clear mention of service opportunities either in the campus life section or the academic section of the website.

Just below 40% of the colleges used the term Catholic on their home page. Some colleges use the term Catholic in their lead blurb about the school. For example, Barry University (2010) describes itself on its home page as "a private, Catholic institution with a history of academic excellence in the Dominican tradition." Some colleges make Catholic identity part of their logo, such as Lewis University (2010), which uses the descriptor in its logo "Catholic and LaSallian University." Several colleges held statements about their Catholicity as prominent features on their home page. For example, Franciscan University of Steubenville (2010) has on its home page that it is "Academically challenging and passionately Catholic." Gannon University (2010) has a link on its home page to "Explore the benefits of Catholic education," and its mission link uses the term "Catholic mission."

The next to the least Catholic marker used by the colleges studied was their actual lead academic statement in which not quite 40% of the colleges explicated their Catholicity as a prominent character in the goals and objectives of the students' education. There were various places and ways in which colleges presented a lead academic statement, such as a prelude to their academic offerings, in the welcome statement by the chief academic officer, in the explanation of the goals and objectives of their core curriculum, in the listing of courses in the core, or as something that influences all activities of a student's college experience. The colleges that did not qualify as making a clear and unambiguous statement of how their Catholic character influences a student's education ranged from presenting academic programs in perfunctory listings to making detailed statements about a student's academic experience but giving no hint of its Catholic character. For example, Loyola University Chicago (2010) has a thorough presentation of the university's core curriculum, explaining the knowledge, skills development, and values students will gain but there is no mention of Catholic, Church, or Christianity. Compare this with St. Gregory's University (2010) that has as its lead academic statement the following:

> In 1875, Benedictine monks brought the *Catholic faith* [emphasis added] to what was then Indian Territory…The schools were founded upon the principle of educating the whole person and the integration of the *Catholic liberal arts tradition* [emphasis added], character formation and

training for success in life. At St. Gregory's University, we continue to hold fast to the *timeless values of our Catholic faith* [emphasis added] and Benedictine tradition...St. Gregory's University [aims to be] the premier, residential liberal arts college inspired by Benedictine values and *Catholic excellence* [emphasis added]. (¶ 2)

Similarly, some colleges were empathic that a student's academic formation will have a Catholic character. For instance, Christendom College (2010) states that

- Catholicism is the "air that we breathe"
- Academic excellence takes the Magisterium as its guide
- Catholic culture is taught, lived, and loved
- Students earn B.A. degrees in Classics, English, History, Philosophy, Political Science and Economics, and Theology
- Parents can feel assured that their children will grow in the knowledge, love, and practice of the Catholic Faith
- Students can continue to follow their vocation to holiness. (¶ 1)

Wyoming Catholic College (2010) is explicit about its Catholic identity in its lead academic statement:

Wyoming Catholic College is a four-year coeducational *Catholic college* [emphasis added] whose primary educational objective is to offer a traditional liberal arts education that schools the whole person in all three dimensions—mind, body, and spirit. As an educational institution that believes deeply in its commitment to preserving and promulgating the *Catholic Faith* [emphasis added], Wyoming Catholic College [WCC] joyfully *accepts Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution Ex corde Ecclesiae* [emphasis added], striving whole-heartedly to implement the binding norms it lays down for institutions such as ours. WCC's mission—to educate the whole person in mind, spirit, and body though a classical liberal arts curriculum, aided by a *rich Catholic environment* [emphasis added] and an exciting outdoor leadership program—is best achieved in an environment of *true Catholicity* [emphasis added]. (¶1)

The least used Catholic marker was evidence on the human resources page that employees, including faculty, are expected to understand and be respectful of the college's Catholic heritage and Catholic mission. Just over 28% of the

colleges reviewed in this study have information that the reader could easily discern that he or she would be working for a college that was committed to a Catholic mission. For example, Saint Mary's College (2010) notes: "All positions at Saint Mary's College require a commitment to Catholic higher education and the College's mission and values." Spring Hill College (2010) notes on its employment opportunities page that

> As a Jesuit, Catholic, liberal arts institution, the focus and mission of Spring Hill College—and its employees—are much different from that of a business or even a typical public college or university. The atmosphere on campus—the relationship between faculty and staff and students—is richer and more meaningful because we share a common goal regardless of faith, race, gender or background: to provide the very best learning environment possible so that our students are prepared to be responsible leaders in service to others in or out of the classroom, and have the greatest opportunities to grow as young adults and succeed as professionals. (¶ 1)

More than 70% of colleges had human resources pages quite similar to a human resource page of any secular college; i.e., there was no information about their Catholicity. These pages were indistinguishable from a secular college in that they presented human resource material in a perfunctory manner, rather than explaining at some level that employees would be working in an environment that supports a Catholic mission.

Discussion

Recruitment of prospective students to our nation's colleges has become a sophisticated enterprise, the details of which may not be so well known to senior administrators and boards of trustees (K. Hartman, personal communication, June 6, 2011). Recently, the college's home page has become an efficient and valuable tool in which to present the college's "difference" and illuminate for students why they should consider a particular college (Klein, 2005; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Stoner, 2004). Thus, one would expect that what is communicated via a college's website should authentically convey the character and identity of the college and give prospective students an idea of that college's experience for the student, or the initial promise (Solan & Gambescia, 2010).

This study shows that a large percentage (almost 90%) of Catholic colleges

in the United States explain to readers visiting their websites their historical roots with their sponsoring religious organizations. A viewer can learn a lot about the colleges' religious tradition, history, values, and character. For most of the colleges, information is readily available from the home page and the religious tradition and affiliation and its meaning for the students' experience permeates throughout the webpages. Certainly the nature and extent of the sponsoring entities of colleges varies along the lines of governance, financial resources, teaching, and their overall involvement in mission and ministry; much of which cannot be judged simply by viewing the college's website. However, it is evident from this study that colleges that ostensibly are Catholic make their religious sponsor's influence known, even if only from a historical perspective.

From this study it is evident that most students attending Catholic colleges could easily identify and learn about the various campus ministry activities at the college, including celebration of the Holy Eucharist, confessions, devotions, spiritual development, and service. Many of the colleges position their campus ministry information prominently on their websites. Both of these markers are indicators of a healthy Catholic character at the colleges. However, it was surprising to find that close to 60% of the colleges did not communicate the social or community service activities of the college. Such activities are emphasized in most of the sponsoring entities' mission statements, are often included in the mission of the college, and are usually a major part of campus ministry. College leadership may want to close any communication or action gap between the words and actual deeds of the students meaningfully participating in service activities and major outreach initiatives.

The aim of this study was to measure how Catholic colleges explicate their Catholicity on their websites. Using the term Catholic on the home page is certainly a clear and expeditious way of communicating this, even if considered a low-level, nominal attempt. Most would expect that if a college is Catholic, then the Catholic identity would be front and center, so to speak, on the college's home page. In this study we learned that more than 60% of the Catholic colleges did not use the qualifier Catholic on their home pages to alert the reader to the type of higher education institution. One could argue that references to the sponsoring religious entities mentioned above, which almost 90% of the colleges did, covers this. Those who have worked for or have been affiliated with Catholic colleges could report that many, if not most, non-Catholics make little connection to a sponsoring entity being Catholic. We do not judge that the absence of the term Catholic on such a high number of college website is an attempt to be ambiguous; however, it bears questioning why these

colleges miss the synergistic opportunity of noting both the Catholic and religious sponsoring entity affiliation on their websites. A college's website is likely to have multiple authors and several individuals involved in its architecture. It is possible that the academic administrators and those charged with mission integration are not intimately involved in the website construction. This study also showed that 43% of the colleges do not symbolically (i.e., via photographs, images, symbols) communicate a Catholic influence; therefore, those charged with communicating the Catholic identity should be more circumspect about what is communicated via the official website.

Obviously, the primary mission of a college is the academic formation of a student. If a college presents itself as Catholic, one would expect that the academic formation in some way has a Catholic imprint; that there is some treatment of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. This study reviewed the lead academic statement on colleges' websites. Again, it was surprising that 60% of colleges did not mention how their Catholicity would be integrated into an academic program. Admittedly, there are several ways that the Catholic character is communicated in academic programs; most important would be the student and faculty interaction and the overall teaching/learning process. Examination at this level is beyond the scope of this study. However, it should be disconcerting that only 40% of the Catholic colleges made an effort to explicate their Catholicity in their lead academic statements. If the Catholic imprint is realized in the core curriculum, our study found surprisingly little information about a college's core curriculum in general, and when the core curriculum was explained many colleges had little to nothing mentioned about the Catholic character in the core curriculum. The presentation of a core curriculum is not impressive; regional accrediting commissions list mission and purpose as a first and foremost standard to be met and expect that the mission and purpose of the college be well represented in the teaching/learning process (i.e., use in student outcomes; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006). It is, therefore, curious that any college that claims to be Catholic would fail to explicate effectively how its Catholicity influences the goals and objectives of the students' education. There has to be "something different" (Komonchak, 1997) about Catholic institutions when compared with other institutions, otherwise the expensive marketing is creating a difference without a difference.

The most controversy created by *Ex corde Ecclesiae* has to be the encyclical's expectation that a critical mass of faculty and senior administrators should be Catholic and that the theologians at Catholic colleges are teaching au-

thentic Catholic doctrine (Monan & Malloy, 1999). All agree that a Catholic college should not shun from hiring non-Catholics or that non-Catholics be discriminated against in any way. Non-Catholics should be welcome. However, it seems healthy and reasonable to convey to all current and prospective employees at ostensibly Catholic colleges that the college's Catholic mission is thoroughly and clearly communicated to them and that this mission should be respected. One suggestion is to make this communication clear to prospective hires as early on as possible and continue this through their orientation. In this study we found that more than 70% of colleges had human resources pages making no attempt to communicate their Catholicity to prospective employees. Their human resources pages looked no different than that of secular colleges. Interestingly, some colleges' human resources pages went into great detail on their pluralist approach to hiring but gave little to no information on their purpose or mission and what qualities they looked for in employees, such as commitment to or respect of their Catholic mission. Even secular organizations have no problem explaining to candidates that their goal is to hire for mission (Finnegan, 2011). Thus, it is not unreasonable to portray that part of a Catholic college's mission is to nurture the assembly of believers.

Assuming that our seven attributes have some level of sensitivity of meaning in communicating Catholicity on a college campus, there is improvement to be made. Only 16 of the 206 colleges examined had the presence of all seven Catholic identity attributes, and seven colleges had none. It is reasonable to expect that Catholic colleges would be using more rather than fewer of these attributes, and, if not, there should be a good explanation for why not.

Implications, Recommendations, and Areas for Further Research

Senior administrators and boards of trustees of Catholic colleges should be acutely aware of how their Catholicity is explicated on their official college websites. Individuals at high levels of responsibility should conduct close periodic reviews and revisions to their colleges' websites to ensure that their Catholicity is unambiguously communicated to visitors to these websites. Material that gets posted to a website, understandably, comes from a variety of sources and may have various gatekeepers, not the least of which are the creative or marketing teams who may or may not be in tune with the importance of communicating a Catholic identity. Most important is ensuring that the mission of the college is communicated throughout the many sections of the college's website, so that visitors can see that the Catholic mission permeates the stu-

dents' experience at the college.

Results of this study show that Catholic colleges give ample information about their Catholic identity in a few areas of their websites; however, significant improvements can be made in most areas. Two groups of viewers, in particular, may misconstrue the fidelity of a college to its Catholic mission if that mission is not clear. First are prospective students and their families who have not had much exposure to religious organizations and their mission for education. By not having Catholic front and center, the college could appear to these prospective students as any other secular college or understood as a religious school but not necessarily Catholic. A second group is prospective students and their parents who are looking for a college with a high level of fidelity to the Catholic mission and identity (Grocholewski, 2008; Reisberg, 1999). If Catholic appears to be missing in places important to them, (e.g., lead academic statement), or if Catholic is used in perfunctory ways, they may consider other Catholic colleges to attend (Cardinal Newman Society, 2009).

Colleges that take seriously their Catholic identity should not have a difficult time explicating this identity on their websites. For example, using the term Catholic on their home pages is not a difficult arrangement. It is difficult to imagine a reason not to have this on a college's website that claims to be a Catholic college. Results of this study show that colleges need to dedicate more attention to how they are communicating their Catholic service and Catholic social justice opportunities for prospective students. These opportunities were either not found or not prominent in many websites. Finally, Catholic colleges are clearly weakest in explaining to prospective students how their academic formation is influenced by Catholic teaching and spirituality, if at all. Colleges that find this important need to evaluate how their Catholic identity is explicated in their lead academic statement or how Catholic teaching, theology, Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and social justice are expressly incorporated into their core curriculum or general education courses.

The authors recognize that this study looked at a relatively elemental, but nonetheless far-reaching and public display of Catholicity by colleges in the United States. There are several important questions that we encourage scholars to consider in further research, such as qualitative study to learn how the creators (design and copy) of college websites are using websites to communicate their Catholic identity and examine how extensive *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and its four essential characteristics are reflected. Do colleges use their websites to explain how they are responding to *Ex corde Ecclesiae*? Research is needed to determine what other markers can be highlighted by Catholic colleges to

demonstrate that they have high fidelity with their Catholic mission (e.g., centers and institutes, special events, co-curricular activities, and majors/minors). Researchers could also survey leaders of human resources departments in Catholic colleges to see if they are reticent about communicating in such a public way (i.e., via their website) the expectation that those who work at these colleges need to respect the Catholic identity. Thoroughly examining Catholic colleges' core curricula to determine the nature and extent of a Catholic influence is needed.

Making a college selection is a serious matter for prospective students and their families. Hanging in the balance of finding "the right" college are high expenses and possibly a life-changing or enriching experience. Prospective students deserve to know the nature and extent of a college's Catholic identity, even from these first-promise encounters on colleges' webpages.

Limitations of Study

A college's fidelity to Catholic identity cannot be judged simply by visiting a college's website. The purpose of this study was to assess the nature and extent of ways in which U.S. Catholic colleges and universities publicly explicate their Catholic identity through their official websites. Colleges that may not be attentive to how their Catholicity is visible on their websites could be providing excellent Catholic education formation for their students. Conversely, colleges that provide a lot of information about their Catholic identity could actually be providing an educational experience no different from any other secular college. Examining these seven markers lacks sensitivity in judging a college's fidelity to a true and meaningful Catholic education. Investigating a college's official documents, such as its mission statement, or conducting an extensive study of the college's core curriculum to assess Catholic identity is instructive. These were beyond the scope of this study and are certainly the types of projects we encourage others interested in this topic to undertake, if not already undertaken. The study is not an exhaustive review of the colleges' websites, thus a summary score of a particular college in relation to its Catholic identity should be taken within the context of the method used. The study's aim was getting an aggregate sense of how well colleges communicate their Catholic identity to prospective students.

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Stephen F. Gambescia is the assistant dean for academic and student affairs for the College of Nursing and Health Professions at Drexel University. Rocco Paolucci is the education research director for the Open Learning Research Project of the Inter–learning Company LLC. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Dr. Stephen F. Gambescia. E-mail: sfg23@drexel.edu