

WHAT'S DONE IS DONNE: *Great Books Programs and the Business Student*

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ABSTRACT: Students who graduate from contemporary business schools, including faith-based schools, are increasingly found to have low ethical standards, inadequate soft skills, and a decreasing ability to integrate. For universities where ethics and Biblical integration are central to the mission, this is very disturbing. This paper describes an unusual program-level model that could reduce these problems: a modified Great Books pedagogy. Is such a program suitable for a business school? The article describes Great Books programs and illustrates with one located at a Christian university. Arguments for and against using this pedagogy in the business school are discussed. The paper ends with the personal impressions of a business professor and business student who participated in a Great Books program.

INTRODUCTION

Most faith-based business schools have a dual purpose: to deliver a superior business education and to help students develop a strong Biblical worldview by integrating Scripture into their personal and business life (Edgell, 2010; Johnson, 2002). This paper describes

a relatively unfamiliar program-level pedagogical model that has the potential to accomplish these purposes exceptionally well: a Great Books program. The intent of the paper is to justify this assertion and to describe the Great Books model sufficiently so that the reader will understand enough of the philosophical and practical realities of the model

program to determine whether a business school would consider it worth pursuing.

A program-level Biblical integration pedagogical model would incorporate the entire business school into a “comprehensive spiritual curriculum integrated with course content” (Roller, 2013 p. 31). All, or most, classes would be included in the model. Program-level Biblical integration models are rare; the only one that these authors are aware of is the Transformational Model developed by Roberts Wesleyan business school, which centers around four key values, each of which are consecutively focused on during a four-year cycle (Bovee & O'Brien, 2007; Bovee, O'Brien, & Starr, 2013).

The Great Books model is an alternate program-level pedagogy. It has the potential to greatly develop students' integration skills and at the same time mitigate some of the major problems found in the contemporary business education, specifically low ethics. The suggestion here is not that a Great Books program is *the* way to conduct a business program, but rather that it is *a* way to do so. The thesis is descriptive, not prescriptive.

In recent years, it has become clear that there are many problems with the current business pedagogy; the paper opens with a discussion of those problems. The second section describes Great Book programs in general. Because some readers may be unfamiliar with this pedagogical model, the subject is approached first by discussion, then by example. The first part defines Great Books programs and shows why they developed in the academic landscape. This is followed by an illustration of one particular program, called the Books Honors Institute (BHI)(pseudonym), which is located in a Christian university. The BHI covers the general education component (GE) of an undergraduate education. While it is obviously not part of the business college, business faculty might more fully evaluate its potential by understanding how the model works in a modern university.

The discussion in the third section centers on whether a business school should consider a Great Books program. First, the benefits such a program might provide business graduates is examined, followed by an outline of the most common critiques of Great Books programs. The illustration in this section is the personal musings of a management professor and a management student who participated simultaneously in the business school and the BHI.

The paper closes with implications and areas for further research.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT BUSINESS PROGRAMS?

For many years, universities have built professional business programs around the functions of the organization; developing majors and advanced degrees in accounting, management, marketing, and so forth. Why would any business school look for a different model?

Unhappily, there is a growing scholarly and societal consensus that the current business educational model is not adequate. Business school graduates are increasingly accused of having deficiencies in the skills necessary for, and desired by, businesses in the 21st century. Indeed, a recent literature review on business education found seven distinct streams of criticisms of business schools that have developed over the last decade (Rubin & Dierdorf, 2013).

The chief outcome criticisms of business schools fall into two areas (Rubin & Dierdorf, 2013). The first is that *business graduates have inadequate or underdeveloped soft skills* (Porter & McKibbin, 1988) that are necessary for people in successful organizations. These include poor leadership skills (Waddock & Lozano, 2013), inadequate cultural awareness (Allred, Snow, & Miles, 1996; Donaldson, 2002), weak emotional intelligence (Cummings & Bridgman, 2011; Learmonth, 2007; Mitchell, 2007), and insufficient personal ethical awareness (Donaldson, 2002, 2003; Ghoshal, 2005; Waddock & Lozano, 2013).

The charge that many business graduates, including private university graduates, have low ethical awareness should be of particular concern to Christian business professors and deans. Faith-based universities see student ethical awareness as a specific “value added” component of their programs (Johnson, 2013; Bovee, O'Brian & Starr, 2007, 2013).

The second major criticism is that many *business graduates lack the complex thinking* that is required to successfully navigate the rapid changes in the 21st century business climate and create innovative responses (Allred et al., 1996; Pink, 2005). According to considerable research, business school graduates do not deal well with complexities (Allred et al., 1996; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998; Learmonth, 2007), dislike paradoxes (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), and are unable to

readily integrate new ideas, even into their specific field of expertise (Allred et al., 1996; Mason, 2008).

The critique that *business students struggle with integration* should be particularly troubling to Christian faculty members, who see Biblical integration as highly valued. Biblical integration in business is defined as blending Scriptural issues and perspectives into the theories and issues of the business disciplines (Smith, 2005). Though there is little research on the mental processes students use when learning how to do Biblical integration, it is reasonable to suppose that if business graduates find it difficult to integrate new ideas into their areas of expertise, they will also struggle with applying Biblical truth to their life and work (e.g. Jordan, 2011; Wallace, 2010).

As a result of these criticisms, a growing number of scholars and practitioners are calling for a rethinking of the business school pedagogical processes (e.g., Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011; Learmonth, 2007; Mitchell, 2007; Shepherd, 2004; Starik, Rands, Marcus, & Clark, 2010; Waddock & Lozano, 2013), suggesting changes in business class content (e.g. Adler N, 2006; Bragues, 2006; Donaldson, 2002; Sheldon, 2010), or both (Mitchell, 2007; Serva & Fuller, 2004; Waddock & Lozano, 2013). Some critiques focus directly on the MBA (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2013; Shepherd, 2004), other critiques point out weaknesses in both undergraduate and graduate education (e.g., Lambrechts et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2007; Shepherd, 2004; Starik et al., 2010; Waddock & Lozano, 2013).

At the same time, professors in faith-based business schools are searching diligently for pedagogies that engage students with Biblical integration. While some scholars argue for incremental changes in classes or majors (e.g. Befus, 2013; Wallace, 2010) – and we do not disagree with this approach – at a program level, the Great Books pedagogy (Adler, 1986; Adler & Van Doren, 1972; Hutchens, 1954) might address, at least in part, these concerns.

The following section defines Great Books programs and places the pedagogy into historic context. Because Great Books programs are different from the instructional techniques currently used in most business schools, this descriptive section is followed with an illustration of how an actual Great Books program, located at a Christian university, is currently implemented.

WHAT ARE GREAT BOOKS PROGRAMS AND WHY DO THEY EXIST?

A Great Books program is a class or group of classes that use primary sources – not textbooks – as curriculum and follow a student-controlled discussion pedagogy in the classroom (Hovde, 2007; Hutchens, 1954). The faculty chooses the primary sources, typically books or articles, but the students control class direction and ideas. In a Great Books program, the book and student discussion of the book, replace professorial control of classroom topics and outcomes (Adler, M. 1986; Duncan, 2004). This approach contrasts directly with the normative business school model where the professor decides learning outcomes, creates the syllabus, and administers the class.

A Great Books program uses primary sources as curriculum, not textbooks. The sources are often, though not always, the classic books of the western tradition, in translation (Hovde, 2007; Hutchens, 1954). Great books are defined as books that pass Samuel Johnson's one-hundred-year test; they are "highly regarded and widely influential at least 100 years after their composition" (Hart, 2001: 227). These have customarily included the Greek and Roman writers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Marcus Aurelius, who are largely responsible for the West's notions of human equality, democracy, and ethics – plus the classic books that arose out of that worldview. Authors such as Augustine, Descartes, Donne, and Shakespeare are usually included in traditional lists of Great Books (Adler, 1986; Leithart, 2008; Nieli, 2007). However, any book or article pack can be taught using the Great Books methodology.

By the definition above, the Bible is a Great Book (Jordan, 2011). However, for purposes of this discussion, the Bible will be placed outside that category. The Bible is integral to any Biblical integration program-level model and therefore will necessarily be part of the curriculum, whatever other books or articles the faculty may choose.

The Development of Great Books Programs

Until approximately the middle of the 19th century, most Western education was integrated. Students studied the classic books of the western tradition plus the mother languages, Greek and Latin, in which those books were written (Leithart, 2008; Newman, 1996 (1852); Nieli, 2007). Many of the classic books are transdisciplinary and studying them helped students see

the relationships between disciplines (Jordon, 2011; Marsden, 1994). This created unity and a purpose in education because the underlying assumption was that the final goal of scholarship was to develop moral people who would freely engage in civic life (Bragues, 2006). Thus “education” consisted of groups of people striving together to discern the eternal truths of virtue, beauty and justice (Adler & Van Doren, 1972; Marsden, 1994), and the cornerstone of this endeavor was the Bible (Jordon, 2011; Newman, 1996 [1852]).

After the Civil War, education in the United States began to move towards the German university model, which focused on science and primary research (Bloom, 1987). The German model was based on the assumption that the purpose of education was to contribute to the scientific and social advancement of humanity (Marsden, 1994). With the western regions of the country opening, prominent scholars and college presidents felt that the integrated classic model of education was old fashioned and that new scholarship based on science and technology was required (Marsden, 1994).

This approach was embraced by the practical American culture. Captains of industry donated large sums to create scientific and technical departments in colleges (Bloom, 1987; Kimball & Johnson, 2012). The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1880 established public universities funded by state and federal governments, with the mission of teaching agriculture, science, and engineering – the practical skills needed by a growing country (Atkinson & Blanpied, 2007; Chu & Mau, 2012; Marsden, 1994). Through the end of the 20th century the efficacy of this, arguably more pragmatic (Dewey, 1916), direction in higher education seemed to be confirmed by an increasing rate of technological advancement (Bloom, 1987).

However, in practice the shift in educational models took the form of a proliferation of specialized courses, particularly in the natural and social sciences – and by extension the business school – and a focus on cutting-edge scientific research by the faculty (Nieli, 2007: 178). Today, most college catalogues show a grouping of classes at each level, some of which are required and some between which a student can choose. Though exceptions exist, such as blended classes (Arbaugh et. al., 2009), the “smorgasbord” (Nieli, 2007) class approach is the norm at most universities, including faith-based universities. Requirements for faculty to do research and to publish

are also the norm. Most readers of this article were educated using this model and understand it well.

Nevertheless, the integrated approach wherein students read the classics and strove to understand universal truths did continue, though in drastically fewer universities. The most prominent development of what is now called a Great Books program was led by John Erskine of Columbia University, who proposed a cross-disciplinary curriculum for entering freshmen, based on classic books and student discussion (Nieli, 2007). The curriculum was implemented in 1920. There were six sections that first year (Hovde, 2007), one of which was taught by a junior professor named Mortimer Adler. Adler later spread the idea of Great Books programs through articles and books (Adler, 1986; Adler & Van Doren, 1972).

Great Books programs are currently utilized at a number of colleges and universities such as Boston College, Notre Dame, and St. Johns College; roughly 200 institutions are listed by William Casement (see reference section for URL). Depending on the university, the program might consist of one or two classes or extend as long as four years. Great Books pedagogy has been successfully used at all levels of the university including, within business schools, and at the undergraduate, masters, and doctorate level classes (Adler, 1986; Duncan, 2004; Leithart, 2008). The Great Books movement has been encouraged by such groups as the National Association of Scholars (Steinberg, 2000).

Illustration: The “Books Honors Institute (BHI)”

Because the Great Books model is unfamiliar to some readers, it seemed useful to describe how such a program is currently being implemented in a modern faith-based university. The Books Honors Institute (BHI) (pseudonym) is located at a Christian university on the west coast of the United States. It is an honors program that fulfills the general education (GE) requirements for a four-year undergraduate bachelor’s degree, with the exceptions of math, science, and physical education (Reynolds, 1998). Students admitted to BHI fulfill their general education credits there and receive their majors from the various colleges, including the business college (Reynolds, 1998). Students simultaneously take GE classes in the BHI and major classes in their respective college.

Entrance to BHI is competitive; approximately one out of four applicants is admitted ([BHI] home page, 2015; jamesrg blog, 2013). When a BHI student enters the program, he or she is assigned to a 20-person

cohort and a faculty mentor, largely staying with that group and mentor for the entire program. Cohort groups take most classes together and each student meets with his or her mentor three times a semester ([BHI] home page, 2015; Reynolds 1998).

Classes are three-hour discussion sessions held once or twice a week, depending on the number of units. Classes are blended. For example, Freshman economics, history, Bible, and philosophy credits are satisfied in two 12 unit classes (jamesrg blog, 2013).

For curriculum, BHI uses the classic Great Books - Plato, Hume, Machiavelli, Marx, Shakespeare - plus the entire English Bible. Students read, on average, one book each week, or about 140 great books during four years ([BHI] home page, 2015). Weightier books, such as *The Divine Comedy* and *Romans*, are discussed over two weeks. A few books, such as *Don Quixote* and *Psalms*, are excerpted. No conventional textbooks are used.

Consistent with the Great Books pedagogy, BHI classes emphasize student-directed discussion around the assigned book. This means that the professors, called tutors to emphasize student control, do not control the class (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Jeffers, 1998). Instead they loosely guide sessions by asking provocative questions. Students decide which questions to pursue in discussion. Indeed, tutors are forbidden to make statements of fact, except for clarification purposes. Students know this and tease the professor when he or she begins to lecture or become "the expert."

As the previous sentence suggests, discussions are lively. Students challenge each other to support assertions with evidence from the text, work to uncover assumptions, and learn to disagree civilly (jamesrg blog, 2013). All students are expected to participate fully in the discussion, and those who do not are asked why by peers. Each class ends with a provocative question from the tutor; students write and hand in short responses to the question (jamesrg blog, 2013).

Student-controlled discussion around primary texts is the core of the BHI program. However, outside of class each student is also responsible for one hour-long context lecture per academic unit. This is similar to the "flipped classroom" approach now common in college classrooms (Arbaugh et. al., 2009; Fink, 2003). Thus, for a twelve unit BHI class, a student will attend, listen to, or watch twelve hours of lectures outside of class sessions. The BHI website has hundreds of lectures on streaming audio and video. In addition, the professors take turns presenting live lectures; typically six or

seven of these are offered each semester. Context-lecture credit is also given for attendance at certain art shows, concerts, or plays (jamesrg blog, 2013).

Each semester, each student writes a major integration paper, discussing an issue from the perspective of all the books read that semester (Jeffers, 1998; Torrey Program, 2012)). Sophomores may substitute a project, such as participating in a music production or doing an internship, for one paper. Juniors and seniors negotiate the balance between projects and papers with their mentor.

GREAT BOOKS AND THE BUSINESS SCHOOL

Should a Christian business school reinvent itself using the Great Books methodology? The answer is individual to each group of faculty, but two secondary questions might clarify the issue. First, does the Great Books pedagogy develop the skills now lacking in business graduates? Second, what are the problems with this type of pedagogy? To compliment this discussion, the largely unedited reactions of a business professor and a business student who participated simultaneously in BHI and the business school will be presented at the end.

What are the benefits of Great Books programs to Business Students?

The two major criticisms of current business education, discussed earlier and summarized by Rubin and Dierdorf (2013), are first that business graduates have inadequate soft skills, such as leadership, cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, and personal ethical awareness. The second criticism is that business students are unable to think complexly, deal well with paradoxes, and readily integrate new ideas. The findings that business students, including those from faith-based universities, struggle with ethics and integration are particularly disturbing for Christian faculty.

No research could be found that directly linked soft skills and high integration ability to Great Books programs, and therefore the following discussion will necessarily be speculative. However, two lines of inquiry suggest that the links are there. The first is Active Learning (Dewey, 1963; Johnson & Malinowski, 1993), a learning model in which students engage in activities that require higher order thinking skills, and then reflect on what they did. This method involves analysis, reflection, and evaluation. The second is the

ongoing discussion by business scholars suggesting that art, music, and classic books in the business classroom can enhance the cognitive development that leads to complex ethical, innovative, and integrative thinking. Lastly, a business faculty member and business student will discuss what they personally experienced in BHI regarding development of these skills.

Active Learning Processes Increase Soft Skills and Integration Skills

In many business schools, much of the teaching methodology is passive (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Students “consume” lectures or media; even student discussion is guided by the professor (Detlor, Booker, Serenko & Julien, 2012; Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

In contrast, active learning methods - such as problem-based, discovery-based, or inquiry-based learning - force students to engage with the information to solve problems and to create knowledge (Detlor et al., 2012; Serva & Fuller, 2004). Active learning helps students develop integrative thinking and soft skills by providing opportunities to “talk and listen, read, write, and reflect” (Auster & Wylie, 2006: xi) as they work with course content and reflect on what they are doing (Cunliffe, 2002; Prince, 2004). Active learning in business classrooms can take many forms, such as simulations (Karakis, 2011; Morgan et. al, 2005), printed and video case discussion (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Serva & Fuller, 2004), and microenterprise development (Johnson & Malinowski, 1993; Harmon, 2009). For a recent summary of active learning methods for business classrooms see Mitchell, 2007.

Active learning is precisely what the Great Books pedagogy generates when students control classroom discussions, particularly if the discussion is followed by students writing integrative papers. The Great Books process of inquiry – which includes such things as double-loop questioning, honing of arguments, and courteous debate (Lambrechts et. al., 2011) – encourages cognitive and worldview development (Auster & Wylie, 2006; Bonwell & Edison, 1991; Fink, 2003). The process of discussion opens students to new links between ideas, helps them understand the viewpoints of others thus developing emotional intelligence, and encourages them to integrate new ideas into their current worldviews (Jeffers, 1998; Leithart, 2008). This increases cognitive complexity, integration skills, emotional intelligence and ethical awareness (Bragues, 2006). As Erskin (1923, quoted in Hovde, 2007) notes:

“I wanted the [students] to read great books... spontaneously and humanly...and having read the books, I wanted them to form their opinions at once in a free-for-all discussion... Even by the end of the first year all the [students] in the class would have in common a remarkable store of information, ideas about literature and life, and perhaps an equal wealth of aesthetic emotions, which they shared in common....Here would be, I believed, the true scholarly and cultural basis for human understanding and communication.”

Using Classic Books in Business Classes Increases Soft Skills and Integration Skills

A number of business scholars have suggested that active learning processes, which are inherent in Great Books pedagogy, benefit business students. Some also suggest that the classic books themselves might be valuable for business classrooms (Hendry, 2006). For example, Morris and colleagues (2005) found that using classic poetry in business classes significantly increased students’ emotional intelligence. A variety of scholars have observed that teaching Aristotle to business students increases their ethical awareness (e.g. Bartunek & Carboni, 2006; Bragues, 2006). Reading classic books, such as Shakespeare and Milton, increases students’ awareness of complexity and helps them integrate new ideas more readily (Adler N., 2006; Karakis, 2011; Pink, 2005). If the Bible is read along with the classic books, the students’ ability to integrate all of them is enhanced (Jordan, 2011). The implication is that both the process and content of Great Books programs encourage student development of ethics and integration skills.

It should also be noted that it is not necessary to use the classics exclusively – or at all – in order to get many of the benefits of Great Books pedagogy. There are business books or groups of articles that could work quite well for Great Books discussion in business schools. For examples of some of these, see Adler (2006) and Duncan (2004). In addition to the books he lists, Duncan remarks that several surveys have found a “high level of agreement regarding the great books of management. These surveys include Bedeian and Wren (2001), Matteson (1974, and Sherwood (1980)” (Duncan, 2004).

In summary, the Great Books pedagogical process emphasizes active learning by students. Students learn to be leaders by leading their peers; they learn emotional intelligence and civil discourse through free-

for-all discussions. They learn to deal with paradoxes by exploring contradictions between experts, and learn how to integrate by watching others do so and practicing it themselves. The interdisciplinary classics help students develop cognitive complexity, ethical awareness and integrative ability. If the Bible is used as one of the books, Great books programs can help students develop strong Biblical worldviews.

OBJECTIONS TO GREAT BOOKS PROGRAMS

However, some scholars are not enthused about the efficacy of Great Books programs. Arguments against this pedagogical model fall into three areas: content, control, and cost (Atkinson & Blanpied, 2007; Cunliffe, 2002; Hovde, 2007; Hutchens, 1954; Nieli, 2007); Nieli, 2007).

The first group of arguments center on the *content* of the program. Examples of such arguments include the following: Why would a business person need – or want – to understand philosophy or poetry? Why study Western literature; are there no other (better) traditions? There is little harmony in the Western literature and faith traditions so the works contradict each other. Why base a program on such disparate sources?

The reply is that the faculty has the control over the curriculum and can choose business books, article packs, or classic Great Books. And, as suggested previously, there is increasing evidence that business students do benefit from understanding philosophy or poetry (e.g. Adler N., 2006; Bartunek & Carboni, 2006; Karakis, 2011; Morris et al., 2005).

As to which cultural or faith tradition to focus on, again the faculty has control of content. However, the U.S. business culture was developed in the Western tradition and the inscription on the ancient temple at Delphi, “Know Thyself,” is still pertinent. A business student with an understanding of the assumptions behind his or her culture or faith tradition is better equipped to understand and respect the culture and faith of others.

The lack of harmony in Western literature can be viewed as a pedagogical strength for business schools seeking to develop students who handle paradox well. As the great minds contradict and struggle with each other, so must students struggle as they discuss the books (Auster & Wylie, 2006; Ghoshal, 2005; Hendry, 2006). As students grapple with the contradictions of

great minds, they learn to think for themselves and form a solid basis for their own opinions.

The second set of objections to Great Books programs focus on *control*. If the discussion is student-directed, the locus of control is no longer the professor. Important information will be missed. The class will descend into incoherent chaos!

The reply is that the assumptions behind the Great Books program are similar to the assumptions behind the popular Active Learning pedagogy (Johnson & Malinowski, 1993), though the processes can be different. Active Learning suggests that when students actively participate in the learning process, they learn better. By taking the reins of the conversation in Great Books discussions, students become active learners rather than passive consumers of entertainment (Myers & Jones; 1993; Prince, 2004).

An argument could be made that important information will be missed in a Great Books system. However, most realistic professors understand that important information is missed in the current system as well, whether by instructor oversight or by student apathy. While a student-driven discourse might miss some important issues, it has the potential to unearth other important issues. Most importantly, it aids the students in their quest to develop their own thinking and skills. As for chaos, there is a vast difference between an incoherent mess and the focused chaos (Kelley, 1999) of innovation and creativity. Great Books pedagogy fosters the latter.

A final set of objections to Great Books programs center around *cost*. Great Books programs are labor-intensive, which is costly. They also require that professors learn new methods of interacting with students, and possibly need to learn new material. This could be arduous for some.

However, the reason many professors entered academia was to have intensive involvement with students’ learning processes. Many have become used to the current system of the professor being the “expert,” and some even enjoy it (Duncan, 2004; Chu & Mau, 2012). But most, given appropriate incentives and opportunities, would eagerly “return to the basics” as the saying goes and learn again how to help students learn. While implementing a Great Books program would certainly demand effort from the faculty members, particularly in the early stages, it would also lead to greater intrinsic rewards as student engage eagerly in the process of learning (Bloom, 1987; Jordan, 2011; Karakas, 2011).

Giving up control in the classroom is difficult, but if a Christian business school really wants graduates who think ethically, complexly, and with Biblical integration, it must allow them to learn to think independently. The Great Books Program is one system that encourages students to develop independent thinking.

IN OUR OWN WORDS: A MANAGEMENT PROFESSOR AND STUDENT ENCOUNTER A GREAT BOOKS PROGRAM

In order to expose students to a variety of approaches, the BHI program discussed earlier regularly invites professors from other colleges to teach as adjuncts in the program. Yvonne, who was a professor in the business school, was invited to be an adjunct teacher in BHI for two semesters. Timothy, who was a management major in the business school, was simultaneously a BHI student. In the following section, professor and student will each give their impressions of a Great Books experience. In order to provide the reader with the most direct connection to these experiences, very little of the original writing has been edited except to clarify. What follows is the relatively unedited story of what happened when two people, trained in the “typical” business school, encountered the world of Augustine, Thucydides, Descartes, and Donne in a Great Books program.

Yvonne the Professor: Student Empowerment

When I was invited to teach in BHI, I was skeptical. Would 21st century students, who prefer images to words and require exact directions on assignments (Black, Smith & Keels, 2014) really enjoy classic books, free flowing discussion, and student directed classes? Really?

It soon became clear that they did. My first BHI class was with sophomores. In the business school I was “the expert,” so I came to the first class with outcome goals and directed questions. By the end, it was clear that the students hated that. Arms were crossed, legs were turned away from me, and discussion was a little hostile. I felt like a failure.

The key, I eventually learned, was to genuinely let control over class topics and outcomes go to the students. So, for example, my first question became “What topics from this book are vital to discuss and in what order?” And that became the agenda for three hours.

The BHI program begins with freshmen and after a while most students become empowered by the ability to control their education for themselves, rather than having it handed to them.

But in all my training and experience, the professor controlled the class content and outcomes. Losing control was frightening - but it became easier with practice. Eventually I learned to trust the students, as a group, to uncover the key ideas in a book and to come to good conclusions. That set me free to enjoy the students, the book, and the experience.

Timothy the Student: Student Empowerment

As a student, I experienced the “expert” style of teaching from the very beginning. I learned to expect the teacher to know the answer and to tell it to us. However, in BHI, the “expert” style of teaching is nowhere to be found. Nor are final answers easily found. BHI students discover that there is no simple resolution to many of the questions about the human condition and the Imago Dei; they learn to be comfortable with questions that have no answers.

However, this attitude is not learned overnight. It is a long and sometimes difficult process that requires patience and endurance. The questions that have no answers are the ones that students most want the answers to. At first, our reaction was to plead with the tutor to just give us the answer. Students instinctively sought the “received wisdom” model that they are comfortable with. When the answers did not come, frustration set in. On numerous occasions, I saw freshmen classes end with students leaving in tears, exasperated and angry.

Over time, however, the student develops an appreciation for the quest that rivals his or her appreciation for the answer. The key is to never be satisfied with what one knows and to always press on towards the truth of the great issues of man. This can only be done by experiencing the pursuit of Truth. Because I was surrounded by other students who were developing the same passion and was given just enough guidance to have some successes amidst many failures, I gained that experience. It was completely unlike anything I had ever done in school before.

Yvonne the Professor: Culture and Integration

Teaching in a Great Books program was a culture shock. In the business school, I was a subject expert. My colleagues expected me to understand the management curriculum; our discussions revolved around students and college processes, not class content. Students also expected me to be the expert and teach management to them as painlessly as possible.

In BHI, I was a member of an academic tag-team. Whatever the expertise of the professor, the curriculum and pedagogy were identical. This profoundly changed faculty interactions; discussion revolved around scholarship and the book, not college processes.

*As each tutor brought his or her expertise sequentially to the books, students developed integration skills. For example, if I led one of two discussions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, I would use management frames to ask questions about change and chaos.*

The following class, a literature professor would discuss *Metamorphoses* asking questions about themes in Greek literature. Students saw daily how different perspectives changed the discussion of the book. They learned from experience to make connections across authors and across disciplines. In other words, they learned integration and developed the cognitive complexity so highly desired in the business world

Timothy the Student: Culture and Integration

I also experienced culture shock in the BHI program. In the business school framework, I saw my peers as competition. I would walk into a classroom at the beginning of the semester, determine who the brightest students were, and do everything in my power to make sure that I got a better grade than they did. When I entered BHI, I had to completely reconsider those patterns. I was a member of a team seeking a common goal – to know Truth. I knew that I would probably have an “A” on my report card at the end of the semester, as would a majority of the students around me. However, because the class was centered on what students chose to discuss and not on the professor’s lesson plan, I had to be dependent on my peers for the class to have any value. This took time and frustration to learn, but eventually I began to think about how my scholarship could best contribute to a discussion, and to learn to trust the scholarship of my peers to contribute to me. As a result, my grounds for competition were lost, but my grounds for learning were enhanced.

Good integration skills are learned through cooperation. For example, imagine assigning a freshman selections from Aristotle, Plato, and Genesis to read, then giving a test that asks the student to compare the nature of man in these three sources. It would be a daunting task for most. However, if you take the same selections and allow 20 students to discuss them together over two or three class periods, it is likely that significant strides could be made. As a result of experiences like this, students gain a strong sense of satisfaction from grasping a little understanding of some of the world’s greatest minds. That sense of satisfaction ultimately changed my entire perspective on my peers. It also helped me come to terms with my intellectual limits, which in turn made me more comfortable with uncertainty and risk.

Timothy the Student: Outcomes

Over my four years of college, the BHI experience changed me into an entirely different kind of student. I became comfortable with different teaching styles. I could determine what was most valuable from each style and apply it to the others. I was able to listen to lectures from professors and carry them further than they were originally intended.

After beginning to understand philosophy in BHI, I developed an interest in theoretical studies of business and management, not limiting myself to the “concrete” and

“practical.” I became able to identify connections between early philosophers and modern business scholars. I came to appreciate the value of different kinds of knowledge – not just understanding how something works, but also why it works and how it can be improved. I began to grasp the importance of Biblical integration into my discipline. BHI caused me to learn in a way that I had never been able to before, and I am a better person because of it.

Yvonne the Professor: Outcomes

Ultimately my BHI experience did not help the students in the business school. It was exciting to see the student empowerment in BHI, and I wanted the business students to have the same experience, so I began by introducing juniors to Socratic discussion around business articles. A group of students resisted – “she is making us teach ourselves” they complained to the Dean. After that I prepared the students more extensively for the experience, but it was always a struggle to help upper division business students enjoy this type of student-directed learning. Business students tend to be fact-based, dislike theory, and like practical application (Smith, 1997). GHI students develop a tolerance of not knowing the answers. However, as Timothy said earlier, students learned this tolerance through a series of sometimes frustrating experiences.

My conclusion is that, though the outcome benefits of a Great Books pedagogy are great, a series of stand-alone classes are not enough. A culture of student empowerment must be devolved early and developed throughout an entire college. There must be intentionality on the part of the faculty, so that when students reach the frustrating part of the student-directed learning experience, they will be encouraged to continue. Great Books programs are excellent ways to create the outcomes business schools desire for their students, but for best results they must be programmatic.

CONCLUSIONS

Should a business school consider using a Great Books program? From research indications and anecdotal evidence, it would seem that business students would benefit greatly from such a program. It would certainly be a challenge to use the Great Books methodology to teach quantitative areas such as accounting or finance. However, the entrepreneurship, management, marketing, and economics programs could be reworked relatively easily.

The discussion above suggests that a Great Books pedagogy would be most effectively implemented as a series of integrated classes. There is precedent for this; many universities now utilize blended classes where students work on major projects such as a new

business. Echoing Timothy's experience, if the current business curriculum became a Great Books program, students would appear to not only gain from the knowledge itself, they would also develop enhanced cognitive complexity, ethical understanding, and integration skills.

Obviously, a deep and detailed discussion would be required to develop a functional Great Books program in a business school, and that discussion would differ from school to school. The problems that such a program would address, however, are pressing and very real.

Further research is needed to confirm if, as seems likely, the desired levels of soft skills and integration are created by the Great Books pedagogy. For example, ways should be found to measure outcomes between graduates of this pedagogy and graduates of regular business schools. The hope is that this article will provoke a conversation about the possibilities and research partners to find out answers. The final word is left for a BHI alumna (jamesrg blog, 2013): "The [BHI] is a super complex program, but totally worth it. You learn so much about life and what it means to be human."

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