

No Country for Old Men: The University of St. Thomas and the E-Mail Wars over the Core Curriculum

It begins:

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 4:07 PM
Subject: core and bond ratings

This story is making the rounds of AP: <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/fitch-downgrades-university-of-st,771489.shtml>. Our bond ratings have been down graded from stable to negative as of 1 April and we are in deep financial trouble. You can find the article at a number of newspaper websites by using google. It certainly did not begin with the current administration and the sniping about athletics, admissions, the administration etc. are simply a smoke screen. Our students hate the core. Their siblings and parents hate it and now their friends and neighbors know it. Our reputation is horrible and the current core proposal is at best irrelevant and at worst silly. It will hasten our closure and I can't understand why the current proposal supporters don't understand why we cannot attract good students or retain the ones that we do. They are voting with their feet and their wallets. I can hardly wait to see fall semester enrollment figures.
Don

From: Miller, FSE, Paula Jean
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 8:39 PM
Subject: RE: core and bond ratings

Thanks for the article, Don. I read it carefully, but it doesn't really say anything we don't already know, except for the drop in rating. That's something very important for all of us to take into consideration, and I presume mainly the Board of Directors will have to deal with that problem.

There is a non sequitur in your message, however. The article says nothing about the reason for the drop, whereas your message seems to infer the article states that the reason is the core (at least I went to the article expecting to see that in print). I can think of a lot of possible reasons for the drop but I doubt that it's the core, simply because students wouldn't come here to begin with if they had such a problem with the core - they'd just go to one of the other multitude of universities they could attend with the same choice for a major and without the core. When they choose to come here they know about the core, so it doesn't seem reasonable to assume that they'd leave because of the core.

I think we need to be careful about how we interpret the data. . .
Thanks for bringing it to our attention, Sister Paula Jean

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2009 9:20 PM
Subject: Re: RE: core and bond ratings

Sorry sister - I disagree. There is an 800 pound gorilla sitting in the living room and it is called the core. It stinks and no one comes here because of our core. They leave because of our core. I have advised at least 50 students per year for over 15 years and the core is the only problem I encounter. The new core proposal is pre-meditated, Machiavellian, unethical, and silly. As I said, why come here? UST does no service to the Galveston-Houston diocese and dawdles about 12th and 13th century issues that make students illiterate about the world they are about to enter. Our core and the proposed core is little more than irresponsible on a monumental level. Don

From: Hahn, Paul D.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 2:23 AM
Subject: core and bond ratings
Dear Don,

I too found the transition from "Our bond ratings have been downgraded" to "Our students hate the core" to be less than obvious.

You provide no evidence for the latter assertion. But here is what students and alumni said about the core in their responses to a survey given last year.

(These results are available, in full detail, at the CCRC website. Log in to Blackboard, choose "ST_CORE_REFORM: Core Reform," then "Course Documents," then "Survey Results.")

187 students responded, and 277 alumni. (Questions 1-13 merely collect demographic data, so I skip them.)

Question 14: "UST's core curriculum encouraged me:

"to pursue learning as a natural aspect of my personal development"

students: agree 143, disagree 31

alumni: agree 266, disagree 11

"to pursue learning within the Catholic context of truth, goodness and beauty"

students: agree 117, disagree 49

alumni: agree 236, disagree 41

"to pursue enduring cultural and spiritual values inherent in great artistic and literary works"

students: agree 134, disagree 36

alumni: agree 256, disagree 21

“to make ethical judgments on the basis of transcendental moral values”

students: agree 135, disagree 32

agree 261, disagree 16

“to accept the dignity of the human person as the source of social justice, respect for human rights and regard for the proper interests of the community”

students: agree 141, disagree 24

alumni: agree 259, disagree 16

Question 15: “UST's core curriculum has provided me with:

“the means to address the enduring questions about the meaning and conduct of life”

students: agree 136, disagree 32

alumni:
agree 262, disagree 13

“an understanding of the compatibility of faith and reason”

students: agree 137, disagree 30

alumni:
agree 253, disagree 23

“the foundation to understand the integration of faith and reason when contemplating the world around us”

students: agree 129, disagree 30

alumni:
agree 253, disagree 23

“a capacity for ethical judgment”

students: agree 130, disagree 32

alumni:
agree 266, disagree 10

“an increased ability to think critically”

students: agree 155, disagree 19

alumni: agree 269, disagree 7

Examining the rest of the survey shows that the responses to the remaining questions, 16-24, are similar.

Hans Stockton and J.P. Faletta, who analyzed the student data for the CCRC, concluded that "All averages (when rounding up) are within some range of 'agree.' Those participating in the survey seem to be fairly positive about their experience with the core."

With less understatement, I will point out that "agree's" compared to "disagree's" on average approach 10 to 1.

Paul

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 8:10 AM
Subject: Re: core and bond ratings

Yes Paul I agree that my comments are anecdotal and without numbers - but are experientially quite real. Also remember that this survey treats the core as a whole. The real problems that my several hundred advisees have had with the core particularly concern the anti-science attitudes exhibited by the philosophy department in particular, and the way those students are treated/humiliated personally and publicly. Those numbers are buried, or hidden in the questions below. Question 14 itself could be the result of many parts of the core. Again I ask the question: Why are those students walking away?

On another topic, one of my un-tenured colleagues informed me that the philosophy class

of one of her advisees was invited recently by two philosophy professors to the Black Lab to discuss (lectured) why there is no such thing as evolution. Why are such things done in dark places? Why was no biologist asked to represent the counter argument and real data? Simple: indoctrination, not learning. Do you really think these people are capable, intellectually or otherwise, of integrating anything, much less a capstone? Why don't we talk about the gorilla? Don

From: Deely, John N.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 8:43 AM
Subject: RE: core and bond ratings & student retention

While I have been following events at home, I have yet been hesitant from so far away as the Russian frontier to venture my own views. But here I feel compelled to intervene with a comment largely in support of Dr. Frohlich in the matter of the core curriculum.

On the academic side, perhaps nothing so fully impacts an undergraduate at the beginning of college life as does a core curriculum. Therefore, when a college has a serious recruitment and retention problem, it is highly improbable that the "core experience" is not among the central factors. A core curriculum is supposed to equip students with the skeleton of an understanding of the status of human understanding at its highest levels of development, which is what a university is all about, in contrast with a prep school or a high school or a technical training. The skills of mind every mature adult is best served by having, for intellectual growth, are clearly a mastery of logic, composition or writing, and speaking. That is the core of any core designed first of all with the good of students in mind.

(Traditionally, it is called the "trivium", not because it is trivial but because it is the transition point toward functioning with intellectual maturity in society. Personally, I regard the failure of the ust phil. dept. directly to promote the study of logic as part of its "ownership" of a share in the core, and of the english dept. directly to accept responsibility for a composition course as part of its ownership to be a twin disgrace.)

Over and above that "core of a core", students need to be made aware of the horizons of intellectual development that humanity has been able to achieve at the given stage of history, and this can only be achieved by distribution requirements. The ideological dismissal of "distribution requirements" in favor of a quixotic, not to say chimerical, "integration experience", as in that miniature labyrinth proposed under the name of "Quest" (a nightmare for advisors and advisees alike) in the larger labyrinth proposed to "integrate" is just that: ideological and misguided.

Because this is a Catholic university, among the core requirements there needs to be indeed a religious studies or "theology" component, and it has also been true from the beginning that the Catholic tradition has always seen philosophy as essential for sound theology, so that philosophy has a double justification for a slightly privileged place in the core curriculum of a Catholic university.

Integration can be fostered by some interdisciplinary courses, yes, and is especially

competently done in the Honors Program at UST; but a core is not an honors program.

My impression is that the original CCRC (or whatever its acronym is) should have been provided with a blueprint target from the outset, before it went amok with its labyrinthine wanderings. My impression is that, ever since, turf battles have been covertly substituted for undergraduate educational need in dividing up the "spoils" of the curriculum war. It is as if we learned nothing from the 2000 crash and burn of the "first year interdisciplinary course" proposal which bore many similarities -- anticipations, as it were -- of the labyrinth proposal of today's melee. Where has been the VPAA leadership in cleaning up all this mess, besides conspicuously absent *usque ad nunc*?

The favorable responses of those who survive the ust core should not close our ears to the footfalls of those who leave to go elsewhere.

Be it a gorilla or an elephant, Don's point needs to be recognized.

(As to evolution, I 100% agree with Don, as did also Pope John-Paul II. Certainly I have never been invited to discuss it with anyone in philosophy, but would gladly have gone to that Black Lab meeting to point out the overwhelming evidence as to the fact of not only biological but even of cosmic evolution in order for life to become possible in the first place. If the Black Lab meeting as reported actually took place, it is a disgrace right up there with philosophy's failure to consider logic as central and essential to its departmental share of core responsibilities.)

From: Koehn, Daryl

Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 8:48 AM

Subject: RE: core and bond ratings

The downgrading of our debt obviously is of concern. But it should be noted that TSU and the Univ. of Oklahoma as well as Warren Buffet's Hathaway corporation just had their debt downgraded. It seems that the economy is playing a role here. Perhaps the core is not at fault (last I looked, these three institution don't possess a core anything like ours!). So we need to be wary of mono-causal analysis. On the other hand, we should notice that the numbers Paul kindly posted are (I believe) true only for those students who stayed at UST. They don't include those students who left--for a variety of reasons, including inability to pay for the schooling, families relocating, and perhaps dislike of the core.

My own view is that students will tolerate disliking some courses if they feel that the majority of their courses are engaging and illuminating. My alma mater the University of Chicago had a massive and distinctive core. I did not like some sequences very much, but thought the majority were fabulous and so I stayed for four years and have never regretted that decision. Each of us as teachers has it within our power to look honestly and closely at the courses we teach and to seek to make these courses as transformative and as worthwhile as possible. We should be engaged in that self-reflection, regardless of the enrollment numbers. If we all did that and revised our courses for this summer and fall accordingly, surely our students would benefit. What's more, the success of this exercise does not depend on university committees or politics but rests solely with each of us individually.

From: Osborne, Thomas M.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 9:17 AM
Subject: RE: RE: core and bond ratings

I do think that Don brings up four interesting points which need to be discussed and are to some extent lost in the heat.

1)The current core discourages students from applying and damages student retention. "There is an 800 pound gorilla sitting in the living room and it is called the core. It stinks and no one comes here because of our core. They leave because of our core."

Evidence for: "I have advised at least 50 students per year for over 15 years and the core is the only problem I encounter."

Evidence against: As Paul and many others point out, the survey shows that the students and alumni are attracted by the core and find it worthwhile. Much of our anecdotal evidence supports this. For instance, I frequently meet student and alums who tell me that UST has no point in existing apart from the core.

My Comments: The survey was sent to current and former students, who presumably already like the core. With respect to the anecdotal evidence, it may be just that Don knows different students than the ones whom we know. The problem is that we have little evidence for his assertion, and not much better evidence against it. How could we resolve the issue?

2) "UST does no service to the Galveston-Houston diocese."

Evidence for: I don't know, but it is true that we are very small and not as influential an institution as we should be, especially considering that we are the only Catholic university in the diocese.

Evidence against: 1) There is some value in having young students who are exposed to the Catholic intellectual tradition. I should mention that the Center for Thomistic Studies serves the archdiocese, although most of our service is to the Church at large. There are few institutions of our size that could boast of the excellence of our faculty and our contribution to national discussions, meetings, scholarships, etc. I know many of the most prominent Catholic intellectuals who would agree with this.

My Comments: What counts as academic service to the (arch)diocese?
Should we be concerned with service to the Church/Nation as a whole?

3) "UST . . . dawdles about 12th and 13th century issues that make students illiterate about the world they are about to enter."

There are two points:

A) We dawdle about 12th and 13th century issues.

My Comments: I should say that I don't know anyone who understands much about 13th century philosophy and does not think that it is of central importance. But I am not sure that we do such dawdling - I wish we did more.

B) 12th and 13th century issues make students illiterate about the world that they are about to enter.

My Comments: It may be that students do not need to be educated or to know about the Catholic tradition in order to be literate about the current world, unless they want to understand its historical roots and have an independent perspective from which to evaluate it. Don may have a point. How do we address it?

4) There is no reason acquire a Catholic liberal arts education. "As I said, why come here?"

This is a tricky question which we need to answer. I am asked it all the time in the context of changing the core. If there were a changed core, why go to UST rather than U of H, which is cheaper, or to a more prestigious school in another town, which would give a better head-start professionally.

But Don or others may have ideas on why a UST education is worthwhile apart from the core. I can't think of many, but this is something that could be discussed at greater length.

Yours,

Tom

From: Michael R. Colvin
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 9:25 AM
Subject: Re: core and bond ratings

I have tried to stay out of discussions concerning the core, but I agree with Don's positions. I also think the entire process is questionable including the various surveys. In support of a statement in one of Don's messages, during my tenure as chair of the mathematics department, I questioned students moving to other campuses, among them similar issues indicated in a second message from Don, the core was clearly stated as a strong reason for a young future mathematician moving. I will continue to remain out of the back and forth, but would like to observe, each time the issue of the core comes up the same voices speak up in denial concerning the effect of the core.

As an additional observation supportive of Don's concern with the bond ratings, go to this article: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i31/31a00101.htm>.

I would point out the following observation: "Down the line, some institutions might even find themselves in violation of the standards that the U.S. Department of Education uses to determine eligibility for federal student aid."

Michael

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 9:36 AM
Subject: Re: RE: core and bond ratings

As far as being balanced, one very important point has been missed here: the Hathaway corporation can take the hit and survive. Warren Buffet is one of the wealthiest people in the world. The states of Texas and Oklahoma can bail out their respective institutions. We are small, debt ridden, private, and have no such resources. Don

From: Ramon Fernandez
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:23 AM
Subject: ok, my turn

I think the main reason for the Fitch downgrade on the two loans (Crawford and Wallis) is the real estate loan we took out several years ago when we purchased the office buildings and the Black Lab strip center. In fiscal year ending June 30, 2010 (next academic year), UST will have debt principal maturities of \$13,785,287 when that JPMorgan Chase real estate loan (UST Realty Company) comes due on February 1, 2010. Our normal annual debt principal maturities are in the \$1-2 million range so this extra \$12,000,000 is due to the Chase loan coming due. Maybe we can refinance but after this Fitch downgrade we undoubtedly will have to pay a few extra interest points to do so. Each 1% extra in interest will cost UST about \$120,000 per year. In fiscal year ending June 30, 2008, the UST Realty Company showed a net loss of \$202,749 (net loss of \$93,591 for fiscal year ending 6/30/2007) so it is not a self sustaining operation and it clearly will need a bailout from UST to pay off or refinance its debt. It is important to note that the real estate loan is for a rental property venture, clearly not central to our mission, but it is going to have a huge impact on the budget next year and in the future. Did the UST administration think this through when it bought these buildings?

Personally, I do think the core is a factor in our recruitment/retention issues, but it is one of many. I think lack of an effective recruitment and retention strategy, poor administrative decision making in a variety of areas (see paragraph #1), a sports program that cannot stand by itself, these are just as important. We should not get totally fixated on the core as the thing responsible for everything that goes bad at UST. However, the core is a factor and it does need a make-over. How extreme of a make-over is a subject for debate. RF

From: William M. Harris
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:25 AM

Subject: Re: core and bond ratings

Don,

I believe that your faculty member probably misunderstood about the intent of the off-campus meeting, if indeed it did occur.

In 2009, it would be hard to believe that a faculty member responsible for the protection of Catholic faith and tradition at a Catholic university would choose to deliberately espouse a position that went against the expressed teachings of the beloved Pope John Paul II and the teachings of the Church. Indeed, there is a dispensation for Catholics whose faith could not rectify the positions between faith and evolution, but that seems to be more for those with weak faiths, not for those with strong faiths who would be teaching at an academically rigorous Catholic institution of higher education.

A second reason for doubting the meeting is the expressed position of many in the philosophy department about "cafeteria" Catholicism, where people choose to believe the things they want to believe in, rather than to accept the church and Pope as the authority of Catholic doctrine. As Pope John Paul II said, evolution is a sign of God's hand in the Universe, not just our planet and as confirmation, rather than refutation, of the fact that there is a "grand plan" for mankind and the Universe.

Dr. Maury Harris

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:33 AM
Subject: Re: core and bond ratings

Sorry Maury but I do not doubt the veracity of either the un-tenured faculty member or student. Many in theology and philosophy espouse positions that are opinion and not in line with the teachings of the Holy See or Mother Church. Don

From: Martin, Christopher
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:36 AM
Subject: RE: core and bond ratings
Dear all,

There is a more important set of questions involved here.

Are all faculty members expected to notify Don Frohlich if they meet with students? Or is it only philosophy faculty who are so obliged?

Is it only meetings off-campus of which we are obliged to notify Don Frohlich?

Is it only meetings which may involve discussion of the wider implications of what is

taught by biologists, or does the obligation extend further?

I am very sorry to say that only yesterday I arranged to meet a former student at lunchtime next week, and I cannot guarantee that we will not discuss philosophical questions, or indeed philosophical questions that relate to biology.

Will Don Frolich give me permission to go ahead with this meeting, or should I cancel it? Or would Don Frolich prefer that he should accompany us?

Lastly, what will happen when colleagues at other universities learn that faculty at this university cannot meet with students without permission from Don Frolich?

Chris

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:42 AM
Subject: Re: RE: core and bond ratings

Chris I think you are being a little sarcastic and you know that isn't what I meant. FYI my name is also spelled Frohlich. Thanks and cheers, Don

From: Osborne, Thomas M.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:44 AM
Subject: Evolution and Why We Need Catholic Education

The evolution point is a complete red herring and I don't know why it should need discussion. For those on this list who might not be Catholics or who might not have had a Catholic education, the following points should be made:

1) No modern scientific theories as such can or have been made part of the deposit of faith, or what Catholics must believe by the theological virtue of faith.

The deposit of faith ended with the death of the last apostle. One of the goals of Catholic education is to illustrate how this is compatible with historical changes, doctrinal definitions, etc. But it is a very basic point.

There are a variety of things which can or should be believed on human authority or as part of pious belief, but evolution has not been presented as such.

2) Most facts about evolution are left up to the private judgment of the Catholic. The bishops and pope have no authority to speak on this matter except insofar as it relates to faith and morals. To the best of my knowledge they have merely spoken about the necessity of having two parents and perhaps made some statements about the original state and original sin. There is also the fact that God is especially responsible for the creation rational creatures. How this should best be explained is left to theologians, philosophers, and to some extent scientists, although the authorities can indicate when

and if something conflicts with the deposit of faith or is somehow dangerous to faith and morals.

Bishops and popes can engage in all sorts of speculations, etc., but these are not presented as matter for belief by faith.

3) 'Cafeteria Catholicism' as defined below is simply not Catholicism. But there is a wide range of views subject to theological opinion, further definition and development, etc. Except for a few areas connected with the first parents, the Fall, and original sin, none of these range of views are matters of faith. What Catholics cannot do is deny Sacred Scripture, dogmatic canons of Councils, definitions by Popes, etc., and they shouldn't deny the other basic magisterial teaching.

Catholic education helps students to understand these points. I believe in evolution if it means that species change and develop, but certainly do not believe it with the same virtue and by the same authority that I believe in the Holy Trinity and Incarnation.

Yours,

Tom

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:52 AM
Subject: Re: Evolution and Why We Need Catholic Education

Tom - Thanks for your civil opinion and clarification. You know much more about this end of it than do I. Don

From: Stockton, Hans Jakob

Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 10:56 AM
Subject: RE: RE: core and bond ratings
Dear Colleagues,

I was just about to chime in with a comment about how civil the thread of conversation had been. Beginning with Sr. Paula Jean's reply last night, and Tom, Paul, Daryl, and Ramon's emails. All sought to recognize a consensus about the general state of our university, but with particular reasons why the case. I thought that everyone presented useful, reasoned, and meaningful points worthy of discussion and presented in a way that facilitated discussion.

I hope we can keep things in that direction. And while Chris' reply might have been a bit sarcastic, I sure couldn't help laughing out loud at his response. As we say at A&M Chris, Gig 'em!

Best,

Hans

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 11:01 AM
Subject: Re: RE: RE: core and bond ratings

I agree Hans. It brought a bit of a smile to my face as well. Don

From: Smith, Randall
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 11:13 AM
Subject: Serious charges have been made and should be substantiated.
Dear Prof. Frohlich,

In a previous e-mail to the faculty, you made the following claim:

"The new core proposal is pre-meditated, Machiavellian, unethical, and silly."

Those are serious charges. Since you have made them publicly, I think the faculty deserves some substantiation of those charges. What is your evidence that the work of the Core Curriculum Reform Committee, a committee made up of our fellow faculty members, has been "pre-meditated," "Machiavellian," and "unethical." Please explain how you are using each of those terms and your evidence for making those charges.

Personally, I am not accustomed to a professional setting where such words are thrown around lightly, especially about fellow colleagues, so I assume that they have not been. What, then, is the evidence of "pre-meditated," "Machiavellian," and "unethical" acts on the part of our colleagues on that committee? These are certainly charges that, if substantiated, would bear upon the consideration of the core reform proposal by the Curriculum Committee.

Sincerely,

Randall Smith
Chair, University Curriculum Committee

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 11:59 AM
Subject: Re: Serious charges have been made and should be substantiated.

Dear Prof. Smith, That is my opinion and one to which I have a right to hold. I will not even attempt to define the four terms in the quote below. You have no authority to insist on substantiation as you call it. In fact, you of all people should stay completely clear of this discussion. In my OPINION the fact that you have even entered this discussion means that you should recuse yourself as chair of the curriculum committee, discussant, and voting member when the matter of the current core proposal comes to table.

Don Frohlich, Professor

From: Stockton, Hans Jakob

Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 12:01 PM

Subject: RE: Serious charges have been made and should be substantiated.

Dear Colleagues,

In light of Randy's recent response and request of Don, I realize that my last email blundered in one very important way. By "civil", I meant to characterize the discussion that was taking place with regard to the merits of the recent bond rating report and interpretation thereof. I appologize to any colleagues who may have perceived any other intention from my initial email. As a data monkey, I tend to skip rhetoric and look at the numbers.

What I did not explicitly acknowledge was my discomfort with the language with which the original email characterized the "other". This feeds the flames of antagonisms, personal hurts, and raises walls even higher. I feel that this language was hurtful to those actually engaged in ethical practice and thought, cast a pretty wide net, and most importantly a distraction from a discussion about the very important bond item. As we are all "the other" when there is more than one position being taken, I hope we can tame the public rhetoric and casting of aspersions. Otherwise, we will eventually end up on the receiving end.

Yours in naivete,

Hans

From: Jeremy Wilkins

Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 12:13 PM

Subject: RE: Evolution and Why We Need Catholic Education

A note on evolution: I think Tom is right, the main doctrinal issues are (1) monogenism (one human family) and (2) the soul/mind/substantial form of a human being is immaterial. I think the latter, at least, is empirically verifiable.

Basically the problem Evangelicals have with evolution has to do with their biblical hermeneutics (how they read Genesis). In other words, their problem directly is the authority and meaning of the Bible; it's only indirectly a problem about God (insofar as God's veracity is called into question). In general Catholics approach the Bible differently from Evangelicals and there is no particular reason they should experience the same discomfort with evolution.

For a good example of a Catholic reading of the creation account in Genesis, one that is perfectly compatible with evolution, see Joseph Ratzinger (a.k.a. Pope Benedict XVI), **In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall**. The essays here were originally homilies to an apparently very well educated (or overestimated) audience; they read very quickly. Hat tip to the redoubtable Clint Brand, who first brought this little book to my attention.

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 12:20 PM
Subject: Re: Serious charges have been made and should be substantiated.

Prof. Smith: PS: You will please note that in my quote that you used below I referred to the "The new core proposal". I deliberately did not refer to "the committee", "colleagues", or name names. Don Frohlich, Professor

From: Martin, Christopher
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 12:31 PM
Subject: RE: Serious charges have been made and should be substantiated.
Dear colleagues,

The rules of the game seem to be these:

1. It is permitted to allege that the core is responsible for our shortfall in enrolment.
2. It is not necessary to consider the evidence given against this thesis by Paul Hahn: if you have this opinion about the core, you have an absolute right to it, any evidence notwithstanding.
3. It is permissible to make accusations of gross professional misconduct against colleagues.
4. It is not necessary to explain what these charges mean, or to substantiate them.
5. When someone asks for substantiation or explanation, it is permissible to tell him that he should recuse himself from the debate.

Do these rules seem reasonable to colleagues? They don't to me - but then, I'm only a philosopher. You wouldn't expect me to understand that an opinion may be held, and charges made, without evidence, clear meaning, or substantiation. Perhaps outside philosophy concepts such as evidence, meaning and substantiation don't count for so much.

Chris

From: Smith, Randall
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 12:32 PM
Subject: Serious charges have been made against fellow colleagues

Prof. Frohlich,

I say again: You have made serious charges against members of the university community, and you have made them publicly. You are of course free to form your own

opinions privately, but when you state publicly that you believe a "proposal" is "pre-meditated, Machiavellian, and unethical," you are either slandering colleagues or you are making serious charges that can be backed up with solid evidence.

I am certainly open to the possibility that you have solid evidence to back up those charges, which is all I asked you in good faith to provide.

It is clear that these are charges against colleagues because a "proposal" cannot "pre-meditate," be "unethical," or plot in a "Machiavellian" fashion. That is a category mistake. A "proposal" is not an agent; people are. So, in all justice, I ask you again either to substantiate the serious charges you have made against fellow colleagues, or withdraw them.

Sincerely,

R. Smith

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 1:10 PM
Subject: Re: Serious charges have been made against fellow colleagues

Prof. Smith - so does that mean that if I publish a public letter to the editor of the newspaper about a new law that I have slandered (your words) the entire legislature?
Don

From: Smith, Randall
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 1:28 PM
Subject: RE: Serious charges have been made against fellow colleagues

Prof. Frohlich,

If you say in your letter that a law or regulation coming out of the legislature is "pre-meditated, Machiavellian, and unethical," you have indeed leveled serious charges against some, or all, of the members of the legislature.

Any member of that representative body would, I believe, be within their rights to ask you to back up those accusations, just as any member of the Core Curriculum Reform Committee would be within their rights now to demand that you justify your negative characterization of their two years of hard work.

You have now sent out two e-mail responses, but I have yet to see any shred of evidence to substantiate the accusations you have made. I call upon you for a third time, either to offer evidence in support of your charges against our colleagues, or to withdraw them.

Sincerely,

R. Smith

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 1:12 PM
Subject: Re: Serious charges have been made against fellow colleagues

Not getting dragged any farther into this. Don

From: Hahn, Paul D.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 2:40 PM
Subject: evolution and the Catholic Church

Only for those who are interested (I don't mean to impose):

Since the topic of the Catholic Church's stand on evolution has come up, I thought perhaps some might be interested in investigating the topic a bit further. Here are states by Pius XII, John Paul II, and two recent incidents concerning evolution and Catholicism. You will notice a certain "evolution" in the Church's position.

Paul

From: Osborne, Thomas M.
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 3:41 PM
Subject: RE: evolution and the Catholic Church

We should probably mention that the only attached document that gives "the Church's position" is the first attached document, namely Humani Generis. Paul would know better than I whether the statements copied from it deserve the assent of faith or not.

In the audience from John Paul II, the past Pope seems to be giving his own view in light of the Church's position. An audience is a significant but not horribly important venue and does not really give you "the Church's position" unless it is tied to something else.

The discussion of the present Pope does not seem to be connected with any Church position but concerns his own thoughts on the matter.

The articles from the Osservatore Romano just indicate some different views and do not indicate the Church's position. The Osservatore Romano is just the Vatican's newspaper and although it has some oversight it is not part of the magisterium (Church's teaching office).

As far as I can tell, the Church never had and does not have much of a position on evolution. Such positions would have to be expressed in authoritative statements or easily deduced from them. Humani Generis is one of the few things out there.

Tom

From: Don R. Frohlich
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 4:45 PM
Subject: Re: RE: Serious charges have been made against fellow colleagues

Prof. Smith: Okay, I hesitate to do this, and this is my final comment. My original quote was: "The new core proposal is pre-meditated, Machiavellian, unethical, and silly". Note that I said nothing about colleagues or committee members or others. The make up of the committee has changed more than once.

pre-meditated: it is a thinly veiled make over of the very unpopular Labyrinth proposal
Machiavellian: it is cunning and began 10-15 years ago under various iterations, all of which failed

unethical: because it hoodwinks students into thinking that they are prepared to be successful in a modern world. It also interferes with the integrity of the major, whose faculty are the real experts.

silly - you figure it out. Do you really think a theologian or philosopher can "integrate" a science capstone such as math, chemistry, or engineering?

Pick apart the semantics as you will and my apparent misuse of "agent" - I am sure that you are MUCH better at it than am I - but I don't have the time or energy to read anymore of this.

Sincerely and respectfully, Don Frohlich,

PS - Boy I hope members of the legislature start suing people who write letters to the editor of a newspaper soon because I am going to become a lawyer fast. All of this grading is getting on my nerves and doesn't pay well either!

From: Deely, John N.
Sent: Friday, April 10, 2009 8:36 AM
Subject: RE: evolution, the Catholic Church, and Catholic education
Why the fixation on evolution? Perhaps a theologian should provide us all with official Roman statements on the solar system? Then Professor Osborne could give us an assessment of their "official status" respecting the magisterium, and we would have a better idea of what we ought to be teaching our students respecting the movement of the earth, where, after all, and in comparison with which, evolution is a relatively late and minor event -- that is, if it took place at all, which we are not required to believe.

Then we will be in a better position to see whether this, too, the environment for alleged so-called evolution, "should best be explained", as Osborne earlier put it in his earlier contribution to "Why we need Catholic education", by "theologians, philosophers, and to some extent" -- not to much extent, of course, but at least to some extent -- to those "johnny-come-latelys" called "scientists".

From: Osborne, Thomas M.
Sent: Friday, April 10, 2009 9:52 AM

Subject: RE: evolution, the Catholic Church, and Catholic education

Due to a public and private e-mail about the Pope, I am just including a response that I wrote to someone. Others could do it equally as well. I have decided to include it because it seems that there is just general ignorance about the role of the Pope. This is a very serious issue for three reasons: 1) it involves the very deposit of the Christian Faith, 2) it is very basic for ordinary Catholics, never mind those who teach at a Catholic University, and 3) it affects the reverence and sometimes obedience that Catholics owe to the papacy. It is disrespectful to bandy the Pope's name about. Some time ago I recommended Dulles' 2007 book (details below) to our library, but I can't see that we have a copy yet. It would be the most up-to-date thing. I am not claiming that I have special authority as a professor here - this is stuff that ordinary educated Catholics should know.

I should note that the Pope himself in his book "Jesus of Nazareth" distinguishes between his private opinion and the teaching which he gives as Pope. I am not making this distinction up. I may be missing something below, as I wrote this quickly. But it is really very basic.

The Pope's opinions on evolution are not about Christian teaching, unless he is worried about something like protecting monogenism or original sin or individual creation. The Pope could officially make statements concerning these issues which either could bind Catholics or more seriously could define part of the faith. But it would have to be for preserving some element of Christian teaching. The comments of Humani Generis are official documents concerned with presenting and defending basic aspects of Christian faith. The comments about whether something has or has not been proved are not about the deposit of faith.

This is not all that complicated. I think that it is often common for non-Catholics to understand the function of the papacy.

The Pope is the visible head on earth. As such, he is entrusted with protecting and passing on the deposit of faith, as well as providing pastoral guidance. He is also the supreme judicial authority.

He can't just make up new things or do whatever he wants. With respect to doctrine, his authority with respect to what is believed by theological faith is limited to his clarification and presentation of Christian belief through a) making definitive statements about what already belongs to the the faith in some way, b) ratifying the dogmatic statements of Councils concerning what already belongs to the faith in some way, and c) teaching the deposit of faith through ordinary preaching and documents. These teachings are all that are believed through the theological virtue of faith.

Catholics should accept with reverence and no public and often even external dissent those other serious statements which guard faith and morals, but they do not require the assent of faith.

But what the Pope says as a private person is not binding at all, but deserving of respect due to his office.

For whatever reason, our library does not have Dulles' 2007 book - or at least it is not catalogued. But it would explain things better. The information is: Avery Dulles, "Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith."

You might want to look at these articles from the old Catholic Encyclopedia. They seem dated to me but are basically OK. The New Catholic Encyclopedia is in the Reference room of our library and would be better, but its contents are not on the Web:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07790a.htm>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12260a.htm#IV>

Yours,

Tom

From: Donald R. Frohlich

Sent: Monday, April 13, 2009 10:11 AM

Subject: bonds, finances, and a proposal

Dear Colleagues.

Now that things seem to have settled a bit I have a proposal:

1. The state of UST is in financial exigency.
2. The graduate program in philosophy should be ended. It graduates less than 1 Ph. D. per year and is of no use to a liberal arts university
3. The Centre for Thomistic Studies should be completely shuttered. Its medieval ramblings are useless.
4. The locked library of the graduate studies for philosophy should be sold to a university with the financial means of curating it.
5. Neither program was conceived until decades after UST were opened. As a biologist I can only speak to you in said terms. Good parasites live only as long as they keep their hosts alive. The current core proposal is nothing less than that.
6. As neither program contributes to the well-being or service of the greater Archdiocese of Galveston those endowed faculty lines (including 403 B contributions, medical insurance, etc). may continue. Those without said lines may retire or be made redundant. President Ivany and his Excellency the Cardinal Archbishop of Galveston-Houston have voiced similar concerns.
7. UST desperately needs to return to its liberal arts - undergraduate roots to become a meaningful and functional part of the Houston community

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Donald R. Frohlich, Ph.D.

From: Osborne, Thomas M.

Sent: Monday, April 13, 2009 10:25 AM

Subject: Cardinal DiNardo and President Ivany want to fire Osborne and Jensen?

I don't know where to start with the errors in Don Frohlich's e-mail, although it does show the importance of a Catholic liberal education for those involved in Catholic education.

The President should respond to this.

At any rate, two claims seem to have been made publicly by Don Frohlich:

- 1) President Ivany wants to shutter the Center for Thomistic Studies and fire those who do not have endowed faculty lines.
- 2) Cardinal DiNardo wants to shutter the Center for Thomistic Studies and fire those who do not have endowed faculty lines.

I should say that I would find it very strange that the President and Cardinal both want to fire me and Steve Jensen. Does Don have evidence for this?

Tom

From: Scott, Carl W.

Sent: Monday, April 13, 2009 1:03 PM

Subject: RE: core, finances, & UST's primary mission

I support Don's willingness to propose solutions to UST's major problems that maintain our focus on UST's primary mission to the diocese.

I have been disappointed in the way that faculty input and other evidence have been cherry-picked in the core reform process.

Recently, I offered some personal, constructive criticism of the second edition of the revised core in my comments to the dean.

I include my comments below because I think that UST is at a crisis, and can emerge successfully, but not with either version of the proposed core.

I apologize for taking your time, but I will accept it as my UST twenty-year service award.

Carl

4-4-09

Constructive Comments for the Proposed Core by Carl Scott

I have been at UST for 20 years, attended Catholic schools for K-16, and have been involved in education evaluation for 30 years. I offer my candid opinions of the revised core because I see that an opportunity to save UST is almost lost.

The two proposed cores, Labyrinth and Heart-to-Heart, could be named Trojan Horse I and Trojan Horse II because they contain unexamined contents that are harmful to those to whom they are offered. The harmful contents are the hours of Philosophy, Theology, and English unchanged from the current core. The harm has two parts: they threaten the survival of the university by leading to its financial ruin and to its loss of SACS accreditation.

Our current core is too large, and students leave and/or choose other colleges because of it. Every week, I face students in my office who voice their desire to leave. The new core is smaller, but not small enough. By revising the parts of the old core that the new core carries forward, UST could achieve a more efficient and effective curriculum that could be justified easily with SACS and that would naturally integrate our curriculum.

The integrative center of the curriculum would be social justice because it connects every department at UST. In psychology, we have been working on integrating social justice throughout our curriculum, but we cannot connect to PHIL and THEO as they are taught now. UST needs changes.

Changes to the proposed core:

THEO (9 hrs): Teachings of the Catholic Church should include about three weeks of instruction in the social gospel and social justice in Catholicism. Our students report that they have learned nothing of Catholic social justice when we begin to discuss it, even though they have taken Teachings. Sacred Scripture should highlight Jesus Christ's social justice actions and lessons. In addition, Social Justice and the Church should be offered more often.

PHIL (6-9 hrs): Ethics should include applied ethics for at least three weeks, connecting to the principles of Catholic social justice and to various, relevant disciplines (e.g., business, medicine). Philosophy of the Human Person should include the philosophical underpinnings that led to Catholic social teaching. If there is a third course required in PHIL, at least two social justice-themed courses should be offered each term.

ENGL (6-9 hrs): If a composition course is not the first course, only six hours of ENGL should be in the core. One of the two literature courses should feature social justice themes in literature.

The final, integrative course should be situated in each major, and it should be designed to connect to social justice themes. For some departments, it might be an interdisciplinary course to maximize the integrative possibilities (and enrollment). Input on readings, themes, etc., from THEO would be part of the course design. (This was the opinion of the majority of the faculty, but ignored in the core reform designs.)

EVALUATION: SACS has asked for an evaluation of UST's core for decades, and nothing satisfactory has emerged. We have a large core, but no clear plan. There is no common syllabus for the core courses with clear goals whose achievement could be measured, with a few exceptions such as COMM. The lack of clear goals precludes any evaluation.

In PHIL, THEO, and ENGL, students have to take one-third or more of the hours for the major to satisfy the core. Despite this, few students choose to major in these subjects. Without better evaluation data, students tell us that they are dissatisfied with these courses.

Instead, students major in the sciences, PSYC, INST, and COMM. Students are drawn to opportunities to learn critical thinking skills and knowledge that will help them grapple with the problems of the world as they search for meaningful roles in society. Most of the world's problems are social justice issues. By making stronger connections to social justice, PHIL, THEO, and ENGL will become more attractive to students and UST can make a clearer statement of our core purposes and strengths. Evaluation will be more straightforward, too.

UST was founded to serve the Houston area. Over the years, Houston has changed a lot, but UST's core has not. Despite Houston's growth, our failure to attract and retain more students indicates that we are failing to meet our first goal. Designing a social justice core for UST would advance us toward better serving the people of Houston and clarifying our Catholic identity. It would reduce our core so that students could design their own curricular paths that would feed their hunger to lead meaningful lives of faith and character and help solve the world's problems. This would attract and retain more students. Finally, our previous problems with SACS accreditation would be solvable.

From: Donald R. Frohlich

Sent: Monday, April 13, 2009 1:25 PM

Subject: RE: core, finances, & UST's primary mission

Carl - Thank you for your support. By way of positive suggestions I suggest that undergraduate philosophy and theology be limited to 6 credits each and that English be limited to 9, 3 of which MUST include writing and composition. Modern language should also have a requirement of 6 credits. As it now stands the emperor truly has no clothes. Don

From: Michael R. Colvin

Sent: Monday, April 13, 2009 3:27 PM

Subject: Fwd: core, finances, & UST's primary mission

I would like to offer my support for the statements made by both Carl and Don. It appears the makers of the public core are not going to seriously listen to suggestions offered from a large part of the faculty. For example, this is the first time I've seen the suggestions made by Carl in his note. It appears to me to be a well thought out set of proposals. I've also heard of other suggestions, however they appear to just fade away. Others have mentioned a call for the faculty to meet and voice its support or non-support of the current suggestions for the new core. In my opinion, it's time for the faculty to step forward and voice their concerns.

Since each time this issue comes forward, it seems me the set of supporters for the currently public core are the same. I'm somewhat reminded of past references to the "silent majority." I think each of us would not want to among those that set by and watched while the campus struggled to handle the serious problems it's now facing.

Michael