

Sustainability and the Common Good: Higher Education's Opportunity to Impact Multi-Disciplinary Professions

Dr. Tracy K. Tunwall, SPHR

Abstract

A commitment to sustainability ties seamlessly with the values of a Catholic education. The goals of serving the common good and promoting purposeful living, as well as the culture and characteristics of Catholic Higher education, highlight the responsibility we carry to prepare our students for professional, societal, and personal success. Higher education plays a unique and often overlooked role in making healthy, just, and sustainable societies. This paper will highlight what sustainability means in the context of higher education and Catholic values, and the educational and operational progress we can gain by making sustainability and corporate social responsibility a part of higher education and strategic planning.

Sustainability issues affect the places where we live, work, and play; at the local, national, and global level. There is unequal distribution of environmental and societal resources, and there are specific global risks across race, nationality, and socio-economic classes. Problems of global sustainability and vulnerability have many interconnected components. Catholic education addresses these through the foundation of Serving the Common Good - the common good is at the heart of Catholic social teaching; and Promoting Purposeful Living - A liberal education enables persons to achieve a greater degree of freedom upon which to act purposefully.

An inter-disciplinary educational experience, including environmental, economic, social, human health, and well-being issues, allows students to see and understand the whole through the lens of different disciplines. It also fits with the hallmarks of a Catholic education which include regard for the dignity of the person, academic excellence and lifelong learning, education of the whole person, and promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less. It helps students communicate more effectively across inter-disciplinary boundaries and to become better citizens. Students can learn to apply problem-solving and systems thinking skills through interdisciplinary, experiential learning projects within a business, institution, or community organization. This paper will address the multi-disciplinary opportunity we have in higher education (as all of our fields will be interacting and engaging with and for business) to affect the common good within the market economy to provide for an equitable and sustainable outcome for all.