

International Immersion for the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching as a Framework for International Service Learning in the Business Curriculum

Abigail B. Schneider
Daniel P. Justin

Abstract

In an International Service Learning class that travels to Uganda, students encounter the global inequity that statistics alone do not capture. Yet the well-worn debate between foreign aid and free-market solutions fails to foster in students a sense of agency and hope. Students similarly struggle with the parallel dilemma of Western intervention versus leaving those in the Global South to have control over their own destinies. Underlying these debates is the assertion that the institutions ostensibly established to address issues like poverty have failed, and any progress depends on enterprising individuals working on the ground. Business schools, in particular, have valorized the social entrepreneur as the newest and most innovative solution to the problem of poverty. Yet, this focus on the individual fails to recognize the interconnectedness between the Global North and South and the inevitable role that anyone participating in modern consumer culture, like our students, already plays in that system.

Drawing on insights from sociology, political philosophy, and Catholic Social Teaching, the current paper seeks to address this gap and offer a third perspective on solutions to end poverty by making three key arguments: 1) business leaders must develop a mindful awareness of their own role in the systems that perpetuate global wealth disparities so that they can be free to align the purpose and practice of business with the common good; 2) scholars must shift the narrative of the self-interested individual to one that focuses on human beings' cooperative and virtuous nature; and 3) business education must provide opportunities for developing hope-filled solidarity with the marginalized as a way to catalyze future business leaders to develop structures of virtue and establish economic and educational institutions for the common good.