



Integration of Faith and Learning – Where to Start?

Faith and Learning at Anderson University

As an intentionally Christian Institution, AU has a long tradition of exploring the integration of our Christian faith within our disciplinary teaching and learning. The Office of Academic Affairs and the Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence encourage and support an ongoing and continuous dialog about this important priority. Faculty employ many approaches to integrating faith and learning, and no single strategy is ideal for all disciplines, even within the same department or those teaching the same course. Essentially, if we ever were to decide there is one and only one “right” way to do this, it would probably be right for some, but wrong for many others. There are many tenets of the Christian Faith that we assume all Christians hold to be true, such as conformity to the Gospel and a broad understanding of the doctrine of the church). However, just as our own denominational traditions and preferences in worship style often differ, so do our approaches to topics of Faith in the classroom or online learning space. This is especially true as we consider how various doctrines or tenants of faith are more relevant in our various disciplines.

Where to Begin?

- Talk with your peers, mentors and Chair or Dean about their approaches. Casual conversations over coffee/lunch, maybe even with a small group, or during a focused office conversation can all be helpful.
- Consider observing a peer’s teaching during an informal class visit.
- Read *On Christian Teaching* by David Smith. Feel free to stop by the CLTE office to borrow other books on Christian Higher Ed.
- Remember that one of AU’s most important purposes is to help our student grow in their faith. That can happen both inside and outside the curriculum. But AU’s reason for existing at all is to educate students and prepare them for success in their future careers and communities. If we ever sacrifice either priority for the other, we have not completely done our jobs. Ideally, faith explorations and disciplinary teaching are integrated into a unified approach to student learning, and not as separate goals that would compete with or ignore one another.

What Faith and Learning Integration *Could* Be...

- **Being yourself.**
This is probably the simplest answer to the question of how to integrate faith and learning, but its perhaps one of the sincerest approaches. Just as you allow your Christian faith to guide your beliefs and actions in other areas of life, allow those values to guide your work with your students, as well. Let students see the character of your own faith through your actions and approaches to relationships, communication, and teaching. There are professional boundaries to maintain, of course, but in general, if students can get to know you a bit as a person, it does help to establish a more trusting student-teacher relationship that promotes learning.
- **Reconsidering students’ own faith engagement within the coursework.**
Where can you intentionally imbed opportunities to connect with faith? Consider assigning readings or works that encourage or require students to explore aspects of their maturing faith, or to express how their faith values connect with the questions and work in a particular week or module of the course. Incorporating such opportunities into existing assignments, as a value-added aspect, is preferable.

Replacing existing assignments with something related *only* to faith development that is *not connected* to the course content is not encouraged.

- **Exploring opportunities for specific disciplinary connections.**
Such connections and questions will look very different in a Math course, a Biology course, or an Art course, for example. There is no reason to force conversations of an issue, or a doctrine, or a tenant of faith that clearly relate to one discipline, but may seem less relevant to another. How do current events that might be impacted by faith values relate to your discipline? Are there opportunities for ministry through your students' future work in their field? Who are the Christian scholars in your field contributed to the canon of the discipline?
- **Investigating ethical the dilemmas of your discipline.**
Each discipline also has its own potential for conversations about ethics. The ethical dilemmas in a business course are probably very different than those in a course in the health care fields, which contrast dramatically with issues in various creative fields, etc. Regardless of the variety of ethical questions that might arise, any issue can be investigated from a perspective informed by Christian faith. Such perspectives can be contrast with atheistic or secular perspectives on a given issue, as well. For example, when confronted with an ethical dilemma, is there a difference in the decisions and behaviors of a businessperson and a *Christian* businessperson?
- **Exploring questions of vocation.**
You might discuss the how students' callings might relate to the discipline and to their potential career paths. Do they see their major or future career as something they are drawn towards or compelled to do? Is their chosen path an opportunity to use the gifts that God has given them? Discussions and reflections on navigating how their faith can influence their work in a secular working world can also be meaningful and helpful.
- **Discussing ways of knowing.**
We have come to some knowledge only through direct observation, while other things can only be known through Revelation. Can these ways of knowing be reconciled, without contradicting one another, or creating conflicts or a false dichotomy? How? Whenever possible, we should guide our student not to use one approach to disprove the other, but to use their skills and knowledge to find opportunities for where faith and empiricism together reinforce their learning.
- **Listening to students.**
When students discuss their faith, you might follow up with questions that encourage further conversation. This can happen individually before or after class, during office hours, or during class discussions. If students come to you for advice or guidance (for whatever reasons) during office hours, sometimes what they might need the most is just a patient, non-judgmental ear. To be clear, faculty are not expected to perform pastoral duties. Encouraging student to talk with spiritual mentors, especially pastoral ones, is wise.

Faith and Learning Integration is Not...

- **Praying before or after every class.**
Some faculty do this, and some don't. Either option is perfectly fine. As you feel drawn to, please participate in a practice of prayer, but don't feel obligated to open or close every class in prayer. Realize that praying before or after class doesn't necessarily help students automatically see how their faith can manifest in the work of the course or discipline.
- **Cherry picking scripture that seems to relate to your discipline.**
All truth is God's truth, and there are many chapters and verses in the Bible that relate to the content we teach, but taking verses out of context because they mention something that seems connected to your

current course content can feel like a very surface nod to faith. That being said, references to scripture in the correct context can be very useful in your classes.

What Priority Should Faith Integration Have in Your classes?

Ideally, upon reflection, an AU student should be able to tell there was a difference in the course they just completed because it was taught at a Christian institution. But how many of the above strategies (or other ideas) should you use? And how often? There is no single correct answer to those questions. Rather, what tends to work best are the strategies and frequency you are most comfortable with. However, it does take intentional effort with those strategies as you prepare lectures and discussions, plan course learning outcomes and assignment objectives, and consider how to share your own spiritual life. Recognize your approach will likely change over time, as well. The purpose of this guide is to suggest some possible ideas, not to proscribe specific requirements.