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Susan T. Dinnocenti

*Connecticut Association for the Gifted*, [dinnocentis@sacredheart.edu](mailto:dinnocentis@sacredheart.edu)

Maria Lizano-DiMare

*Sacred Heart University*, [lizanom@sacredheart.edu](mailto:lizanom@sacredheart.edu)

Khawaja Mamun

*Sacred Heart University*, [mamunk@sacredheart.edu](mailto:mamunk@sacredheart.edu)

Rupendra Paliwal

*Sacred Heart University*, [paliwalr@sacredheart.edu](mailto:paliwalr@sacredheart.edu)

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# TEACHING THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION THROUGH AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM

Susan T. Dinnocenti, Ph.D.,\*

Maria Lizano-DiMare, Ed.D., ‡

Khawaja Mamun, Ph.D., ††

Rupendra Paliwal, Ph.D. ‡

## Abstract

A Catholic University has a specific mission of preserving, transmitting and developing the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. This paper proposes an experiential learning program to support this mission of the catholic universities. This program aims to provide integrated and practical learning of fundamental moral values of catholic intellectual tradition and issues related to social justice while developing the critical and analytical thinking through exposure to real world problems, their possible solutions and a personal reflection. In this paper, we use a microfinance program in an underdeveloped country as the premise for the experiential learning program specifically for business students. Moreover, the proposed program has a clearly defined 5-step module with flexibility to adapt to different academic discipline.

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\* Connecticut Association for the Gifted

‡ Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT

† Corresponding author. Phone: 1-203-371-7857. Fax: 1-203-365-7538. Email: [mamunk@sacredheart.edu](mailto:mamunk@sacredheart.edu)

*If we are worth anything, it is not because we have more money  
or more talent, or more human qualities.*

*In so far as we are worth anything, it is because we are grafted  
on to Christ's life, his cross and resurrection.*

*That is a person's measure.*

*~Archbishop Oscar Romero, March 4, 1979<sup>1</sup>*

A Catholic University has a specific mission of preserving, transmitting and developing the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT) through its engagement with the internal and external community. The catholic intellectual tradition guides the university to focus on educating the whole person and cultivating wisdom, character and dedication. The university also has an obligation to help students appreciate responsibility and service to the larger community and to develop a respect for diverse cultures and customs. An experiential learning program which integrates fundamental moral values of catholic intellectual tradition, social justice and role of a catholic university, real world issues and a personal reflection will make it easier for the students to comprehend, appreciate and relate to the values and principles of the tradition.

In this paper, we propose an experiential learning program which we believe is appropriate for a Catholic University. This program aims to provide integrated and practical learning of fundamental moral values of catholic intellectual tradition and issues related to social justice while developing the critical and analytical thinking through exposure to real world problems, their possible solutions and finally a personal reflection. The proposed program has a clearly defined 5-step module with flexibility to adapt to different academic disciplines. We provide an example

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from one of Arch Bishop Romero's homilies one year before his assassination

on how this program can be adapted for business students using Micro-Finance as a tool and field work component in a foreign country.

We first explain the premise behind experiential learning followed by a description of Micro-Finance programs. We then provide a discussion on the common ground between the CIT and Micro-Finance and background on our chosen foreign country El Salvador. Then we explain the suggested 5-step module for the experiential program specific to the microfinance program in El Salvador followed by the conclusion.

### **Experiential Learning Premise**

According to the Association for Experiential Education “Experiential [learning] is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values”. Experiential learning is not a new concept. In 450 BC, Confucius mentioned “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”. In recent years, notable educational psychologists such as John Dewey, Carl Rogers, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget and David Kolb have provided the groundwork of learning theories that focus on “learning through experience or “learning by doing”. Kolb noted that concrete learning experiences are critical to meaningful learning. His work has been influenced by the works of others as he developed the foundation of the “Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)”. The ELT model (Kolb et al. 2000) portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE).

These modes are depicted in a four-stage learning cycle (figure 1) where immediate or “concrete experiences” are the basis for observations and “reflections”. These “reflections” are assimilated and distilled into “abstract concepts” from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be “actively tested” and serve as guides in creating new experiences. The process does not necessarily begin with concrete experience. Instead, each learner must choose which learning mode will work best based upon the specific situation. A learner develops a preferred way of choosing based on his cognitive ability, life experience and present environment. The patterned ways of choosing a learning mode is called “learning styles”. Kolb (1971, 1984) also developed four learning styles associated with different approaches to learning include diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. Although these learning styles vary in everyone and are brought to bear on the experiences that one becomes involved with, both research and clinical observations have associated certain modes to selected learning styles.

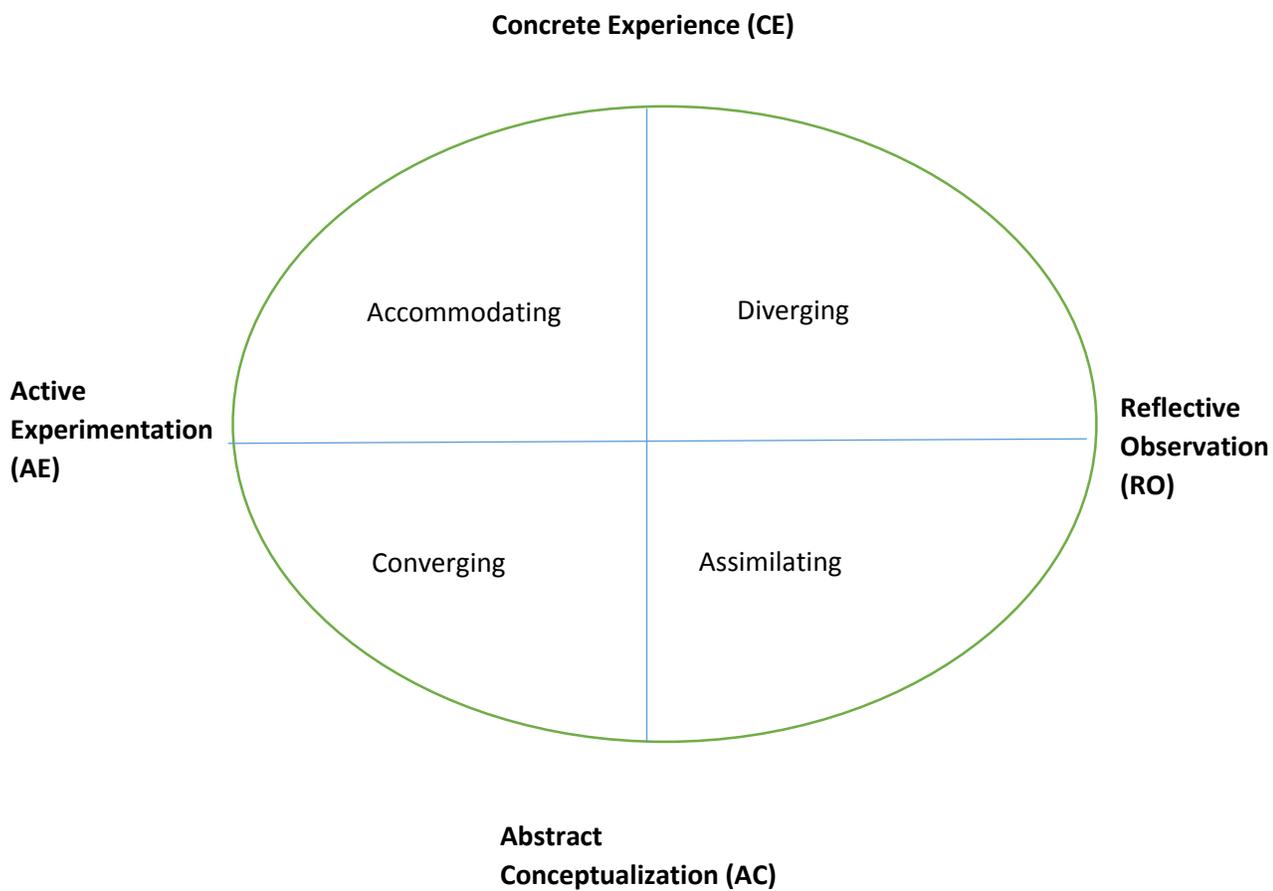
The divergent learner enjoys concrete situations from many viewpoints and has broad cultural interests, work best in groups, and enjoys feedback. The diverging style’s dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO).

The assimilated learner can take masses of information and chunk it to manageable and logical form. People with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through. The assimilating style’s dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO).

The convergent learner has the ability to solve problems and make decisions and enjoy technical situations, simulations, and practical applications. The converging style's dominant learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE).

Figure 1

*The Experiential Learning Cycle and Basic Learning Styles (Kolb, 1984)*



The accommodating learner is the “hands-on” learner, carries out plans, enjoy challenging and new experiences and can act from the “gut,” and rely on people. The accommodating style's dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Active Experimentation (AE).

## **Microfinance program**

Microfinance is the supply of loans, savings, and other basic financial services to the poor provided by different types of service providers usually known as “microfinance institutions” (MFIs). The term is often used more narrowly to refer to small-denomination loans (i.e. microcredit) issued by these MFIs to the poor. More broadly, microfinance refers to a range of financial services offered by the MFIs to finance income-producing activities, build assets, stabilize consumption, and protect against risks. These services include savings, credit, insurance, remittances, and payment services. The economic principle used by the MFIs is to deliver very small loans to unsalaried borrowers, taking little or no collateral. These methods include group lending and liability, pre-loan savings requirements, gradually increasing loan sizes, and an implicit guarantee of ready access to future loans if present loans are repaid fully and promptly (“Consultative Group to Assist the Poor” 2013).

The poor are often neglected by traditional financial systems including banks and insurance companies, which force them to find monetary resources from less credible financial sources often resulting in high interest repayments and limited growth. This problem was first addressed by Dr. Mohammad Yunus in his pioneering work on microfinance in Bangladesh during the 1970’s (Accion 2013). Yunus went on to develop Grameen Bank in 1976 (the first MFI) which stimulated the growth of other MFIs around the world. Currently, microfinance programs are available for the poor in more than 40 countries across five continents (see Beatriz, 2005 and Karlan & Zinman, 2009). Dr. Yunus’s work and influence on microfinance earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Yunus currently travels around the world to promote Microfinance after retiring from Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.

Typical microfinance recipients are underprivileged and low-income people who do not have access to other formal financial institutions. They are often self-employed, household-based entrepreneurs; small retail shops, street vendors, artisanal manufacturers, and service providers, and in rural areas, they are often farmers with little or no land ownership. According to the Microcredit Summit Campaign, women represent eighty percent of microfinance clients' recipients (Goldberg, 2005) and in some countries the percentage is higher; such as in Bangladesh, where women membership is approximately ninety-five percent (Khandker, 2005 and Copestake et al. 2005).

Microfinance has been credited with having a positive impact on: poverty reduction, attaining income, food consumption, creation of businesses, education, health, and the empowerment of women and the empowerment of the poor in general. Microfinance programs help to improve the standard of living, which assists in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger at both the individual and household levels (Accion 2013). Goldberg indicated that the "very" poor do benefit from microfinance programs as business loans from microfinance institutions open a world of opportunity previously closed to the poor by the formal financial sector. Loans enable them to buy tools and materials to start an income generating business and/or to increase the productivity of an existing business (Goldberg, 2005).

In a randomized experiment Karlan and Zinman (2010) indicated that while business investment did not increase, business profitability did increase. This same study also showed that the borrowing households invest in children's education and building human capital as opposed to investing in labor. Similar results were found by Morduch (1998) who indicated that more children are being sent to school and staying enrolled longer and that microfinance programs increase access to healthcare, making preventative healthcare measures more affordable to the poor. In

addition, Pit and Khandker (1998) and Morduch (1998) showed that the poor used Microfinance programs to level out consumption, thus allowing them to borrow during off-peak season and pay-off the loans during peak season. Finally, it has been discovered that microfinance programs help borrowers to develop dignity and self-confidence in conjunction with loan repayment, and self-sufficiency as sustainable income becomes available. Since microfinance services are primarily focused on women, they lead to the empowerment of women and break down gender inequalities, as more women take on leadership roles and responsibilities (Goetz and Gupta 1996).

There are numerous studies highlighting the successful outcomes of microfinance programs and other programs which provide anecdotal evidence. For example:

- In Bangladesh, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) members increased household expenditures by 28% and assets by 112%. The incomes of Grameen Bank members were 43% higher than incomes in non-program villages.
- In El Salvador, the weekly income of Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) clients increased on average by 145%.
- In Ghana, 80% of clients of Freedom from Hunger had secondary income sources, compared to 50% for non-clients.
- In Lombok, Indonesia, the average income of Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) borrowers increased by 112%, and 90% of households graduated out of poverty.
- In Vietnam, Save the Children clients reduced food deficits from three months to one month (data from Consultative Group to Assist the Poor).

In short, microfinance programs do improve the quality of life for the poor in various ways. However, it is difficult to measure the true impact of these programs in the lives of the poor because

of methodological issues. In contrast to the positive impact the programs bring, microfinance has been criticized for charging higher interest rates and engaging in predatory lending practices by the for-profit MFIs. It should be noted that MFIs have to charge higher interest rate as the risk of lending to small lenders is higher compared to large lenders (Cull, 2011). In addition, the for-profit model for the MFIs seek to perform for the benefit of shareholders and that is in direct contrast to the MFIs who goal is to create social improvement.<sup>3</sup>

### **Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Microfinance**

The fundamental moral values of catholic intellectual tradition (CIT) includes human dignity, social justice, the common good, concern for the poor and respect for freedom and human rights (Loris, 2010). Microfinance programs, the provision of small loans to poor entrepreneurs, espouse among its benefits elimination of poverty, women empowerment, access to credit, better education and health.<sup>4</sup> These similarities between the moral values underpinning CIT and the benefits associated with microfinance programs motivated us to plan and develop an experiential learning program where students will be able to reflect on and understand moral values of the catholic intellectual tradition through the practice of microfinance. This we believe is also consistent with the “sacramental principle” that one’s relationship to the transcendent is always mediated by created reality, i.e. people events etc. (Loris, 2010). While working with and helping people who are economically disadvantaged our students are more likely to comprehend what it means to be human, which for a catholic university is, to live a life of meaning and purpose; to understand and appreciate the natural world and to forge a just society for the common good.

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<sup>3</sup> See Yunus (2011) on detailed discussion on the danger of for-profit MFIs.

<sup>4</sup> See Morduch (1998), Pit and Khandker (1998) and Karlan and Zinman (2010) for a detailed discussion on the benefits of Microfinance.

Pope Benedict XVI in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth)<sup>5</sup> offers the following observation about microfinance:

*“the experience of micro-finance, which has its roots in the thinking and activity of the civil humanists — I am thinking especially of the birth of pawn broking — should be strengthened and fine-tuned. This is all the more necessary in these days when financial difficulties can become severe for many of the more vulnerable sectors of the population, who should be protected from the risk of usury and from despair. The weakest members of society should be helped to defend themselves against usury, just as poor peoples should be helped to derive real benefit from micro-credit, in order to discourage the exploitation that is possible in these two areas. Since rich countries are also experiencing new forms of poverty, micro-finance can give practical assistance by launching new initiatives and opening up new sectors for the benefit of the weaker elements in society, even at a time of general economic downturn.”*

There are lessons to be learned from the global experience(s) in microfinance about what it means to produce real growth which benefits everyone and which is self-sustainable. Once students are exposed to developing and underdeveloped economies and see the struggles of the common man, they may better appreciate that development needs to be inclusive and integral to make a true difference in the lives of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. It is important for students, especially business students, to understand that profit is useful if it serves as a means towards a “just” end. Recent financial crisis has clearly demonstrated that if profit becomes the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009

exclusive goal without any consideration for common good; profit seeking will risk destroying wealth and creating poverty.

The benefits and values associated with microfinance activities closely relate to the relationship between catholic social teachings and economic development described in the literature. In addition, the importance of programs such as microfinance is emphasized in Pope Benedict XVI writings in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, where he says:

“The strengthening of different types of businesses, especially those capable of viewing profit as a means for achieving the goal of a more humane market and society, must also be pursued in those countries that are excluded or marginalized from the influential circles of the global economy. In these countries it is very important to move ahead with projects based on subsidiarity, suitably planned and managed, aimed at affirming rights yet also providing for the assumption of corresponding responsibilities. In *development programmes*, the principle of the *centrality of the human person*, as the subject primarily responsible for development, must be preserved. The principal concern must be to improve the actual living conditions of the people in a given region, thus enabling them to carry out those duties which their poverty does not presently allow them to fulfill. Social concern must never be an abstract attitude. Development programmes, if they are to be adapted to individual situations, need to be flexible; and the people who benefit from them ought to be directly involved in their planning and implementation. The criteria to be applied should aspire towards incremental development in a context of solidarity — with careful monitoring of results — inasmuch as there are no universally valid solutions. Much depends on the way programmes are managed in practice.”

## **El Salvador, Social Justice, and Economic Renewal**

Since 1992, our institution has had an ongoing relationship with El Salvador, based on its mission and CIT in preparing professionals for: “reaching out to those in need, especially the poor and assuming responsibility for making the world a better place”.<sup>6</sup> Our faculty and students have been engaged in poor rural communities, in collaborative service experiences in education, housing and church development projects.

El Salvador is best understood in the context of social justice based on the teachings of the Latin American Bishops’ Council of 1968, Medellín, Colombia, which advocated for the empowerment of the disadvantaged classes giving a “preferential option to the poor”.<sup>7</sup> At that time, El Salvador struggled with extreme poverty in which just 2% of the population was in charge of the economic wealth of the country. It is due to this huge disparity between rich and poor that from 1980 to 1992, the country experienced a civil war that claimed more than 75,000 lives including Catholic priests such as Monsignor Oscar Romero. Key contributing factors to the Salvadorian civil war included: (a) unequal land distribution, (b) extreme economic inequalities between rich and poor, (c) state oligarchic structure, (d) political repression and violence used to perpetuate the government structure, (e) electoral fraud, (f) human right violations and (g) repression of populist forces.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1992 the Salvadorian government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) signed the Peace Accords in Chapultepec, Mexico where the FMLN became a

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<sup>6</sup> Our institution is a Catholic liberal arts school in northeast part of United States.

<sup>7</sup> See Swatos (1998)

<sup>8</sup> For detailed discussion on the El Salvador civil war see Manuel and Boyce (1997)

legitimate political party<sup>9</sup> June 2010, President Funes took office representing the first victory for the FMLN in twenty years since El Salvador's civil war ended in 1992.<sup>10</sup>

According to World Bank and United Nations Data the Salvadorian population was estimated at 6,193,000 in 2010 of which approximately 37.8% lived below the poverty line and the gross domestic income per capita was \$3,423.7(US). According to FINCA the wealthiest ten percent of Salvadorians earn 39.3% of national income, while the bottom ten percent of the population earns just 1.4%. El Salvador's formal banking sector has been slow in responding to the needs of small borrowers or entrepreneurs, who need access to loans to create, maintain or grow their businesses ("Mentors International" 2012). As a result, numerous microfinance organizations have arisen to provide loans and access to capital for the very smallest businesses and underprivileged groups.

In our proposed experiential program as discussed later in the paper, we leverage our long standing relationships in El Salvador to incorporate field work component related to micro-finance. The goal of this experiential learning opportunity is to explore and reflect on economic development specifically in the area of microfinances while developing an understanding of social justice as it relates to El Salvador. The culminating phase of this work encompasses a fieldwork in El Salvador, with these three goals:

1. Provide students and faculty with a hands-on international experience that explores social justice issues and microfinances in the context of El Salvador
2. Apply the knowledge, skills and dispositions learned during this experience into a concrete curricular project at the university

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<sup>9</sup> Naciones Unidas El Salvador (1992)

<sup>10</sup> See Ribando Seelke (2012) for current political, economic, and social conditions in El Salvador.

3. Reinforce participants' understanding and action of the CIT with an emphasis on higher education for social justice.

### **Living the CIT through Service to Others – A 5-Step Module**

With the advancement of current technologies, capable of finding a plethora of information on any concept within a nanosecond, learners have become content to take “clicked on” information as truth and are reluctant to dig deeper through inquiry. This reluctance can be challenged and eliminated by enhancing the curriculum with experiential learning opportunities for students. The “learning experience” will be resulted from the interaction between the learner and the external conditions of the environment to which he can react. Learning takes place through the active behavior of the student; it is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does (Tyler, 1949). In order for students to create knowledge from a learning experience, they need the “combination of grasping and transforming the experience” through “touching all the bases”- experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting in a recursive process related to the situation (Kolb, 1984).<sup>11</sup>

With this purpose in mind, a 5-step experiential learning module has been developed on living the CIT through service to others to provide students with an experiential learning opportunity based on micro-finance in El Salvador. Although the initial module design incorporates micro-finance as the main content area, the module is supported on a BlackBoard (BB) platform and can be adapted to other colleges or departments across the University for any Content Area.

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<sup>11</sup> Students and delegates may be used interchangeably as students who go to El Salvador are called delegates as are faculty when traveling to the country.

The module's 5-steps represent an ascending level of instruction which embody a blend of both William James's Theory of Knowing (James, 1885) and Alfred North Whitehead's Levels of Involvement (Whitehead, 1929), to immerse the learner from breadth to depth on concepts related to the Catholic Intellectual tradition, Social Justice, Micro-Finance, and culminate in a series of reflections, synthesis, and demonstrations of students' new understandings. The module steps 1, 2, 4, and 5 are created for students and faculty from all colleges within the university, and step 3 is a content specific fieldwork component.

BlackBoard (BB) © an e-learning platform designed to streamline the use of technology, communication tools, student and faculty devices, and file and data management, while promoting collaboration in a real-time environment will house the CIT module. Through the use of BB, students have the ability to communicate both synchronously and asynchronously while having 24/7 access to content, communication, wikis, blogs, and associated podcasts and media based instruction.

### **Step 1 – CIT Described**

In order to submerge the learner into a foundational understanding of the Catholic intellectual tradition (CIT), several readings were selected to be loaded onto BB where the students are held accountable for reading and responding to a series of questions.<sup>12</sup> This selection will be chosen based on the clarity, ease of read for the non-theologian, and light the spark of interest in asking more questions. These readings should provide a foundation as to what the CIT is at a Catholic University, an argument as to why one should care about the CIT, how to be a transformative catholic and live the tradition, and what God represents to the Catholic Tradition.

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<sup>12</sup> A short list of four readings provided in the appendix. This list should be amended by the faculty member teaching the experiential learning course.

They are intended to become an intellectual springboard to initiate discussion, create more questions, and provide for a confrontation with knowledge as the student progresses through the module. In order to build a framework of “Living and caring” about the CIT, students’ readings should demonstrate that the study of history and religion is no longer euro-centric, rather a blend of world cultures and languages (Hellwig, 2000) and that their education is designed as a preparation for life and societal responsibilities (Dewey, 1896). Essential to living the tradition is the realization that some teachings are more Catholic than Christian, and that assumptions related to the CIT, may not be foundational for the Christian tradition but are vital to the Catholic Tradition. These fundamental assumptions recognize that human existence is; (1) a continuous dialogue between faith and reason, (2) in relation to the Triune God who is of and through this world, (3) the search for truth integrated across all knowledge disciplines, (4) a responsibility to be receptive and accountable to the common good.

The assessment will be administered through BB and can be self-assessed or instructor reviewed. Our preferred method is self-assessment, although not an empirically proven fail-safe method of understanding whether the student took away meaning from the readings, that allows for the student to demonstrate autonomy and an implicit trust with the instructor. Sample questions related to what the CIT is at a university focus on elements of what the tradition calls one to do and the way things are celebrated in the tradition; What role does symbolism have in the CIT? How do the arts and architecture represent the values and assumptions held by religions? Discuss the importance of sacred texts and how they explain the Christian journey? How may the Catholic journey be different from the Christian journey?

These questions and others are posted on BB in a designated assignment folder which the student accesses to obtain a self-assessment for each article read. Students upload their answers

to an assignment folder which can be retrieved where it can be retrieved by the instructor who gives feedback via track changes on the file received or through copy edits. Upon submission of the self-assessment an email acknowledgement is sent and an exemplar answer sheet is made available to the student to assess their own understanding. This initial step of the module, to gain awareness of the CIT and being held accountable to process a thoughtful understanding of the tradition addresses the recommendation of Hellwig (2000) who states “elements of the tradition should not be hidden or left unexplored.”

### **Step -2 Social Justice and Catholic Education**

After completing step 1 of the module we expect students to have deeper understanding of the Catholic intellectual tradition (CIT) and how Catholic social teaching is an essential part of CIT. The objective of Step-2 in the module is for the students to explore the relationship between Catholic education and social justice and to understand and appreciate the role of the catholic university in serving common good. As Pope John Paul observed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,<sup>13</sup> his letter on Catholic Universities,

“A Catholic University, as any University, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of *serious contemporary problems* in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic

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<sup>13</sup> See John Paul II. (1990)

and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.”

We expect that student will study contemporary social problems as part of their field work component (Step-3) in underdeveloped countries or communities. Dean Brackley, S.J in an informal lecture at the University of Central America (UCA), shared the words of Ignacio Ellacuria S.J a martyr and former rector of UCA (Brackley, 1993). “Ellacuria believed that the university existed for two reasons to serve the nation and the common good. He also stressed that there are two premises on which teaching, research, and the university must be based, first and foremost “la realidad nacional – reality” and secondly; teaching, research, and social outreach must be guided by “proyección social – social outreach.” To Ellacuria, a university’s mission is to teach “la realidad mundial – world reality” not just content but content that speaks to what’s going on in the world, not something unrelated to a past life. Brackley, echoed and extended Ellacuria’s viewpoint regarding the university’s purpose with the suggestion that all students “be blown away....and feel a broken heart experience.” He stated maybe you can do math or physics but until you have your heart broken you don’t have a university education.

Although the “broken heart” experience may be more impactful once students are physically in El Salvador or any of the impoverished countries (or communities) the delegations visit. Part of the experiential learning module is to prepare and initially sensitize the student and faculty members on the history of the disruptive environment. Many issues related to social justice, political strife, the portrayal of “good versus evil,” and propaganda from media, military, and government agencies are explored to prompt a call to questioning and a search for truth

Within this Social Justice Step of the module articles, lectures, and field notes from former faculty delegates who visited El Salvador will be posted on BB to allow for personal reflection and a cohort wiki will be created to post questions to focus on during the subsequent trip to El Salvador. A short list of articles to be reviewed are provided in appendix.

It is expected that student will in process develop a framework to analyze and reflect on social problems they observe during their visit. The “ten building blocks of catholic social teaching” from Byron (1998) will form basis for developing this framework. Byron’s building blocks include the dignity of human being; the respect for human life; the right to form associations; principles of participation and protection of poor and vulnerable; principles of solidarity, stewardship and subsidiarity; and the principles of human equality and the common good. As Byron suggests, these ten organizational categories can act as ten "bins" for gathering the collected wisdom drawn during the visit.

### **Step 3 - Field Work Component**

This step is curricular and experiential in nature and can be completed over the one or two week timeframe while students are abroad working in the field. For example, a business student studying micro-finance will be assigned to a team consisting of university delegates and Salvadorian business executives to gain firsthand insights on methods and procedures used in El Salvador. Students will visit multiple sites in poor urban and rural areas that deal with micro-lending organizations, engage with cooperatives in rural areas in Usulután, and with women and men business owners to learn about their economic and social backgrounds, loans, opportunities, challenges, and training and resources available to them. Students will also have the opportunity to interact with stakeholders in microfinances such as (1) the University of Central America

(UCA), a leading Jesuit institution of higher education in El Salvador involved in economic development and social issues; (2) the Monsignor Romero Center, an outreach center directly involved in social justice in Tierra Blanca, a remote village in El Salvador; and (3) micro-lending organizations such as Mentors Loan and FINCA.

Daily focus plans are utilized to highlight particular concepts that will be studied and nightly debriefings will allow students to compare and contrast American business practices to that of El Salvador. This component is the most important piece in developing the critical and analytical thinking skills of the students as they grapple with culture, theory, and practice.

As Kolb (1984) states, "Learning is defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." It is this type of hands-on, minds-on learning that the students will experience firsthand as well as learning by experiencing another language and culture within their field.

Using the framework developed in step 2, students will submit their reflection and analysis on social problems they observe during their visit. Then as Byron (1998) suggested, analysis and reflection targeted on this material can become the base for moral instruction and formation of conscience. This will serve the objective of bringing Catholic education and Catholic social teaching together and is also consistent with Pope John Paul's observation about role of a catholic university in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,

"The Christian spirit of service to others for the *promotion of social justice* is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women. The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote "the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery,

endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment". Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it. A Catholic University also has the responsibility, to the degree that it is able, to help to promote the development of the emerging nations.”

#### **Step 4 – My Life and the CIT outside My Country**

Constructing one’s own knowledge as noted in experiential learning theory and constructivist theory requires the learner to create and recreate social knowledge based on experiences shared and as Piaget (1966) suggests, the learner assimilates new experiences into existing concepts and accommodates those concepts into the new experiences. This recurrent process involves a confrontation with knowledge and possibly the elimination of misconceptions and the evolution of new questions with new knowledge and conceptual awareness.

After the delegation has returned from the country where the fieldwork component was completed the next step is to reflect on the processes, skills, culture, customs, and feelings that were part of the experience and develop a product to communicate the experience. Utilizing technology and visual forms of communication (blog, wiki, video, podcast, and documentary) all delegates are responsible for a product that chronicles the learning module’s 5 steps and how the experience has affected the student personally, professionally, spiritually, and intellectually.

Each product will have a defined rubric which primarily focuses on the content area within the field of study, however, additional deliverables to be presented will include comment and feedback on how the culture influenced thought and feeling, how the CIT was evident in the associated experiences of the fieldwork, and what impact the experience has made personally. Delegates are permitted to work in teams for a collaborative product although each delegate is required to have a personal response regarding the impact of the field experience.

### **Step 5 – Forwarding the Action**

The final step in the learning module does what Kolb (1984) suggests it “touches the bases” of university stakeholders; faculty, administration, ministry and identity, potential delegates, and students’ peers from their major field. Once the product is completed in Step 4, each student or team will schedule a presentation opportunity within their field of study or request time in a class where they study the CIT and present their experience.

In addition, our university sponsors a faculty cohort each year to study the CIT. This faculty cohort will schedule a roundtable discussion with the student cohort and allow for the final presentations to be the topic of the discussion.

### **Conclusion**

This 5-Step Module of Living the Tradition through an Experiential Learning Program capitalizes on the richness of the tradition and its 2000 year old history of seeking truth and justice in all facets of society as well as enlivens the richness of young delegates to seek out new understandings and develop a thirst for questioning or as Brackley (1993) would say, to become “Blown Away”.

An Experiential Learning Program in a underdeveloped country with an emphasis on an academic component (e.g. Micro-Finance) infused by the CIT will undoubtedly expose students to the values sacred to the tradition holds; human dignity, social justice, common good, concern for the poor, and respect for freedom. It will also create learners who will have lived the tradition with neighbors unlike themselves, they will as Hellwig (2000) suggests; understand that human life has meaning and meaning can be known and that the basic principles of moral right and wrong are given and not humanly invented.

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## **Appendix:**

### **Selections for the initial four readings on the CIT include:**

Butkus, Russell. "Dangerous Memory: The Transformative Catholic Intellectual." *As Leaven in the World* Ed. Thomas Landy. Collegium, Wisconsin: Sheed and Ward, 2001. 49 – 63.

Cahoy, William. "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition What is it? Why should I care?" Presentation at College of Saint Benedict/St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, 2003 <http://www.csbsju.edu/About/Catholic-Benedictine-Tradition/Catholic-Identity/Catholic-Values/Bill-Cahoy-Fall-Forum.htm>.

Hellwig, Monica. "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University" *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, Ed. Anthony Cernera & Oliver Morgan. Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000. 1 – 18.

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### **Selections for readings in Step 2:**

Brackley, Dean. "The University and the "Broken Heart" Experience." *Sacred Heart University Review* 13.1 (1993).

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