

# OPENING ADDRESS

I want to set the stage for tomorrow's dialogue by juxtaposing two quotations that illustrate the tensions that energize our conversations here at DePaul about balancing market and mission.

David Brooks, in an op-ed published in *The New York Times* on Sept. 25, 2005, opens his piece "The Education Gap" with this line: "Let's say you work at a university or a college. You are a cog in one of the great inequality producing machines this country has known. What are you doing to change that?"

In the book "Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis," Fr. John Piderit with Melanie Morey wrote about Catholic culture in crisis at our colleges and universities, describing the way Catholic colleges conceive of and practice their Catholic mission, identity and purpose. In an interesting statement about the relationship of Catholic mission, student enrollment and enrollment management, they say:

*"...[our focus] is on the average or typical student (and his or her typical parents) at a type of Catholic institution. Consequently, although the distinction between the actual and sticker price is well understood, issues of discounting, merit, and need are set aside. As important as it is for all institutions to have a fair and well-constructed enrollment management strategy, as long as such strategies are deemed fair, they are unimportant for our analysis." (p.52)*

Tonight and tomorrow, I welcome you into a topic that animates the ongoing conversation at DePaul within my Enrollment Management (EM) group and in which we engage our colleagues campuswide and our Board of Trustees, a dialogue about balancing mission and markets. The general orientation of that conversation, the tension that energizes our debate, is in part illustrated by these two simple statements.

Our intent in this symposium, and in what we hope becomes an ongoing and ever-widening dialogue, is to engage colleagues across Catholic higher education who, like us, grapple with this challenge: *How do we elucidate and elevate our understanding of our missions and how those missions are meaningfully manifested in a market context?*

Here at DePaul, we often wonder about how our fellow Catholic colleges and universities conceive of themselves—their purposes and priorities, their current situations, their comparative and competitive positions and their preferred strategic futures. More specifically, we wonder how each of our fellow Catholic institutions view these things when perspectives are framed by both mission and market sensibilities simultaneously—or put another way, when they are attempting to be both mission centered and market smart.

## BALANCING MARKET AND MISSION: ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Before we adjourn tonight, I want to describe how the tensions implied in these two quotes by Brooks and Piderit and Morey frame our hopes for this symposium—and by doing so give you something to think about tonight before we commence in the morning.

I'll focus on an aspect of mission that many of us share and one that is particularly relevant today, that is, our commitment to student access and opportunity. Our commitment to this one critical ingredient in our collective, broader aspirations is about social justice. I hope to show that whether or not this is an explicit part of your institution's mission, it nevertheless is at the core of the relationship between mission and market that applies to all of us.

## ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT MANGEMENT

Let's return to the tensions.

David Brooks—in that one statement mentioned above—takes a position grounded upon a vast foundation of research, analysis and public discourse about access to education in America. We won't even make an effort in this symposium to recount or review this literature and the increasing decibel level of the calls for reform.

Suffice it to say that 45 years ago, when the Higher Education Act of 1965 was passed, this nation set out to address the challenge of the gross inequities in educational opportunity between the haves and the have-nots. Yet today, 45 years later, the very gaps we set out to close have not lessened. While overall participation rates in higher education have improved, the gaps in those rates between high- and low-income students have not narrowed. When we look not just at access and participation but rather at attainment and degree completion, the chasm is even wider. It's no surprise that the national reports on this topic have titles such as "Access Denied," "Promise Abandoned" and "Empty Promises."

The causal factors in this continuing national problem are many; the national reports point to changing federal policy in financial aid and changing state policies as well. But increasingly the finger of blame points to the strategic decisions deliberately made by America's colleges and universities—public and private alike. Brooks concludes his op-ed by quoting Tom Mortenson's assertion that *"higher education is now causing most of the growing inequality and strengthening class structure of the United States."*

Brooks' column is just one call to action—albeit a very compelling one—that is directed squarely at those of us within the academy to recognize our complicity in a national renegeing on the promise of access. His commentary signals what we mean by the condition and crisis of access in America and the challenges this presents—not for federal policy, not for state-based budgets, but for institutions themselves—especially those with a passion about social justice. His challenge is one powerful and overarching catalyst for our creation of the Center for Access and Attainment at DePaul and for our gathering today and tomorrow.

Many of us in this room are particularly stung by this observation of how more and more of American colleges and universities seem intent on joining what Tom Mortensen calls "the gated communities of higher education." We're stung by this because we, as enrollment management leaders, are so frequently indicted as a big part of the problem, not the solution. Mortenson in his provocative and informative newsletter, *Opportunity*, is a particularly vehement and unrelenting critic of enrollment management.

But he is hardly a lone voice. In fact, much of what's been published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Education Trust*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and many others, suggests that the practice of EM isn't just part of the problem—it is the problem, the dominant villain in this unfolding drama.

Kati Haycock at The Education Trust asserts that EM leaders use their resources to compete with each other instead of providing opportunities for low-income students.

Matthew Quirk in his article in *The Atlantic Monthly* titled “The Best Class Money Can Buy”—subtitled “the rise of the enrollment manager and the cutthroat quest for competitive advantage”—says that “enrollment managers have a host of ugly tactics to deter low-income students.” He quotes Roger Winston’s line that EM is “a brilliantly analytical process of screwing the poor kids.” Quirk concludes that “enrollment management has transformed ... in some cases the entire mission of a college or university ... installing market-driven competition at the heart of the university.”

Don Hossler, in an essay in *The Chronicle*, quotes a leading scholar saying that “enrollment managers are ruining higher education” and “undoing our commitment to justice.”

These are just a few from a litany of indictments far too numerous to recount tonight. Critics look to EM as a key part of the failure of institutions to make progress on access and attainment, largely because *EM seems focused exclusively on realizing market-oriented outcomes for institutions*—outcomes that critics say are oblivious to the social mission of higher education.

Brooks’ critique is more highly generalized than just the practice of EM—and there are ample publications out there focusing more broadly on the insidious effect of market factors on higher education. But his indictment represents a growing chorus of voices singling out EM practice and its leaders in the reneging of our social-justice mission in service of market-dominated outcomes and aspirations. So we in EM are particularly sensitive to Brooks’ critique.

And between you and me, it only hurts because it’s true—at least in part.

## MARKETS AND THE CATHOLIC MISSION

Brooks’ challenge about our market-obsessed obliviousness to our social mission is only one anchor in our discussion. The other anchor we find in the observations and concerns discerned from Piderit and Morey’s text, and we’ll use their quotes as a convenient, abbreviated point of reference to the second dynamic that prompted us to invite you all to join us for this symposium. While Brooks suggests we’ve lost sight of mission in pursuit of our institutions’ market-oriented outcomes, Piderit and Morey suggest we pursue mission outcomes independent of market contexts.

Now that’s not an entirely fair characterization. In their text, Piderit and Morey certainly acknowledge that Catholic institutions must assess their market situation and then choose within that context how they will live out their Catholic identity and mission. They affirm that there can be no mission without margin and in that sense offer an important acknowledgement that our institutions do in fact exist within a market context.

They acknowledge that it is only by being sufficiently market-responsive to be profitable that the broader outcomes and purposes of our Catholic missions can be realized. They also recognize that market forces create certain constraints and boundaries to our mission-centered purposes on the one hand but also, on the other hand, create options and opportunities that allow us to afford our dreams and aspirations.

Market realities, they suggest, force some institutions to brand themselves in ways that can dilute their Catholic distinctiveness. They also suggest that market realities force some institutions to sacrifice some elements of mission for margin. Piderit and Morey’s fourfold taxonomy of types of Catholic cultures in higher education is defined in part by the relative mix of students in the college’s enrollment profile—albeit their focus is only on the mix of Catholic

students. So there are certainly points where their text touches appropriately on the balance of market and mission.

But taken in its entirety, this text actually suggests a perspective that is not uncommon in most discussions about university missions: *that market and mission largely operate on entirely different planes*. The prevailing perspective is that market-oriented goals and mission-centered purposes exist independently, one admittedly a necessary condition for the other, but only in an instrumental way. There isn't much sense of any strategic complementarity.

Many critics of contemporary higher education at times seem to suggest that market realities have encroached upon what was heretofore a more pristine pursuit of mission in the academy. But markets have, in fact, been part of the academic scene since the beginning. We are fond of the imagery that Bob Zemsky and Bill Massy painted in their Chronicle Review article where they recall Clark Kerr's description of higher education as being grounded in both the acropolis and the agora of Greek society (and I've always loved this artistic rendering of the balancing of market and mission that was on the cover of that issue of The Chronicle Review). They said:



David H. Kalsbeek, Ph.D. (left);  
Arnold L. Mitchem, Ph.D.

*“Clark Kerr, the former president of the University of California, once described the tension between the acropolis, with its focus on values and mission, and the agora, the Greek word for marketplace. Arguing that colleges always have served the market, Kerr went on to observe: ‘The cherished academic view that higher education started out on the acropolis and was desecrated by descent into the agora led by ungodly commercial interests and scheming public officials and venal academic leaders is just not true. If anything, higher education started in the agora, the market, at the bottom of the hill and ascended to the acropolis at the top of the hill. ... Mostly it has lived in tension, at one and the same time at the bottom of the hill, at the top of the hill, and on the many pathways in between.’”*

We ground a good bit of our thinking here at DePaul in Zemsky's work—not only this essay but the book from which it was abstracted and from which we borrow the phrase “market smart and mission centered.” But even Zemsky views market factors as both enabling and constraining institutions' pursuit of mission in so far as market realities ensure the financial capacity of mission-centered enterprises to do their work, largely through broad cross-subsidizations by profitable parts of our enterprise underwriting mission-based and non-profitable activities.

Here's the rub: I think it's not enough to just say that markets and missions are interrelated in this way. When market realities and needs are so explicitly bracketed off from mission-centered purposes, when mission-centered purposes are never measured in market-centered outcomes and are articulated in ways seemingly oblivious to the most critical dynamics of the contemporary marketplace, then we may in fact be complicit in the systemic shortcomings Brooks describes—and we are, in fact, part of the problem rather than the solution. *Our premise is this: it is only within a market environment that a mission gains traction, or that mission even has meaning.*

Given its historic commitment to social justice, we believe that Catholic higher education in particular certainly has a role in responding to this systemic challenge of access as both a mission-based and market-based issue. *The real question is if the role that Catholic colleges and universities collectively—and individually—play is by default or by design.* Is it a reflection of our purposes or our market positions? Or both? Or neither?

If we approach our sense of Catholic mission and Catholic identity by bracketing our institutions' market positions as something we can park aside as we explore how best to realize our missions, or if we only see the intersection of mission and market in terms of how

we communicate our mission to the market, then let's accept here at the outset that Catholic higher education is part of the problem Brooks describes rather than an essential part of the solution to the national challenges of access and attainment.

At DePaul, we don't think that's the case. But what do others think? Unfortunately, it's our observation that in the national dialogue about access and attainment, Catholic higher education is neither explicitly indicted nor explicitly credited with any kind of distinct or notable role. I think it is safe to say that collectively, ours is a benign presence in the national discourse.

It's not because we are an insignificant presence on the American higher education landscape that Catholic colleges and universities are missing from the access debate. When we consider Catholic higher education in the context of all of American colleges and universities, here's what we're speaking of: almost 250 institutions that range from tiny College of St. Thomas More in Ft. Worth with fewer than 100 students to DePaul and St. John's—two of only a dozen private universities with more than 20,000 students enrolled. The median enrollment is about 2,400 students—but the mean is 3,500—indicative of the presence of some large institutions at the end of the spectrum. All told, there are more than 900,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in America's Catholic colleges and universities.

We represent every Carnegie class—including research universities, doctoral universities, master's-level institutions and baccalaureate colleges. We occupy positions across the entire spectrum of academic selectivity and prestige and brand recognition, positions all across the spectrum of the so-called food chain of American higher education—from one end of the pecking order to the other—a landscape we'll learn more about tomorrow.

Though we are indeed a varied group, the one thing that we have in common is a Catholic heritage, Catholic identity and Catholic mission. Of course, how our Catholic missions are played out on our campuses is not always the same—the way we articulate that mission, what we emphasize in our mission statements, how we organize our mission-based activities and how we measure mission accomplishments, is not monolithic. That's what Piderit and Morey's text attempts to delineate, and we are fortunate to have joining us at this meeting a number of mission officers at our universities who, during our time together, will help us come to a better understanding of these nuances.

As Catholic colleges and universities, however, it would seem from the national discourse that we are an undifferentiated cog in this system of class stratification that Brooks describes. Not long ago, for example, The Education Trust described flagship public universities as "engines of inequality." The public universities, it turns out, also have a challenge balancing mission and market. But how might The Education Trust have described Catholic colleges and universities had that been the focus of their report? What would be their verdict? Could they even reach one if they so intended? Is the fact that we're not mentioned the result of us bracketing off market dynamics and conditions from how we conceive of our mission, accepting market realities only as a means toward an end rather than embracing the tensions of the contemporary marketplace as the place where mission is most relevant and necessary?

Some think that's the case. As a quick aside, let me share a comment from the recent book by Bowen, Chingos and McPherson, titled "Crossing the Finish Line," about the graduation rates from America's public universities.

*"... public universities have to be the principal engines of progress in addressing these challenges. Important as it is, the private sector is not large enough, nor does its mission focus as strongly on social mobility as does that of the public sector. It is the public sector that has the historical commitment to*

*educational attainment for all, as well as the scale, the cost-pricing structure, and the greatest extant opportunities to do better... ” (p. 224-225)*

*“As important as the private sector of higher education is in America, the struggle to improve educational attainment across the board and to reduce the marked disparities in outcomes that are so troubling will take place mainly within the public universities. In the vernacular, that is ‘where the action is’ (or at least most of it).” (p. 10)*

The implications of these statements—and exploring all of the evidence to the contrary—is a speech all to itself. Perhaps next year.

I fear that the reason we are not already affirmed as part of the solution rather than part of the problem is because when we review the mission statements of some Catholic institutions, it seems that we often make broad and bold pronouncements about how we promote learning in the Catholic tradition in our curriculum, in our co-curriculum, in our student development efforts and in the learning outcomes we aspire to achieve. All of these are noble goals, but let me suggest this: the crux of the challenge is that how we typically regard the Catholic mission of our institutions has far more to do with what we teach and how we shape the student experience than it does with the enrollment profile and enrollment mix we seek and how we are deliberately and strategically staking out positions in the highly competitive and comparative marketplace of higher education and resolving the many competing tradeoffs and tensions that the market creates. In our missions, our focus on social justice is generally a persistent and prominent theme; but Brooks reminds us that the primary challenge to enhancing social justice isn't what we teach our students to understand and care about or how we engage our students in curricular and co-curricular activities with a social justice focus. No, promoting social justice is about whom we enroll and whom we graduate. In short, it's all about EM.

Through the Center for Access and Attainment I've established here at DePaul within our EM division, we affirm this simple premise: *It is by elevating the primacy of whom we enroll that we become a far more prominent part of the national dialogue about access, opportunity and attainment and a proactive part of the solution rather than just a bystander in that debate.*

It is by deliberately melding mission and market dynamics in Catholic higher education that we avoid being just another part of Brooks' vast, systemic mechanisms perpetuating long-standing social inequities that erode the economic foundation and further tear apart the social fabric of America. It is precisely in addressing whom we enroll and whom we teach—and how we define and pursue our preferred enrollment profile in the market—that we find the need for dialogue between our EM and our mission leaders.

Now if the data show that America's Catholic colleges and universities are collectively and demonstrably doing less than other institutions to provide opportunities and access for the least advantaged, then we deservedly sit in the crosshairs of the critics such as Brooks and his ilk.

If, on the other hand, America's Catholic colleges and universities are collectively and demonstrably doing more than other institutions to respond to Brooks' challenge, then we should celebrate that fact. But before we celebrate, we need to ask why that is the case. Is it because we have intentionally embraced mission-centered goals and aspirations that call us to ensure a more socioeconomically and racially diverse student body and thereby increase the ranks of college-educated Americans regardless of privilege and circumstance? Or is it because the market position in which most Catholic institutions find themselves essentially dictates such an enrollment profile? So I return to that question: to whatever degree Catholic institutions collectively and individually respond to the access imperative, is it by design or by default? Is it driven by mission or by market realities—or by both reciprocally?

As we commence our dialogue together, I want to bring our focus to bear on that part of our shared identity and mission, that aspect of our Catholicity that motivates us to want to respond to Brooks' challenge in a common voice saying: "Yes, we confess that we in higher education are collectively responsible for and guilty of renegeing on the promise of access, but we respectfully assert that Catholic higher education is doing more to address that challenge than others and we have the outcomes to prove it."

I don't yet know if that's true. Finding out is what has motivated our gathering. At DePaul, we believe that Catholic colleges and universities can and should be far more explicit and active in addressing this by bringing together EM and mission officers to grapple with this issue. And that's why we're here—to explore with a small, select group of potentially like-minded colleagues whether there is merit in pursuing this as a collaborative agenda. We do this because where else or among whom would this dialogue occur if not us? Where does the locus of this dialogue sit at our respective institutions? In Student Affairs? Advancement? The faculty? Not likely.

## BALANCING MARKET AND MISSION

I believe that it is the very definition of an EM perspective and process to balance market and mission. The functions and responsibilities of EM require us to have one eye on market-based realities and one eye on mission-based aspirations and manage the tensions between them in a way that moves our institutions forward. I believe that, unlike what we hear in these national indictments, EM is not the root of the problem but rather the only way that the tensions between market and mission can be effectively, strategically and intentionally balanced, choosing among the inevitable tradeoffs considered with purpose and with principle. That's why inviting mission officers into that dialogue is critical.

We are going to spend tomorrow together considering this intersection of market and mission. That intersection is a fascinating, complex, tumultuous and maybe dangerous place to explore. I believe that it is at the intersection of mission and market where our institutions do three things:

1. At the intersection of mission and market, we forge the clearest possible sense of our institutions' overarching and sustaining principles and priorities. It is only with the heat and the pressure of market realities that our missions are tempered and strengthened. Markets aren't to be bracketed off just as necessary conditions or constraints on our mission—they constitute the crucible within which we grind out what's really important in our missions, the reality which makes mission more than rhetoric, creating the choice points where we test the mettle of our mission and find empirical evidence of its impact. That's one dynamic we discover at the intersection of mission and market.

2. It is at the intersection of mission and market that we make the strategic institutional choices about how we'll position our institutions, where we'll stake our market position relative to other institutions and make the decisions about how we'll compete, whom we choose to enroll, and what tradeoffs we are willing to make in doing so in a highly competitive market environment. Our institutions are battling for market share, market visibility, market penetration and market position—does where we stake out our position in the landscape of the competitive marketplace have anything to do with mission? How is mission manifested in the market-based choices we make? That's also a dynamic we will discover at the intersection of mission and market.

At the risk of being too philosophical about this intersection we are out to explore, I'd paraphrase Immanuel Kant and say that: **Mission without market is empty; market without mission is blind.**

What I mean is this: Mission statements and mission-centered aspirations that are not grounded in the realities of the market dynamics that directly shape our institutions' academic vitality and financial viability risk being nothing but rhetorical statements of our hopes and dreams and beliefs. They are devoid of context and are **empty**.

Likewise, navigating today's turbulent market dynamics and market contexts without some clear sense of guiding mission renders us rudderless, directionless, with no purpose to guide our decisions other than to ride those market dynamics wherever they may take us. Our market response is **blind** without mission.

Just exploring these two dimensions of markets and mission should be enough for a day of dialogue together.

But let's dare not stop there. There is a third essential outcome of exploring the intersection of market and mission:

3. It is there that we find our response to the challenge put forth by David Brooks. It is only at the intersection of market and mission that our choices about how we respond to the challenge of access can be framed and affirmed. The degree to which our institutions are part of the problem or part of the solution, the degree to which our institutional posture on access and opportunity is one of design or default, and the degree to which our Catholicity leads us in one direction or another on this most pressing social justice issue all depends on the outcomes of the institutional dialogue that occurs when market meets mission.

I truly believe that these are not simply abstract or academic questions; rather, in pursuing answers to them, we can begin to identify how our institutions (individually and collectively) can be strengthened in ways that are both mission-centered and market-smart. I hope by the end of tomorrow we will have begun a journey together to chart a more deliberate course of action wherein we elevate the prominence of Catholic higher education in the national dialogue about access and attainment.

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