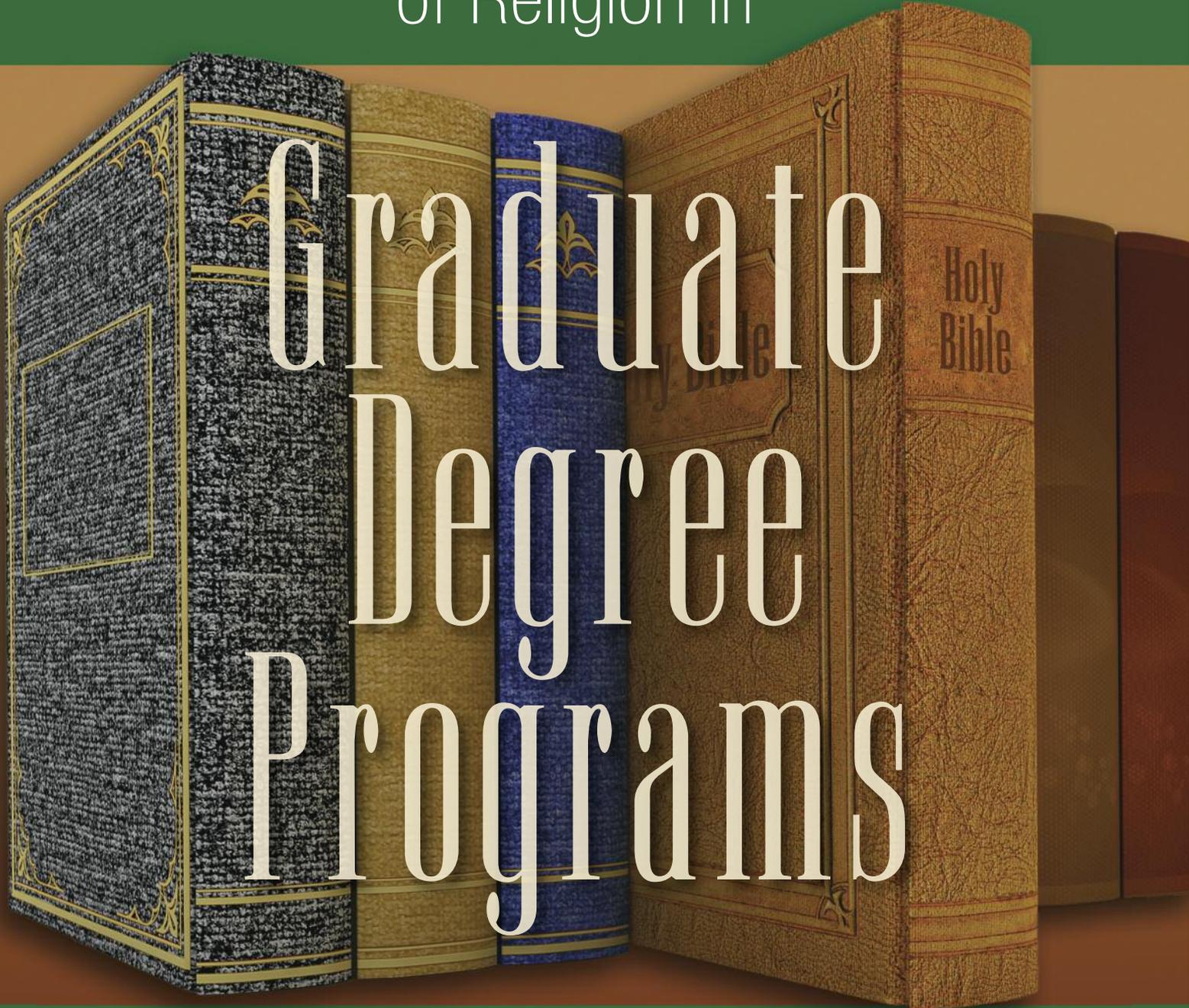


The Study
of Religion in



Graduate Degree Programs

Opportunities and
Structural Issues

In this article, I will discuss several questions that get at the heart of the distinctive purpose of Seventh-day Adventist graduate education: How should we integrate faith and learning in these programs? Should we require the study of religion in all graduate-degree programs? If so, should this always take the form of a required religion course taught by a religion professor? What other options might be available to ensure that Adventist graduate education achieves both its academic and spiritual goals?

Comparatively little has been written on how to structure integration of faith and learning in Adventist graduate education.¹ This article explores the challenges and provides a framework for exploring the advantages and shortcomings of various approaches.

The Opportunity

The need to integrate biblical faith into Seventh-day Adventist graduate education has never been greater. Every school term represents an opportunity either gained or lost to connect learning and faith. The more we can ensure that faith informs and interacts with the academic disciplines, the more likely that students will think biblically and live morally when they leave our institutions. Interweaving Scripture with academic curricula in natural ways will improve both academic learning and our students' faith. Scripture can be useful when addressing "big questions" and assumptions in a variety of disciplines. Biblical principles can be compared with various schools of thought. Scriptural narratives and biographies provide opportunities to explore ethical values and aesthetics as they interact with academic learning. The deeper we dig in order to connect the grand themes of the Bible to academic content as well as our shared experiences with students throughout the total learning environment, the stronger becomes the anchor of faith. Incorporating matters of faith into our teaching can also help expand students' critical thinking skills.

As a faith-based community, we embrace the need to establish and nurture faith-based graduate degree programs. What are we doing to ensure that biblical principles are integrated into the various disciplines in our curricula?

Adventist graduate education desperately needs learning resources supportive of faith and learning integration at both the Master's and doctoral levels. Unless godly scholars in various disciplines produce educational materials that address issues of faith and learning, our faculty will continue to function without adequate resources to use in this area. I would encourage our administrators to explore a variety of ways to sponsor and produce such resources in multiple languages for use worldwide.

Through its educational institutions, particularly at the graduate level, the church plays a definitive role in preparing professionals who are willing and able to take their faith into the larger arena of leadership in the public square. If Christians are to live integrated lives after graduation, their faith commitment and learning quest must inform and challenge each other while they are in school. This will help to ensure that after graduation, faith integration continues to occur not only in the areas of church life and personal devotions, but also in the crucible of the graduate's vocation. We also must constantly seek to nurture and prepare the next generation of scholars to serve as faculty in our schools and faith. The many issues² raised by the various academic disciplines are so vital and urgent that we must address them through the lens of faith.

Implementation

How can biblical faith be incorporated into the graduate curriculum? Should we require every graduate student in every discipline to complete a general religion course?³ Is this the best way to ensure that integration of faith and learning occurs in graduate studies? Who should teach such a class—a religion professor? A subject-area specialist? Will such a class adequately address the issues of faith that the student will encounter in his or her vocation? Or should subject-area professors receive training so that they can integrate faith and promote spiritual growth in their courses? Perhaps both approaches should be implemented?

Consider the issues raised by these questions as well as the structural challenges of the various approaches. Many religion professors do not have graduate degrees in disciplines other

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than theology or religious studies. Can we reasonably expect them to find effective ways to integrate faith and learning in the graduate-level study of other disciplines? The reverse also may be true. Subject-area professors who have little formal training in religion will doubtless feel uncomfortable being required to teach a graduate course in religion. They would need sponsorship and release time to take these additional courses that would qualify them for this task. Exacerbating the problem is employment of non-Adventist adjunct professors who have little knowledge of the church's doctrines or exposure to strategies for integrating faith and learning. Thus, it is likely that a significant number of subject-area professors will face serious challenges if asked to address issues of faith in the graduate courses they teach.

Add to this the pressure to provide students with academic training to master an ever-expanding body of knowledge. If a religion course is required, either the degree program must be

must make to foster integration.⁵

Differentiation and integration are inherently inverse operations. Embedded in one is the potential for undoing the other unless both are appropriately managed. Although they are natural polar opposites, they are inseparable, which means that the tension ultimately cannot be completely resolved one way or another once and for all. It can only be managed, with attention given to both specialization and integration. To attempt to resolve the tension is to damage one or both sides of the polarity. Furthermore, this paradox exists in dynamic tension. Some people like to think of paradox management as a balancing act where we give a little to one side and a little to the other side. But the balancing metaphor does not adequately describe how to manage a tension that is not static, where there are inevitable tradeoffs regardless of the choices that are made.

Keeping in mind the challenge that managing this tension poses to the task of integration, are there any structural options that will help administrators who are defining the content of a graduate-level religion course? How can we get the benefit of subject area specialization and at the same time be successful at integration? I suggest five possible options. (See page 33.) These can be considered in terms of the degree of involvement by a professor, as shown in the following matrix. As used here, "High Involvement" is when the professor has the dominant influence in planning course content, writing the course syllabus, and managing the teaching-learning experiences. "Low Involvement" is when he or she has little direct influence in course content planning, developing course requirements and managing the teaching-learning experiences. Listed at the bottom of the matrix are examples of goals that the options are designed to achieve. (Some goals inevitably will compete with one another.⁶)

Option 1: Offer a course in religion taught by a religion professor. The course is tailored to address the issues of other subject areas. This option might be chosen when faculty in the university's graduate-level courses are not qualified to discuss religion topics relevant to their discipline or have no interest in developing a discipline-specific religion course. Option 1 also assumes that either (a) religion faculty can become qualified to deal with the issues of other disciplines at the graduate level or (b) it is unnecessary for religion faculty to become so qualified. Examples of this approach can be seen in the history at Loma Linda University that Gerald Winslow referred to in his 2006 article "Why the Study of Religion Belongs in Adventist Graduate Programs."⁷

As with the other options considered here, there are tradeoffs when choosing this course of action. The upside of this option is that a scholar who specializes in religion teaches the course.⁸ Religion scholars will bring a depth of understanding of religion but not necessarily the expertise needed to guide student inquiry in other disciplines.⁹ This option may deter scholars in other disciplines from integrating faith into their own curricula areas. Some professors may conclude that only

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lengthened to accommodate it or an existing course dropped to make room for the new one. This will result in a difficult trade-off.

Finally, consider the structural constraints imposed by external accrediting bodies and the perceptions of administrators and faculty members regarding what is required for a credible graduate program. These and other questions should be discussed in the context of the fundamental structural tensions experienced in the quest to integrate faith and learning at the graduate level.

The Structural Perspective and Tradeoffs

Adventist higher education must exist concurrently in two worlds: the community of learning and the community of faith.⁴ The resulting tension highlights two fundamental concerns in defining structural options for faith and learning integration: How much influence should each of these communities exert in the teaching-learning process? What is the appropriate level of involvement for scholars from each of these communities in the teaching of religion in graduate school? The core issues are the degree of *differentiation* (specialization) we wish to create in the curriculum and the commitments we

		Degree of Involvement on Faith Issues by Religion Scholar	
		Low	High
Degree of Involvement in Faith Issues by Scholar From Other Disciplines	High	Option 2	Option 3
	Low	Option 5	Options 1 and 4

The following represent possible competing goals to manage when a structural option is chosen:

- Maintaining a limit on the total length of the curriculum
- Adequately covering the topics in the academic discipline
- Improving biblical literacy among graduate students
- Addressing issues raised by academic disciplines when seen through the lens of faith
- Maintaining a pool of qualified faculty members who align with institutional mission
- Furthering the individual scholarship interests of faculty and students
- Fostering faculty development: interdisciplinary study vs. deeper study of one discipline
- Encouraging students to consider the claims of faith in their lives
- Integrating faith and learning throughout the entire curriculum
- Maintaining the appropriate rigor needed for graduate education
- Fostering role models of faith integration among faculty and students
- Achieving economic efficiency
- Offering training that prepares graduate students to pass licensing exams or to be successful in other types of career gateway experiences
- Keeping a limit on the amount of information addressed in any one course

scholars with terminal degrees in religion are qualified to engage graduate students in substantive discussions regarding issues of faith.

From a structural point of view, extensive specialization requires a corresponding commitment to integration and to collaboration between religion and the other disciplines. To ensure that this occurs, religion scholars will need to devote time to fairly intensive study of the disciplines taught at the institution. The religion teachers should become familiar with the stream of Christian scholarly research and dialogue already present in the other disciplines so they are aware of the issues and problems that other Christians have raised.

Option 2: Offer a course in religion tailored to the issues of the various academic disciplines, and taught by one or more professors in each discipline, rather than a religion scholar.¹⁰ This option may be seen as a logical extension of ideas on faith integration put forward by several authors.¹¹ This perspective appears to be derived from the assumption that all truth is God’s truth,

and that Christian scholars in all disciplines can learn to incorporate ethical and moral topics relevant to their area of specialization into their classes.¹² This option may be implied in Richard Rice’s review of the options when he says that Adventist professors “will teach as representatives of a religious community, not merely as historians, literary scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, or philosophers.”¹³ Implementation of this option makes a statement that the university refuses to compartmentalize religion.¹⁴

An example of this option is the course BUAD 562 Integrating Faith & Business required of all M.B.A. students at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. In this course, some perspectives traditional to the field of religion are employed such as biblical studies, Christian ethics, world religions, missiology, and biblical theology as lenses through which to think about issues in business theory and practice. Another example is EDCI 512 Faith and Learning, offered by the La Sierra University School of Education in Riverside, California.

This course examines such topics as worldview, spirituality, and epistemology as they relate to Christian and public education.

Option 2 assumes that students and professors alike are interested in exploring issues of faith in the context of their field of inquiry. It also assumes that faith integration is not a one-way street in which biblical knowledge, theological reflection, and personal religious experience have little valid connection with academic disciplines. Further, it concludes that faculty in disciplines other than religion are qualified, or can become qualified, to deal with issues of faith in their own area of study. In Gaebelein's view, there is an assumption that the "experienced teacher who can control and interest a class in science can, out of prayerful and faithful study, interest a class in the Word of God."¹⁵ But conversely, Option 2 also suggests that religion faculty may not be qualified or may lack interest or time to become qualified to deal with the issues of theory and practice addressed by other disciplines.

While it is true that ethics is important for all graduate students preparing for service, this approach [Option 3] limits the range of biblical material that might be relevant to a particular discipline.

The upside of Option 2 is that scholars who are deeply acquainted with the big questions, the core ideas, theories, and assumptions in the discipline are the ones who engage students in matters of faith. Those closest to the intellectual issues of the discipline are those who, employing a biblical worldview, evaluate with students the big questions inherent to the discipline.¹⁶ The downside is that the people teaching these classes may not have graduate-level training in religion, thereby increasing the risk that they will make errors when addressing key issues of religion or overlook areas that ought to be explored.

If this option is chosen, teachers will need to devote time to studying the biblical and theological foundations that inform their discipline. Some may need to use a sabbatical to develop such a course. In many cases, it will be helpful to invite a theologian or biblical scholar to participate as a guest lecturer.

Option 3: Offer a religion course tailored to the issues of a specific academic discipline, which is team-taught by two (or more) professors, one from religion and one from the other academic discipline. This collaborative approach assumes that faculty from both religion and the other discipline will have a desire and willingness to collaborate. As in the other options, it also assumes that both students and professors are interested in ex-

ploring issues of faith in the context of their chosen academic field. An example of this approach is seen in SOWK 508 Social Work, Religion, and Spirituality, a course required of students enrolled in the School of Social Work at Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington. This course is team taught by a faculty member from the School of Social Work and a professor from the School of Theology. Another approach would be to offer a course in Christian ethics, with a portion of the course allocated to a particular discipline. While it is true that ethics is important for all graduate students preparing for service, this approach limits the range of biblical material that might be relevant to a particular discipline.

The upside of this option is that professors from religion and the other subject area have high involvement in the course. The depth of scholarship may be enhanced by their collaborative effort. The downside is that, compared with the first two options, such an approach will be more expensive and difficult to schedule.

If this option is chosen, among other things, faculty members need to be selected, at least in part, based on their willingness to collaborate. In addition, administrative support and budgetary adjustments may be needed to deal with the additional costs.

Option 4: Offer a general religion course taught by a religion professor. This option assumes that faith integration will occur for students and faculty even if the big issues, assumptions, and questions of their discipline are not specifically addressed. Those advocating this option argue that a general religion course will provide a deeper understanding of the Bible and enhance the student's overall spiritual experience. This option may be chosen because of the belief that there is an insufficient

number of teachers who can appropriately integrate faith and learning in the various disciplines.

This option also may be more efficient since students from a variety of disciplines can be enrolled in one course. The downside: It may implicitly foster a compartmentalized view of religion in terms of the curriculum in other disciplines. Students will not be directly challenged to think about the issues, questions, and assumptions of their discipline through the lens of Scripture. Furthermore, requiring a single graduate-level religion course will make it impossible to cover the vast amount of biblical material that might be addressed during graduate study.

If this option is chosen, professors in the various disciplines will need to find other opportunities to engage students in the issues of faith as they relate to the discipline. But, if religion professors are perceived as taking care of the faith and learning curriculum problem, it will be more difficult to convince professors in other disciplines to pursue such engagement.

Option 5: Both the community of faith and the community of scholarship have little or no involvement in the design and delivery of a religion course. This approach appears to be inconsistent with the mission of Adventist universities. Accordingly,

it probably should be rejected.

With the exception of Option 5, each option described here allows for every professor to integrate faith and learning in any particular course, class period, or assignment. Furthermore, the personal impact of the life of each instructor is an important factor in the integration of faith and learning in every discipline that cannot be forgotten when considering only the structural dimension.

Other Structural Contingencies

In addition to the options available in resolving the fundamental tensions between differentiation and integration, it is necessary to consider other structural contingencies. For example, graduate study is distinguished from undergraduate study in terms of the degree of emphasis or the degree of complexity a number of factors, including theory, research, schools of thought (perspectives), assumptions, threshold concepts (core ideas), values in practice, and pedagogy. Each plays a role in teaching and learning. Graduate studies tend to emphasize theory and research to a greater degree than classwork at the undergraduate level. These and other factors can be seen as planks in the bridge between other disciplines and religion, as shown in the illustration below.

Each teacher, whether trained in religion or another academic discipline, will have personal preferences for how to cross this bridge with students. They must be allowed the academic freedom to pursue matters of faith in a way that constitutes the best fit for their own talents, knowledge, and skills, as

well as the needs of their students. Some teachers may make connections to biblical faith by emphasizing theory and religious experience. Others may approach the faith integration process by emphasizing how values can best be put into practice, or stressing the grand biblical themes that guide practice. The potential pathways across the bridge are many. Individual preferences and course- or discipline-specific elements will influence the choices made. However, every choice comes with one or more tradeoffs, since there is insufficient time in a single course to explore every possible part of the bridge that might have the potential for linking faith and student experience.

Every teacher, however, can integrate faith and learning in caring interactions with students by sharing his or her spiritual journey. Scheduling worships at the beginning of each class period and expressing a genuine interest in each student's spiritual and emotional welfare and growth will also help to ensure that our programs are holistic and produce graduates who have grappled with the moral issues relating to their discipline.

University administrators must provide support and training to assist teachers in making these connections between their disciplines and biblical principles. Teachers can search out materials on the Internet and/or attend seminars to help them identify effective strategies to use in order to integrate faith and learning in their classes.

Conclusion

The fundamental structural tension between differentiation and integration cannot be completely resolved. It can only be

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managed. We may think we have resolved the tension by making a particular choice among the options; however, no single choice is likely to bring permanent resolution.

Which option is best? The answer will emerge at each university and in every program through dialogue that considers the contingencies and how best to manage (minimize) the downside tradeoffs of each option. An assessment of the background and needs of a particular group of students may suggest the need to adapt an approach that worked well in another environment.

Hybrid approaches might seem to be the optimal solution, but they still present some challenges, since they are unlikely to permanently resolve the fundamental structural tension described in this article. Furthermore, hybrid approaches will bring their own set of tradeoffs to consider. Each teacher and the administrators of each institution will need to carefully and prayerfully study the options in order to decide which approach will work best in each situation. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See for example, Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 7. This present article assumes that there are differences between graduate and undergraduate education regarding the optimal ways of integration of faith and learning, and will address only the graduate level.

2. The term *issues* as used here refers to the cluster of questions, dilemmas, assumptions, and problems emerging from an area of study, which relate to or impact the core of a person's faith, and influence the formation of his or her worldview. Accordingly, issues are not necessarily points of fact, but refer to assumptions, theories, interpretation of facts, methods, and vocational behaviors that affect a person in a social setting.

3. See Gerald R. Winslow, "Why the Study of Religion Belongs in Adventist Graduate Programs," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 48:3 (February/March 2006), pp. 27-32: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200668032706.pdf>.

4. Fritz Guy, "Can Education Be Both 'Higher' and 'Adventist'?" *ibid.* 64:4 (April/May 2002), pp. 4-8: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200264040405.pdf>.

5. These two opposite functions have been recognized in various fields including mathematics, biology, education, psychology, philosophy, and art. Traditionally, higher education has been on a long-term trajectory of increasing specialization of the academic disciplines. This has created greater challenges in how to integrate learning across the disciplines. I am arguing here that the same fundamental tension exists when considering issues of faith and learning. In the field of organization theory, much has been written on this fundamental tension experienced by every organization in every sector of society including religious nonprofit organizations. See Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, *Organization and*

Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1967); Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978); Richard H. Hall and Pamela S. Tolbert, *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005); Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

6. Competing goals are not unusual in complex organizations and especially in nonprofit organizations. Indeed, the goals of differentiation are, to a degree, in competition with the goals of integration.

7. Winslow, "Why the Study of Religion Belongs in Adventist Graduate Programs," *op. cit.*

8. This review of positive and negative effects of the various options is not intended to be comprehensive. The validity and relevance of some of the points raised here will vary, depending on the contingencies of particular situations.

9. Some have cautioned against taking too heavy-handed an approach when teaching religion, suggesting that mere indoctrination can actually be counter-productive to the goals of Christian education, since professors hope that students desire to be critical thinkers rather than mere reflectors of the thoughts of others. See Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, *op. cit.*, p. 68; R. T. Hughes, *The Vocation of the Christian Scholar: How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), p. 70; Richard Rice, "How Religious Should We Be? And How Should We Be Religious?" *The Journal of Adventist Education* 70:4 (April/May 2008), pp. 4-9: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200870040406.pdf>; Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 17.

10. See C. Garland Dulan, "Curriculum and Faith in Tension: Educational Models and Principles That May Ease Tension and Promote Understanding," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 71:4 (April/May 2009), pp. 4-9: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200971040406.pdf>; Chris Blake, "Encouraging Students to Ask Questions About Their Faith," *ibid.* 49:1 (October/November 1986), pp. 14-15, 30: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200971040406.pdf>. Integration of faith and learning in specific disciplines has been addressed by: John Wesley Taylor V, "A Christian Focus for the Arts," *ibid.* 71:1 (October/November 2008), pp. 5-11: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200871010507.pdf>; Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth: Problems of Integration in Christian Education* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1968); John Wesley Taylor V, "Instructional Strategies for Integrating Faith and Learning," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 63:5 (Summer 2001), pp. 5-14; George H. Akers and Robert D. Moon, "Integrating Learning, Faith, and Practice in Christian Education (Part II)," *ibid.* 43:2 (Summer 1980), pp. 17-31: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae198042051715.pdf>.

11. For examples, see: John Wesley Taylor V, "Instructional Strategies for Integrating Faith and Learning," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 42:5 (Summer, 2001), pp. 5-14: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200163050507.pdf>; George H. Akers and Robert D. Moon, "Integrating Learning, Faith, and Practice in Christian Education (Part I)," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 42:4 (April/May 1980), pp. 17-32: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae198042041716.pdf>; Hudson Kibuuka, "Mission and Identity of Seventh-day Adventist Schools," *ibid.* 64:2 (December 2001/January 2002), p. 7: <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200164020405.pdf>; Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth*, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Some may argue that if faith integration were extended throughout the graduate degree curriculum, there would be no need for a course in religion. Others will maintain that a specialized course in religion is needed if for no other reason than that it will be practically impossible to extend faith integration throughout the curriculum of each degree program, given the current personnel resources available.

12. James Wilhoit, *Christian Education and the Search for Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), pp. 127, 128; James S. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 1990), pp. 93, 142; Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth*, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 7, 17.

13. Rice, "How Religious Should We Be? And How Should We Be Religious?" *op. cit.*, p. 8.

14. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

15. Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

16. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.