



## TO THE READER

Character formation is grounded in Christian values, borne by belief in a triune God. He has ordained us as educators. We have been esteemed with the opportunity, responsibility, and honor to deeply impact our students' lives.

This eBook, adapted from my book *Character Formation in Online Education*, provides practical ideas for customizing your online courses and improving your pedagogical methodology, irrespective of your discipline. As the reach of online education expands, so do the opportunities to effect real character formation. It is my hope that your students will not be the only ones to experience transformation.

*—Joanne J. Jung (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is associate professor of biblical and theological studies at Biola University and chair of the Talbot School of Theology committee for online learning.*

### The Truth about Character Formation

Character formation is more than an outward, behavioral, or moral change. It deals with who one is now and who one is becoming over the long haul in his or her life. Whether in ordinary, everyday life or in the challenges and trials that force the true self to emerge, whether in the presence of eyewitnesses or in the solitude of seeming obscurity, character formation is an ongoing work.

Godly character formation is aligned with spiritual formation, as its goal is growth in an honest relationship with self as a whole person, with others, and with God. It deals with the default self, the real self. It is developed by what one allows to enter most deeply into one's heart and soul and is the lifelong response to the grace of God by the power of his Spirit in growing likeness of the Son. God's Word informs this process, as evidence of this lifestyle of godliness has both inward and outward consequences: inward, a growing dependence and trust in God, who proves himself worthy of that trust; and outward, reconciled relationships with others, who matter a great deal to God. Our world needs more pervasively influential, Christ-centered, others-focused people.

*"If you have settled for the 'easy,' uninvolved approach to online education, be warned."*

There is skepticism among educators about character formation in online education. Many cannot imagine that real transformation can be achieved in any format other than in the traditional model of residential education with in-class face time. Profound

spiritual formation, however, can and has happened through quality and effective learning in online education.

If you have settled for the “easy,” uninvolved approach to online education, be warned. The following content will only serve to stir a discontent with that status quo. If, however, a desire is stirred in you to know more about the kind of professor, the kind of course, and the kind of character formation possible in your online classes, read on.

## PART ONE

### Do Heart and Soul Have a Place in the Classroom?

*One never meets a mere human being.*  
C. S. Lewis

The heart is often misrepresented in American culture. Whether it is Céline Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On” or Taylor Swift’s “I Heart ?” or Tony Bennett’s “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” the contemporary use of the word heart has popularized the idea that heart is exclusively linked to the human emotion of love or passion. We tend to valorize heart-based judgments as more true and authentic. But the heart has much more to do with how we live, as we mean when we speak of doing something wholeheartedly.

Effective teaching moves beyond a truncated understanding of the heart to incorporating the entire heart. In Proverbs 4:23 (HCSB), believers are warned: “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.” Mentioned nearly one thousand times in God’s Word, the heart is clearly important to him. Discovering more about the heart helps us understand its importance to him.

John Coe describes the heart as “the core of human personality and is the nexus of human will, affect, and intellect.”<sup>1</sup> The intellect, which is the mind or thinking function of the heart, is where our thoughts are received, processed, and formed. Affect, or emotion, is tied to thoughts, because we have

“Mind, emotion, and will are often examined separately but were created to function together.”

---

<sup>1</sup> John Coe, “Heart,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 495.

feelings about all thoughts; some elicit deep and profound feelings, while we could not care less about others. The will is an expression of what we actually do (or do not do) with our thoughts. These components of the heart — mind, emotion, and will — are often examined separately but were created to function together. They make up who we are. Our lives are our hearts in motion.

An approach to online teaching that focuses only on acquiring information focuses on the mind while marginalizing the emotions and will. The ability to form students' character depends on whether thoughts reach the level of emotion in the heart. Formational learning requires emotions to be involved, bringing greater value to what we understand, which prompts change.

John Kotter and Dan Cohen write, “People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their *thinking* than because they are shown a truth that influences their *feelings*.”<sup>2</sup> Though they are writing about the business world, their

“People change ... because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings.”

findings apply to academic settings. Successful organizations, and successful professors, recognize that both thinking and feeling are essential but that “the heart of change is in the emotions.”<sup>3</sup> The key to change lies in making people feel differently. Kotter and Cohen’s core pattern of “See-Feel-Change” has been shown to impact not only individuals but those around these individuals as well.<sup>4</sup> Joseph LeDoux, professor of neuroscience and psychology at New York University, adds, “Once emotions occur they become powerful motivators of future behaviors.”<sup>5</sup>

Theologian Robert Saucy, in addressing the biblical understanding of the heart, describes human emotions as “sensors that are always evaluating the situations of our life with feelings of pleasure or displeasure, with resonance or dissonance.”<sup>6</sup> Thinking or analysis that does not touch the emotions will produce little or no change. Human beings are more motivated to change when emotions are involved than when humans engage knowledge or analysis alone. How we feel about what we think has great potential for what we do.

---

<sup>2</sup> John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, 10 – 11.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 84.

The soul, too, is often misrepresented. There's Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul; the Kia Soul, a car; and, of course, soul food. Such broad use of the word diminishes the reality and importance of the human soul. In order to reclaim its importance, we need to understand that the soul's primary identity is "equated with the totality of the person created in the image of God."<sup>7</sup> The heart functions as the control center of the soul; therefore, what is known in the heart is known in the soul.

Even when Christians are asked about the soul, they tend to refer to it as the nonmaterial essence of who we are.

**"Scripture does not support the bifurcation of soul and body."**

Unfortunately, that is only partially correct.

Scripture does not support the bifurcation of soul and body.<sup>8</sup> The two words in the Bible that are translated *soul*, *nephesh* in the Old Testament and *psuche* in the New Testament, describe living beings or human beings, not just the immaterial aspect of a person. Early in Genesis (2:7) we are told that the union of our body (the material substance) with our spirit (the immaterial substance) forms a living soul (*nephesh*). The soul, which includes the body, comes to mean "the whole person," all of what makes up the "self." All human beings are souls.

Considering the soul as only its immaterial aspect marginalizes the impact the body and its actions have on character formation in online education. When the body is excluded from an understanding of the soul, we ignore an important part of the soul: we unintentionally disregard the impact that physical actions and behaviors have on our soul. In an organic and dynamic way, matters that impact our souls, and thus our hearts, are manifested in how we live; the actions and behaviors of our lives impact our souls and thus our hearts. This holistic understanding of the soul allows us to address it with greater discernment.

Over the centuries, Christians have contemplated and written about the significance of the soul for our lives. Even when only the immaterial might be implied, one can still grasp the seriousness of matters of the soul. In the mid-1600s, Brian Duppa, Bishop of Winchester, wrote of the distance one can have with one's soul: "Why should the soul and I become such strangers? Are we like my two eyes, which have but an inch

---

<sup>7</sup> Wil Hernandez, "Soul," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 764 – 765.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus spoke of a separation of soul and body in Matthew 10:28, but he was addressing what happens at death when the soul or person is separated from the body, resulting in a disembodied soul. In Revelation 6:9, the apostle John identified the disembodied souls of those who were martyred. These disembodied souls would be incomplete souls because though the soul remains the real person with or without being embodied, it is designed for embodiment. For Christians, this will happen at Christ's second coming, when believers receive new, resurrected bodies.

between them, yet never see one another? Or is it that we can so much more easily look on the souls of others with patience than on our own Wounded Souls?”<sup>9</sup> He then adds, “Whatever may become of my other friends, I hope that in my afflictions, I may at least have my soul to talk to — that neither sin nor the Devil could ever separate us.”<sup>10</sup> Souls need attentive consideration.

Similarly, John Bunyan observes the soul as that which “God counts worthy to be the vessels to hold his grace — the graces of the Spirit in.”<sup>11</sup> Intended to thrive on God’s graces, we are inadequate people without them. We are poor souls when we are barren of the graces that are meant to fill the vessels of our lives. Growing one’s consciousness of God’s presence prepares us for the flood of grace intended to flow to the soul, the whole person.

This happens in character formation. It happens as we learn to think and learn to live our lives as Christians with a conspicuous faith, allowing ourselves to be vessels and conduits for the grace of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power. This kind of reflection in online classes is possible through well-framed questions that keep the whole person in mind and through a strong learning community that recognizes that people learn best in positive relationships.

## The Well-Framed Question

*A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.*  
Francis Bacon

Questions are at the heart of learning. A good question affects intelligence, interest, attention, memory, and conduct. The quality of questions is more critical than the quantity to generate transformative learning and an integrative learning community. Well-framed questions promote the students’ understanding of concepts and course material and encourage insightful engagement with peers and the professor. They help advance the line of discussion, inquiry, and reflection toward greater understanding of an idea or intellectual task. Vague or simplistic yes or no questions and mundane, repetitive

“Seize the opportunity to fashion investigative questions that help students discover truth for themselves.”

---

<sup>9</sup> Brian Duppa, *The Soules Soliloquie* (London, 1648), 5. Updated in modern language.

<sup>10</sup> Duppa, *The Soules Soliloquie*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> John Bunyan, *The Greatness of the Soul* (London, 1683), 50.

questions fail to do this. Seize the opportunity to fashion investigative questions that help students discover truth for themselves.

Well-framed questions reveal something about the questioner; the answers reveal something about the respondent. Jesus asked questions, but not merely for the sake of asking questions. His questions were clear, brief, and practical, yet stimulating, personal, and adapted to the individual. They were intended to reach the heart of the matter, to cause people to think and feel, and to elicit a response that stemmed from careful consideration. Reflection is the brain's way of making connections toward grasping a concept or truth. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter understood the power of consideration and meditation "for the moving of the affections, and for the powerful imprinting of things in the heart."<sup>12</sup> Intentional reflection connects thoughts with emotions and leads to transformation. As Robert Saucy reminds us: "The deeper something is in our heart, the more it influences our life."<sup>13</sup>

Questions that impact character formation are those whose answers make a close connection between the subject matter and human emotion. These purposeful prompts further the engagement of the heart and have the greatest potential

“Questions that impact character formation ... make a close connection between the subject matter and human emotion.”

impact on the soul because they apply information, facts, and truths to students' lives. Well-framed questions force students to wrestle with or meditate on the information presented. The inclusion of the word *soul* in some questions and conversations is vital. Christian conversations are mostly devoid of the use of this word, yet every human being is a soul who requires attentive care, which ultimately means the heart receives attending as well. Here are two sample questions designed to elicit meaningful meditation:

- Paul writes in Colossians 3:23 (NASB), "Whatever you do, do your work heartily [with the soul], as for the Lord." In light of the biblical understanding of the soul, what challenges do you face in being obedient to God?
- Consider Psalm 119:11, 13. Is it more difficult for you to get the Word into your heart and soul or to speak when the Word impacts your life? Explain.

Meditating on a response to an effective prompt touches the emotions and affects the will, which results in living out what has been learned and embedded in the heart.

---

<sup>12</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (London, 1650), 720.

<sup>13</sup> Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 82.

## Brain Growth and Mindfulness Meditation

In an effective learning community, thought-provoking questions that aim at matters of the soul incline students to reflect or meditate on deep issues. Many people ask how to shorten the distance between head and heart. Richard Baxter would submit,

Consideration opens the door between the head and the heart. . . . Now this is the great work of Consideration. O what rare men would they be, who have strong heads, and much learning and knowledge, if the obstructions between the Head and the Heart were but opened! and their Affections did but correspond to their Understandings. . . . He is the best Scholar who hath the readiest passage from the Ear to the Brain, but he is the best Christian, who hath the readiest passage from the Brain to the Heart; now Consideration is that on our parts that must open the passage though the Spirit open as the principal cause; inconsiderate men are stupid and senseless.<sup>14</sup>

Though meditation is a stranger to many, it is one of the most effective processes with which human beings effect life change. Meditation is not a stagnant exercise but one that forces a person to engage in thinking, to ask questions of the self, and to determine if a thought truly aligns with a belief. The seventeenth-century minister Jonathan Mitchel understood this: “One truth felt in Meditation, is worth a World, and it will make way for more.”<sup>15</sup>

“Meditation is not a stagnant exercise but one that forces a person to engage in thinking.”

Massachusetts General Hospital researchers have observed the brain to explore the effects of mindfulness meditation. Meaningful self-awareness affects structural changes in two important parts of the brain: the left hippocampus and the amygdala. This kind of meditation helped increase the gray matter concentration of the hippocampus, an area important for learning, memory, and compassion.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, stress-related disorders have been associated with smaller hippocampi.<sup>17</sup> (As a hopeful aside for the reader and this author, the hippocampus is well known for its ability to generate new neurons, and it has been shown that volume loss is reversible.<sup>18</sup>) The effects of

---

<sup>14</sup> Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 720.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Mitchel, *A Discourse of the Glory* (Boston, 1721), 282.

<sup>16</sup> Britta K. Hölzel, et al., “Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density,” *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191, no. 1 (2011): 36, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Hölzel, “Mindfulness,” 40.

<sup>18</sup> Hölzel, “Mindfulness,” 41.

mindfulness meditation on an individual's psychological well-being reach beyond the time spent in meditation and should inspire both students and professors to invest time in meditation.

To incorporate the self-awareness of mindfulness meditation with the God-awareness of biblical meditation is to create opportunities for students to engage in meditation that will embed truth more deeply in the heart. Meditation on the character and attributes of God — his sacrificial love, mercy, and kindness, to name a few — and on his movement throughout redemptive history provides abundant material not only for healthier gray matter but for transformative heart matter as well. Professors should allow students to think deeply in a way that incorporates biblical truth into their relevant fields of study, calling, relationships, and life purpose. Fortunately, Christians are not alone in this work. The Holy Spirit is a believer's Advocate and Counselor. He teaches, guides, and reminds Christians of why and how to think biblically about everything.

But the transformation doesn't end there. Not only are we impacted as individual souls directed by our hearts but also as souls created to thrive in community.

## Connecting Thoughts with Emotions: The Community

Our culture perpetuates individualistic isolationism with its emphasis on the self. The iPhone, iPad, iTunes, and iPod reinforce the belief that it really is about me, or "i." Such radical autonomy is a constant temptation in contemporary society. Cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch observes that students are fluent in entertaining themselves but not in educating themselves. They may be digitally adept, but they have not developed the skills to use technology to educate themselves.<sup>19</sup> The ability to access information is not equivalent to acquiring knowledge. As educators, we are uniquely positioned to impact what students learn and how they mature in their learning and to foster critical thinking and discernment with the information they retrieve. The training in our various disciplines taught us to ask defining questions, to think broadly for resources, to pursue answers, to wrestle with apparent contradictions, to press through when we have hit the wall, to discover deep within ourselves the conviction that what we learn will indeed make a difference in our world. We then bring this posture to our students, and they are taking notice of what education looks like.

“Radical autonomy is a constant temptation in contemporary society.”

Christian education has always been more than delivering content or transferring

---

<sup>19</sup> Michael Wesch, “Digital Ethnography” (Lecture, Biola University, La Mirada, CA, 2013).

information. It is committed to both academic excellence and spiritual transformation. Educators care about their academic discipline and Christian fidelity as they equip their students through an academic subject. They understand that knowledge without character formation limits true impact on students, their community, and the world. Students learn more when they believe that their professors care about their learning, and students are more engaged in their own spiritual transformation when they believe that their professors value transformation. The goal is character formation, and educators can provide opportunities for students to change something about themselves and grow as persons. This is best accomplished in a community that values knowing and being known. Learning together influences a deeper level of engagement.

Impactful learning in any season of life takes place in the context of affirming relationships. As human beings we have a fundamentally insatiable need for relationship. Being relational is in our nature because we are made in the image of God, who is communal. So no matter what the technology, people will use it to connect with others. The communal aspect of online learning conveys the value and role of each member in spiritually formative relationships, which include both professors and peers. Community makes possible a powerful structure for shaping and bringing about individual and corporate change. In community, emotional engagement is added to the shared experience and leads to changed behavior.

“Impactful learning in any season of life takes place in the context of affirming relationships.”

Creating an effective communal environment for learning can be challenging. Professors must consider schedules as well as the willingness and ability of both professor and students to engage in conversation and dialogue. Technology used well, however, has proven instrumental in addressing and accomplishing these tasks. Cultivating a presence in an online course community is critical. The professor who cultivates interaction with and between students breeds a “classroom away from the classroom” that is healthy enough to minimize the disadvantages of being geographically distant while maximizing the advantages of engaged learning to cultivate profound experiences of authentic Christian community. We will identify effective practices in the following chapter, but first let’s consider the need to foster face-to-face community.

We would be remiss to ignore the need for students to take an intentional break from technology. Students must learn how to power off, to distance themselves from technology, and to engage in authentic face-to-face encounters in order to be present with others and avoid faking a self-image. One of my students, Riley, realized this in a very scientific and technological way:

The other day I was sitting in the cafeteria eating dinner with a friend. He is a Chemical Engineering major and told me that he creates computer programs to solve his math and chemistry problems. I was blown away and I kept thinking, *How could anybody make a computer program that does his or her math homework?* I asked him to show me. He pulled out his computer, opened up the program, and walked me through it. I was amazed at what he was showing me. The program honestly looked like a different language, but I eventually started to see the basic structure of how it all worked. What he did next will stick with me for the rest of my life.

My friend said, “Do you know what an image is?” I couldn’t answer, so he pulled up an image and, using the computer programming software, showed me how an image is made and

“My friend said, ‘Do you know what an image is?’ I couldn’t answer.”

seen on a computer. As he put the image, which was written in a short code, into the program, a long grid of numbers popped up on the screen. And I mean long. It must have taken twenty seconds to load. He told me these numbers were all on a grid and make up what an image is. He then manipulated the image by changing some of the numbers. I was blown away by the fact that all digital images are merely grids and numbers. He then explained that anything digital, from an email to a text message, a viral YouTube video to an Instagram picture, is merely a series of numbers set in a grid. Simple math problems and numbers run every digital device we have. The math problems, he said, are basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and the numbers are all zeros and ones. This is what runs apps, computer software, and digital devices.

I was blown away. After pausing, I asked him, “So the phone that I spend a vast majority of my day on, the Instagram picture I so badly want to upload, the computer I am so fixated with, is all just silicon and a series of numbers? That is what runs everything?” He simply said, “Yes.”

I lean on my phone and my computer, my Twitter and my Instagram, and my email and my Internet for comfort, satisfaction. The weight of being fixated with technology while being inattentive to people really fell on me right then and there. There is nothing wrong with a computer or a phone. But I would sometimes rather be on my computer looking at grids and numbers that build an image rather than with [real] people. I am letting

grids and numbers rob me of the joy that is found when I am in community with other people.<sup>20</sup>

We must encourage students to engage both in online communities mediated by technology and in students' own unmediated communities. Both provide the arenas for successful, character-forming interaction and conversations.

## PART TWO

### How to Integrate Faith and Learning Online<sup>21</sup>

*Divine knowledge, and Human Learning, are the right and left eye of the World; as the Sun and Moon are to the Universe, the eclipsing of either of them leaves the World in darkness.*

Richard Mayo<sup>22</sup>

*Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need.*

Frederick Buechner

There are some who feel that the Christian faith and scholastic learning are diametrically opposed and antithetical to each other. Not so! Rather, the two are harmonious companions. Faith in God is deepened as we learn and understand more about ourselves and our world, regardless of the subject matter — whether mathematics, science, business, or the humanities. Likewise, learning is expanded when we comprehend the majesty of God's handiwork in creation and the world around us. The writer of Proverbs asserts, "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding" (3:13), and "Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (4:7). Conversely, only the unwise do not wish to learn: "Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). It is God who gives knowledge and understanding (Dan. 1:17).

---

<sup>20</sup> I thank Riley Mailman for "A Write-Up on Technology," April 2013.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Rick Langer, director of the Office for Integration of Faith and Learning at Biola University, for his expertise, which contributed to the writing of this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Mayo, *The Life and Death of Edmund Staunton*, (London: Printed for Ths. Parkhurst, 1673). As a nonconformist minister, Mayo pens his reflections on his predecessor, Edmund Staunton, an ejected minister, college head, and Puritan divine.

At the core of the integration of faith and learning is the mandate for Christians to participate with God in seeking creation's greatest good and bringing about its flourishing in ways that honor its Creator (Gen. 1:26, 28). This involves applying a biblical or Christian worldview to all of life. The goal is to use acquired knowledge — how we think, act, and live within culture — to participate in God's plan to redeem culture to its fullest potential, its realized good, and his revealed glory.

“The integration of faith and learning is a conversation between Christian beliefs and the best of academic learning in all disciplines.”

This chapter addresses the practical side of the integration of faith and academic disciplines in an online format. It is important to note, however, that a model of integration where faith is merely a quick supplement or insertion into a discipline creates a compartmentalized life, devoid of an authentic biblical worldview and lifestyle. Therefore, let us first identify what the integration of faith and learning is not.

To meet a quota or an institutional requirement, some professors erroneously implement the integration of faith and learning by tacking a Scripture verse onto a principle where it may — or may not — fit or by starting class with a short devotional that has little or no relevance to the subject matter or to students' lives. In some cases, an attempt to integrate faith and learning may unfortunately be inserted on the last day of class.

Integrating faith and learning is not limited to any particular subject or discipline; it is applicable to all. It is fallacious to think that professors who teach courses in theology or biblical studies do not need to be intentional about integrating faith and learning or that courses in the arts and sciences, for example, do not need such integration. Professors must communicate their subject matter with biblical integration and application. Incorporating faith and learning into all disciplines is crucial to living lives of integrity and purpose.

Broadly, the integration of faith and learning is a conversation between Christian beliefs and the best of academic learning in all disciplines. The goal is to guide learners so they are able to formulate essential questions that emerge from study in the academic discipline, to discover insights that arise from the questions that connect the discipline with relevant biblical concepts, and to respond to the insights with a plan to act and engage with culture. Once a question has been framed, the conversation continues for the purpose of discovering insights that connect the best of the discipline with the relevant theological concepts. The identification of points of congruence, complementarity, conflict, or continued questioning furthers the discussion.

Because the integration of faith and learning is not just a cognitive process, one must respond to the insights with a plan to act, to engage creation or culture.

“True and deepening knowledge requires action.”

Richard Baxter notes, “Reason is at the strongest when it is most in action.”<sup>23</sup> David Williams echoes this thought, saying, “Reality is not what our knowledge mirrors; rather, reality is that with which our knowledge participates.”<sup>24</sup> True and deepening knowledge requires action. It is easy to see a linear sequence from thought to emotion to expressed actions of the will, but in fact, actions have a double-back impact on the emotion (feeling) and thought (thinking). Actions flow from the emotion of the heart but also have an effect on the heart’s emotion.<sup>25</sup> C.S. Lewis observes, “The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”<sup>26</sup> In this, one can begin to see the mutual effect the mind, emotion, and will have on one another in the heart and in character formation.

It is a small step outside the box of online learning to imagine the ways a student can engage in his or her own milieu and community. Geographical distances may separate the professor from the student, but the student is present in his or her own corner of the world. The online professor may not engage with students in an unmediated way, but that does not preclude the students from interacting with their own present reality.

Adding experiential components or actions — aspects of the will — to the learning process affords opportunities to practice a principle or truth, strengthening what is thought (mind) and felt (emotion), thus allowing that truth to be more deeply known. Interestingly, the absence of such opportunities, the lack of an expression for the will, can impede knowing and feeling.

The most effective level of learning and knowing will involve knowledge that is lived out in actions. As meditation on God’s Word embeds that truth in one’s heart, so too do actions affect the heart and soul as noted in chapter four.

---

<sup>23</sup> Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 723.

<sup>24</sup> David Alan Williams, “Knowing as Participation: Toward an Intersection between Psychology and Postcritical Epistemology,” in *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 343.

<sup>25</sup> Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 101.

## The Most Influential Integration Component

Theories and narratives are one of the principal ways to begin and continue the integration discussion. One narrative, however, remains key to influencing and inspiring students as they grapple with their own integration of faith and learning — yours! As effective as the content and structure of the online course is, they cannot substitute for an authentic, transparent, caring educator.

Professors are responsible not only for teaching course content but also for *how* it is taught. Even in an online course, they must be mentors and must be present for students both effectively and personally. The word *integration* comes from the word *integritās*, from which we get the word *integrity*. Students search for and desire access to someone who is honest about manifesting a life of faithfulness and authenticity.<sup>27</sup> How these integrators think, discern, make choices, and live out a consistent commitment to God and others is crucial — essentially modeling integration in a way that allows student access to that process. Students desire to observe and interact with those whose Spirit-led, heart-directed souls are characterized by a solid biblical worldview and a lack of hypocrisy. The fact that students want to see a professor’s personal relationship with God means that the integration of faith and learning is something profoundly meaningful to them.<sup>28</sup>

“[Nothing can] substitute for an authentic, transparent, caring educator.”

Researchers continue to affirm Randall Sorenson’s findings that what contributes most to a student’s integration of faith and learning is how well students can determine the convergence of a professor’s authentic, dynamic, and growing relationship with God and the professor’s nondefensive, emotionally unguarded, and even vulnerable relationship with students. Sorenson summarized this point as follows:

Too often we think that teaching students our integrative models is what they need in order to learn integration. Often what they want, however, is not our models but ourselves — or perhaps more accurately, they want us to model our own integration, and to give them access to our own relationship before God in an open and nondefensive manner. It is as though when they have access to us as not just professors but persons, and to our ongoing life before God — doubts and all, our joys and our

---

<sup>27</sup> Randall L. Sorenson, et al., “National Collaborative Research on How Students Learn Integration: Final Report,” in *Psychology and Christianity Integration: Seminal Works That Shaped the Movement*, eds. Daryl H. Stevenson, Brian E. Eck, and Peter C. Hill (Batavia, IL: Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Inc., 2007), 350.

<sup>28</sup> Sorenson, “Collaborative Research,” 350.

terrors — students are well served in finding their own integrative pilgrimage.<sup>29</sup>

The relational attachment that students, both graduate and undergraduate, have with their mentors is the most effective way they learn integration. Professors are often the mentors who personally model that integration for students. Elizabeth Hall and her colleagues

identified five traits that are significant to the process of integration: self-revealing, caring, welcoming, dedicated, and open-minded.<sup>30</sup> *Self-revealing* refers to the transparent and humble nature with which professors describe their personal, professional, and spiritual knowledge and experiences. *Caring* reflects the personal involvement of a professor in students' lives outside the classroom. *Welcoming* involves opportunities for discussion and ongoing conversations about topics of interest, which form a large part of the integration of faith and learning. *Dedicated* refers to the faculty member's passion, heartfelt desire for, and belief in what he or she is doing and communicating through the integration of faith and learning. *Open-minded* means fostering a climate in which students can mutually share thoughts and opinions, recognize differences, and wrestle with integrative issues.<sup>31</sup> These relational processes reflect the value of Spirit-filled, Christ-like lives and the significant influence such professors can have on their students.

“[They] identified five traits that are significant in the process of integration...”

Discussions about integrating faith and learning are often unscripted and spring from a lifestyle that models a biblical worldview, a life of godly character and integrity. As such, integration exercises may not be a part of every class session, since it takes time to build an infrastructure of discernment, understanding, and transparency. To exhibit your passion for and dedication to integrating faith and learning in the classroom, you can bring new ideas, engaging questions, and challenging scenarios to a conversation and can demonstrate how various concepts fit together. Start with a concept with which the students are familiar and then introduce them to a fact they have yet to learn. Encourage students to think outside the box, which fosters critical thinking, and explain why you chose that approach.

The importance of being present and conversant with students cannot be overemphasized, even in a course that at the outset may not seem to be inclined toward

---

<sup>29</sup> R. Staton, Randall L. Sorenson, and H. Vande Kemp, “How Students Learn Integration: Replication of the Sorenson (1997a) Model,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26 (Winter 1998): 348.

<sup>30</sup> M. Elizabeth Hall, et al., “The Other Side of the Podium: Student Perspectives on Learning Integration,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 1 (2009): 17.

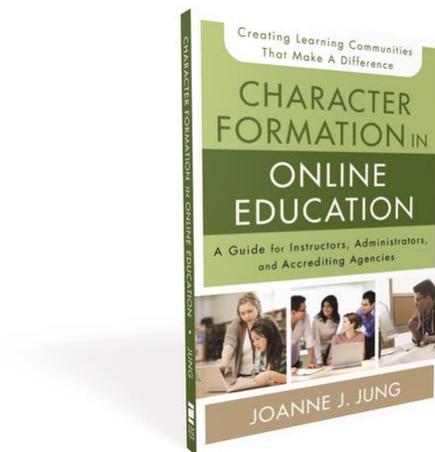
<sup>31</sup> Hall, “Other Side of the Podium,” 19.

the integration of faith and learning. Even a statistics course can be shown as a function of God's creation, but the professor is the key to integration. One student in an online statistics course reflected on her experience of unreturned emails and unanswered phone calls to the professor. The student avowed that she would have felt less like a faceless, nameless number if the professor had made even a minimal effort to respond to her inquiries. With the communication features of most LMSs — discussion threads, collaborations, video conferences, written or media comments on graded assignments, and of course, announcements, emails, and audiovisual comments — professors have no excuse for not being present in online courses.

Professors have a tremendous opportunity to awaken and inspire faith in their students. They have been given the noble responsibility of equipping students with knowledge, and that knowledge is not merely intellectual but is also knowledge of how to live. It is imperative that professors recognize and stalwartly accept the remarkable task of integrating faith and learning.

Adapted from

[Character Formation in Online Education: A Guide for Instructors, Administrators, and Accrediting Agencies](#)



## NEW Online Courses from Zondervan

Zondervan Academic now offers a growing line of online courses for use in both residential and online programs.

- **Get the best scholarship for your classroom.** Your students will get content from leading biblical scholars, produced by the academic team at Zondervan.
- **Help your students learn.** They'll experience rich media and engaging lectures—all crafted by expert instructional designers to create an optimal learning experience for your class.
- **Stay on top of what's happening.** Don't wait for the end of the semester. Now you can track and analyze student performance in real time as they're learning.
- **Make it work for your school.** Integrate into your school's existing online offerings, use in a blended learning environment, or start a brand new program.

Online Courses from Zondervan are free to try—and it's easy to get started.

[Learn More](#)