

Undergrad Values

The university experience is the first “adult” experience for many students who are standing at a crossroads looking back on childhood and looking forward to great success and importance. For some, the opportunity to live a life independent from their home life brings great excitement and anticipation, while others may feel uneasy about setting out on their own.

Regardless of their attitude toward their new situation, the values of a 17- or 18-year-old high school graduate are not fully developed, and the next four years are a critical time in their lives. Today’s young adults are vulnerable to a multitude of outside influences that can tempt them to go off course, adding to the challenges they face in making sound choices and decisions that will impact them for a lifetime.

For students whose moral compass is not fully developed, a private, Christian higher-education experience can help chart them on the right professional and spiritual course. Christian institutions offer smaller classes and more personal academic direction, as well as greater opportunities to grow spiritually.

Unlike public state institutions, a Christian university allows students and faculty to examine their individual worldview and how that worldview will influence their role as a professional. For instance, how will the student’s Christian belief system influence his future in the nursing, business or education profession?

Certainly it would be naive to think this environment alone shields students from the many pressures and choices they face every day. However, private institutions with a reputation for integrating traditional values into their programs are gaining ground because they prepare students for life in ways that public and private secular institutions do not.

Christian colleges and universities provide students with a much-needed foundation that guides them when, not if, they are exposed to tempting situations. Many of their programs include an emphasis on servant leadership, which infuses ethics and a focus on others into the educational process, preparing our future leaders to face even greater challenges ahead.

Throughout my university career, I have encountered students who crave guidance, counsel and security—the type of guidance they may have sought from their parents and church leaders when they were younger. They are not insecure, but they seek affirmation of their values, belief systems, and decisions from individuals whom they respect and see each day in a campus setting.

In a private Christian institution, we are able to provide this affirmation. We are also able to instill values and goals that do not destroy students' personal dreams but rather capture them and cast them in the light of how they will help these young adults to be of service to others and contribute to the greater good. We offer a safer, smaller atmosphere in which students are not afraid to explore and speak about what they are learning and in which they become prepared to challenge ideas and opinions contrary to what they have been taught.

Essentially, we become agents of transformation in students' lives. Through their educational experiences students learn to discern between wisdom and foolishness in what they hear. It is where their religious beliefs are formalized.

With the right guidance, students have opportunities to grow and mature during this process, developing their thinking skills, learning skills, listening skills, understanding of others and love of God. As graduating students, they should have acquired a sense of values that were developed, tested and confirmed during their undergraduate study. The perspective they gain gives them opportunities to assess their

personal and professional values, beliefs and decisions, and their impact on the world.

Today's college graduates need to be prepared to approach decisions with critical thought, integrity and the knowledge that they are leaders, knowingly or unintentionally, and that their leadership is important. Attending a Christian college or university helps them understand their value to the world and to God's kingdom—and provides them with the motivation to pursue all that God has for them to be and do.

Kathy Player, Ed.D., *is the president of Grand Canyon University in Phoenix.*