

## Integration of Faith and Learning at Sterling College

The expectation that teaching will include the integration of faith and learning stems from the mission of Sterling College, specifically that part of the mission which speaks to students “understanding a maturing Christian faith.” If we truly believe that “all truth is God’s truth” and that we are to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls, and *minds*, then we will be modeling the development of an integrated faith, one that encompasses all we do, including our academic work.

### *What integration is not*

There are a number of ways to model and share our faith with our students. All of these are important, valid, and, in some cases, essential. However, most of these do not qualify as integration of faith and *learning*. Specifically, devotions at the beginning of class, Christian lifestyle, personal sharing of one’s faith journey with students, demonstration of concern for students, and similar behaviors, while crucial to our witness (and expected of all of us!) are *not* integration.

### *What integration is*

Integration of faith and learning is a cognitive process, a scholarly undertaking, in which one seeks the contact points between the fundamental paradigms of one’s discipline and one’s faith commitments. Integration is a two-dimensional process: our intellectual commitments influence our faith, and our faith commitments shape our disciplinary work.

Our understanding of the faith is deepened as we apply the insights of our disciplines to God’s word and world. It is essential to model this aspect, lest we send out graduates who have grown intellectually in every area *except* faith, and leave with a child’s Sunday school faith too fragile to stand up to a hostile world. St. Paul writes, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” (I Cor 13: 11, NRSV) We are enjoined, in our thinking, to be mature; we need to teach and model this.

Our understanding of our discipline, at its deepest levels, should be informed by our faith commitments. Depending on the discipline, this may take several forms, including (but not limited) to:

- Ethical implications of a given knowledge base
- Philosophical implications of given concepts
- Making explicit the values implicit in various products of culture
- Analysis of the values underlying particular feelings and relation of those values to Christian faith commitments

### *Evidencing integration of faith and learning*

Integration of faith and learning is an aspect of excellent teaching that must be addressed as part of the faculty portfolio for promotion and focused review. If integration is a process, how can it be addressed in the production of a portfolio? The following list is not exhaustive, but is intended to get you started:

- Self-evaluation (as part of essay)
  - What do I see as the essential integration points of my discipline?
  - How do I incorporate those in my teaching? (specific in-class discussion, assignments,...)

- Syllabi
  - Part of statement of objectives
  - Specific lecture topics
  - Specific assignments
- Class artifacts
  - Assignments
  - Service projects
  - Student reflections

### *Conclusion*

Integration of faith and learning is a process, not a product. As we continue to grow, both in faith and in knowledge, we should think increasingly deeply about how our intellectual disciplinary commitments and faith commitments interact. There is not intended to be a quantitative measure of integration, nor a prescribed manner of integration. However, we do need to hold one another accountable to continued growth and development in this area, and to increase sharing our discoveries with each other and with our students.