

Ruth D. Lasseter

Abstract Title: The Role of the Shadow Curriculum in Achieving the *Pax Academica*

The existence of “shadow curriculum” in every institution is a well-known, but often undeclared, reality of college life. In many Catholic colleges and universities, the shadow curriculum works against the professed Catholic intentions of the classroom and academic life of the school.

Definition: A shadow curriculum is unstated expectations, either positive or negative, consisting of intellectual, cultural, social, and religious influences that shape the assumptions about thinking and the foundational behavior of student life in all areas.

A consideration of the nature of an institution’s shadow curriculum, and an effort to bring it into conformity with the purposes and mission of the institution, is essential to accomplishing the goals of a Catholic college or university. In this presentation, I will present several means by which a healthy shadow curriculum can be developed.

In choosing a college with their adult children, parents should ask three questions of any institution, and university authorities should seriously take these concerns into account:

- What influences are permitted and encouraged on campus?
- What sort of living environment awaits incoming freshmen?
- What is the character and quality of adult citizens that this institution produces?

These questions define the shadow curriculum our students will meet and determine the adults they will become. These concerns are, in the long run, more important than “Is it affordable?”

Concerns to be addressed: How can a Catholic institution achieve a Catholic shadow curriculum so that orderliness, not chaos, has priority? Without heavy burdens of unnecessary “parietals” is there a way to change the shadow curriculum on a Catholic campus that has been allowed to devolve away from Catholic norms and practices?

Suggestions for creating a Catholic shadow curriculum that will foster responsibility, respectful freedom, pro-life activities, intellectual motivation, safety, chastity and modesty:

1. Establish clear expectations and norms for behavior on campus and in dormitories.
2. Plan structured activities in the areas of pro-life witness, community work, and work with the poor.
3. Structure social events -- game and movie nights, dorm dinners and discussion activities.
4. Set reasonable curfew and dorm-rules -- limiting entertainment to public areas, discouraging open room visitation, and prohibiting over-night visits.
5. Establish student-run “chapters,” where dorm life problems are open for discussion and debate. (As some students will inevitably protest any restraints or limitations, dorm advisers or chaplains must be aware of both student rational objections and Catholic moral teaching in answer.)
6. Set daily periods of dorm quiet and study time.
7. Institute regular dorm religious activities and teaching/discussion occasions: regular opportunities for confession by clergy, and spiritual guidance or counseling by Catholic religious authorities are essential.

Our world today is terrified with unrest and moral confusion. Now more than ever, our next generation needs the *Pax Academica* that only an effective “shadow curriculum” can support.