

2026 Presidents Institute

A Deeper Purpose



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The Council of Independent Colleges

Mission-Aligned Institutional Resilience

Presented by

Jeff Arnold, Donna Carroll, Tammy Gieselman,
Andrea Luxton, and Lamont Wells

Presenters

- **Jeff Arnold**, Executive Director, Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities, Moderator
- **Donna Carroll**, President, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
- **Tammy Gieselman**, Director of Education, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church
- **Andrea Luxton**, Associate Director of Higher Education, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists
- **Lamont Wells**, Executive Director, Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities

Donna Carroll

President, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities



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Leadership Resilience:

Sense of Purpose

Sense of Optimism

Sense of Control

Sense of Belonging



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Institutional Resilience:

Shared Sense of Purpose

Shared Sense of Optimism

Shared Sense of Control

Shared Sense of Belonging



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



Characteristics of a Catholic Institution:

- A welcoming disposition/culture of care
- An expansive and enduring intellectual tradition
- A focus on human flourishing
- A commitment to community and the common good
- The integration of intellectual and spiritual life



Resilience Building Strategies:

Hire for Mission

Turn Purpose into Story

Fall Forward/Learn from Crucible Moments

Caveat: Resilience vs. Adrenaline



“We should be alive with a joy that intrigues people. Then they will want to know what our secret is.”

- Timothy Radcliffe, OP

Tammy Gieselman

Director of Education
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
United Methodist Church



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John Wesley
Founder of the Methodist Movement

Resiliency and the United Methodist Ethos

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

- Attributed to John Wesley



HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Virtues of United Methodist-Related Education

Education is not ultimately about training people to be clever or successful, but about discovering what it means to be the full human beings God intended us to be.

Methodism grew out of a “whole person” approach to spiritual growth and religious practice. It was built on a foundation of service and social justice, care and compassion for all.

The world is my parish.
- John Wesley



Andrea Luxton

Associate Director of Higher Education
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

Pepperdine University Study

- Informed Skills Education (RISE) program developed to equip students with resilience skills.
- Curriculum focuses on six dimensions: physical, social, cognitive, spiritual, service, and life skills.
- 91% reported learned resilience skills
- 86% applied resilience skills
- 74% shared resilience skills
- Individual responses spoke positively to each dimension (physical, social, cognitive, spiritual, service, and life skills).

AACU 2024 Prospective Student/Parent Survey

Critical Strengths Identified:

- Whole-person development
- Shared faith values
- Engaged faculty
- Christ-centered learning (faith integration)
- Also: Lifelong friends

Survey Results:

AACU Grads	Non-AACU Grads
66%	45%
70%	17%
82%	50%
63%	30%

Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Study

- Studied religious participation, subjective happiness, and purpose in life (over a 20-year period) as predictors of resilience among students who reported trauma or adversity
- Andrews requires religion courses and some chapel experiences, expects integration of faith and biblical perspectives, and provides opportunities to engage in service and faith-related activities.
- Religious participation was a significant predictor of psychological resilience, which increased if it involved structured religious participation, offering social support and a sense of meaning
- Resilience development in college students, which at best requires spiritual, social-emotional, and purposeful goal setting, can be strongly supported by “religious engagement and positive affect.”

Lamont Wells

Executive Director
Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities



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Rooted and Open for Such a Time as This

Why This Moment Matters

- Employers want skills AND character
- Students seek meaning, not just credentials
- Democracy & workplaces suffer from moral thinness
- Belonging and wellness are now core success indicators



Moral Imagination as Workforce Readiness

- Capacity to envision ethical alternatives
- Builds empathy, discernment, and judgment
- Prepares graduates for complexity
- A mission-rooted competency



Vocation as a Value Proposition

- From careerism to calling
- Discernment of gifts and purpose
- Identity anchored in community impact
- Asking: Who are you becoming?

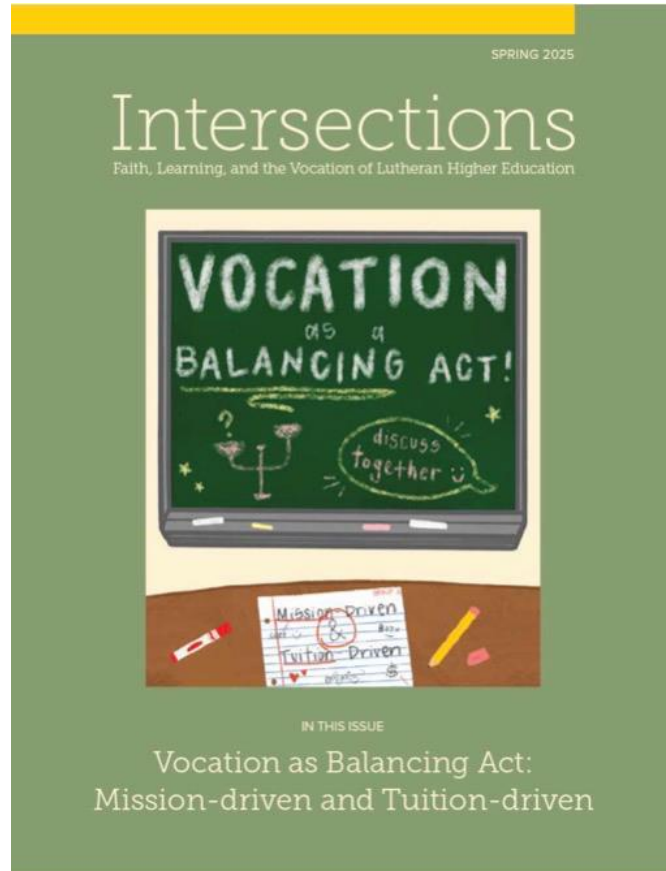


The Whole-Student Advantage

- Education of mind, body, and spirit
- Integrated spiritual care and mentoring
- Communal values counter isolation
- Formation over transaction



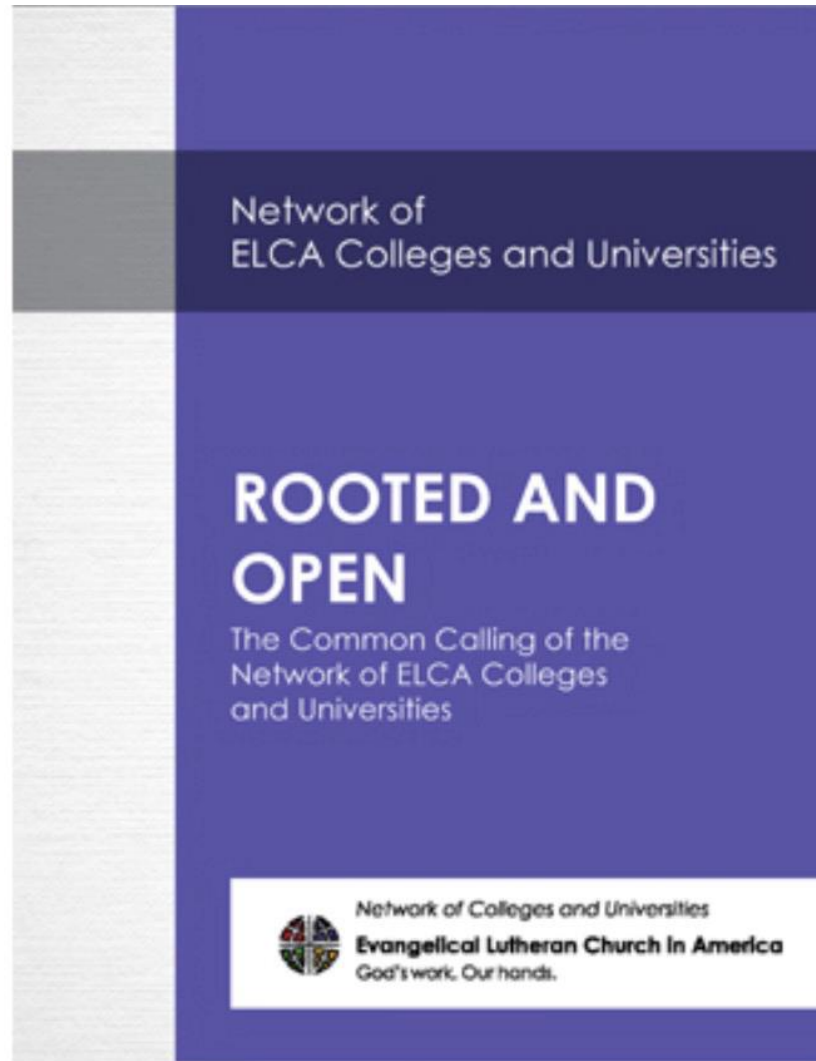
A Distinctive Ecosystem of Care



- Deep alignment with equity and belonging
- Hospitality as institutional practice
- Especially impactful for first-gen and racially minoritized students

Rooted and Open: A Third Way

- Neither sectarian nor secular
- Rooted in Lutheran tradition
- Open to pluralism and dialogue
- Moral imagination as public witness



Why Faith Affiliated Institutions Matter Now

- Moral imagination for leadership
- Vocation as workforce readiness
- Belonging as mission
- Lutheran higher education as a gift to the future



Q&A



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Thank you for attending this session!



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