

Chapter 12

A Million Ghosts: West Point's Long Line of Moral Development and Character Education

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ABSTRACT

On the surface, West Point's long line of cadet moral development may not seem obvious. Perhaps notable alumni, its history in educating engineers, or maybe even its architecture are commonly thought of first. However, upon closer examination and consideration of the Academy's dynamic curricular and extracurricular structure we find, throughout its history, that the moral and character education and development of its cadets is the foundation upon which engineers are taught and buildings are constructed.

BACKGROUND

As an institution, West Point is an exemplary model in the promotion of moral and character development. According to The Templeton Guide to Colleges that Encourage Character Development (2003), West Point successfully incorporates coursework intended to, among other things, “develop individual moral awareness, the ability to apply ethical considerations in decision-

making, and the skill to promote ethical conduct within organizations” (p. 360). Furthermore, the Academy has become one of the 100 American institutions of higher education who “exhibit a strong and inspiring campus-wide ethos that articulates the expectations of personal and civic responsibility in all dimensions of college life” (Templeton, 2003, p. 279). Through the multifaceted Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS) West Point incorporates academic, physical, and military leader training which serve to embed a cadet in the venerable honor code, “A cadet will

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not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do” (Finnegan, 1998).

Though what do West Point and moral development have to teach us about institutional research? It can surely seem nebulous to consider undergraduate student moral development and character education as a means of assessing institutional effectiveness. It will help though to begin with a good definition of what the moral in moral development means. Christian Smith (2009) succinctly summarizes this point:

[Morality] is an orientation toward understandings about what is right and wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, just and unjust, that are not established by our worn actual desires, decisions, or preferences but instead believed to exist apart from them, providing standards by which our desires, decisions, and preferences can themselves be judged. Human animals are moral animals in that we possess a capacity and propensity unique among all animals: we not only have desires, beliefs, and feelings (which often have strong moral qualities) but also the ability and disposition to form strong evaluations about our desires, beliefs, and feelings that hold the potential to transform them (pp. 8-9).

Although much less obvious than, say, revenue projections, financial analyses, or information systems and data management, moral education can be a valuable component in supplementing not only institutional research, but also its effectiveness. Therefore, it is in the best interest for institutional researchers and administrators to give meaningful consideration to variables like moral development and character education.

By way of metaphor, let’s quickly consider how valuable St. Louis Cardinals’ first baseman, Albert Pujols is to the team’s success. Since his rookie season in 2001, Pujols has been selected by both fans and players as a National League (NL) All-Star nine of the last ten seasons, won three NL Most Valuable Player Awards, won

five NL Silver Slugger Awards which are given each year to the top offensive performer by position, and not to mention being 2008 winner of the Roberto Clemente Award given to the player who most resoundingly embodies the virtues of community service and helping others (Sports-Reference LLC, 2010).

Aside from the obvious and more notable individual awards, Pujols’ annual offensive production and defensive protection rank him first among all active players in Major League Baseball (MLB) in such obscure, scientifically based statistics like offensive win percentage (OW%). What this means is if the Cardinals had nine Albert Pujols’ instead of one they would actually win eight out of every ten games played (Sports-Reference LLC, 2010). Considering there are 162 games in each team’s season, the Cardinals would win 130 of those 162. In 2006, the last year the Cardinals won the World Series, they won, what seems like a meager, 83 games. Another is the wins above replacement player (WAR) statistic which demonstrates the number of additional wins the team can achieve in any particular season by having a given starter in the game. In 2010 the Cardinals won seven additional games they theoretically would have lost by not having Pujols in the lineup (Sports-Reference LLC, 2010). Those seven games rank him as the league’s best.

Obscure statistics like the ones listed above are not intended to take the place of standards like batting average, slugging percentage, or fielding percentage. Instead, they have been developed to simply offer a different perspective and the possibility of discovering hidden value. The same goes for considering student moral development in institutional effectiveness. Since institutional research and assessment are here to stay, what else is there? What else can we do in order to enhance the lives and education of students by digging deeper and looking closer at what we find? By emphasizing the moral and character education of students, colleges and universities should indeed see a return on their investment. It may be neither

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