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Case for Christian Higher Education: Two-Year Technical Programs, Too

Abstract

"The importance of today's professional-technical vocations is critical to the collective work for Christ in today's world. People serving in these fields are truly at the front lines, responding to God's word with their hearts, minds, and hands."

Posting about the need for Christian technical training from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-case-for-christian-higher-education-two-year-technical-programs-too/>

Keywords

In All Things, vocation, Christian education, technical education

Disciplines

Christianity | Higher Education

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

The Case for Christian Higher Education: Two-Year Technical Programs, Too

 [inallthings.org/the-case-for-christian-higher-education-two-year-technical-programs-too/](https://allthings.org/the-case-for-christian-higher-education-two-year-technical-programs-too/)

October 27, 2016

Joel Sikkema

As servants of the Lord, we are called to work for His kingdom. At our core, we seek to follow scripture's command to love God above all, and our neighbors as ourselves. Within this body of believers, we have each been given different gifts. As a result, we live out these commands in a host of ways such as: sharing Christ's word, working to ease suffering caused by sin, and exercising a dominion that develops and conserves the Lord's creation. Within this diversity of callings, there is unity as each one of us seeks to shine Christ's light in this world.

Christian education has long held an important role in equipping citizens of Christ's kingdom for this work. Opportunities for such learning occur across many educational levels (preschool to doctoral) and subjects (theology, humanities, sciences, and professional callings). However, the continuum of Christian education is not without gaps, noticeably in associate's-level/two-year technical degrees.

In and of itself, the fact that Christ is Lord over all is justification enough to expand Christian college education to this area. This justification is not new; it has and will continue to exist. However, a combination of workforce needs and changes in industry have brought an urgency that should compel the body of believers to act fill this hole in Christian education. Addressing this need will not be without challenges; and, as we act outwardly, we need to look inside as well to realign ourselves with a scriptural understanding of vocation that sheds misconceptions brought on in our culture.

A two-year technical degree places people on a pathway to family-sustaining careers that are (and will continue to be) in demand. In fact, the [National Skills Coalition](#) reported that careers requiring training beyond high school—but not requiring a bachelor's degree—currently make up 54% of all positions in the United States and these careers will represent 49% of job openings through the year 2022. This “skills gap” continues to be a topic of local and national reports.¹ The career opportunities are diverse, for example: computer/network support specialists, advanced manufacturing technicians, and respiratory therapists. Even with increasing levels of automation, careers prospects are projected to remain strong because the careers themselves have become increasingly well-rounded. We used to hear the phrase, “work smart, not hard” from parents and teachers. It was a way to encourage children to strive for professional careers. The careers that arise from today's associate's degrees can more accurately be characterized as *work smart and hard*. Certainly, these careers require hands-on technical skills, but they also require a person's hands to work in sync with their heart and mind by applying skills in teamwork, communication, and problem solving. These careers are truly vocations that draw on the fullness of what it means to be a human in God's world. Framed in this way, a welder's hands join metals, her mind interprets and modifies plans to respond to her neighbors' needs, and his heart seeks to ensure that what he creates keeps those who use it safe, all without wasting God's finite resources.

To act on this Christian education need and opportunity requires that we look inward and reclaim the nobility of serving in technical *and professional* callings. Greek philosophy viewed thinking as much more valuable than doing. This philosophy still permeates our culture today. Young men and women tend to aspire to be teachers, accountants, business owners, and scientists. Fewer aspire to work in skilled fields: caring for the animals that provide the food we eat or building the vehicles we ride in every day. A [biblical understanding of vocation](#) does not separate knowing and doing. Rather, “knowing is a form of doing” and both of these together are “one continuous and integrated obedient response to what we hear to be the Word of the Lord.” Careers in professional-technical fields give people the opportunity to respond to what they *know* of His redemptive work in what they *do*. Rather than separating theory and practice, this service is an interplay of practical applications informed by a broad

understanding of how their vocation impacts (and is impacted by) other parts of the world.

The implications of filling this gap in Christian education cannot be understated. Various parts of creation cannot be isolated or cut off from the greater whole. Rather all of creation is interconnected—and believers need to be at work, shining Christ's light in all of creation. If we, as followers of Christ, abdicate our responsibility to engage all of life, then parts of creation suffer and as a result all of creation suffers. The importance of today's professional-technical vocations is critical to the collective work for Christ in today's world. People serving in these fields are truly at the front lines, responding to God's word with their hearts, minds, and hands. In this response they impact people and impact the creation. This impact does not cease when the work is done. In the act of doing things with their hands, they imbed their values into the things you and I use and consume every day: homes, cars, phones, food. These values must reflect the norms God calls his people to live by.

Footnotes

1. e.g., [Harvard Business School](#), [USA Today](#), [Iowa Workforce Development](#) ↩