

Faith Integration in the Academy Conference

Friday, August 7, 2026

Note: All times listed below are in Pacific Daylight Time

Time	Topic
8:00-8:15 a.m.	<u>Welcome & Introductions</u>
8:15 - 9:10 a.m.	<u>Keynote</u>
9:15 - 10:10 a.m.	<u>Breakout Session 1</u>
10:15 - 10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30 - 11:25 a.m.	<u>Breakout Session 2</u>
11:30 - 12:25 p.m.	<u>Breakout Session 3</u>
12:30 - 12:45 p.m.	Break
12:45 p.m. - 1:40 p.m.	<u>Breakout Session 4</u>
1:45 p.m. - 2:40 p.m.	<u>Breakout Session 5</u>
2:45 - 3:00 p.m.	<u>Closing Session</u>

Opening Session

Location: [Faith Integration in the Academy Main Meeting Room](#)

Keynote Session

Intellectual Discipleship: How Wise Faculty and Higher Ed Administrators Cultivate Authentic Academic Faith Integration

Dr. Paul Kaak, Senior Consultant and Lead Trainer

TheoMetrics

Location: [Faith Integration in the Academy Main Meeting Room](#)

Paul Kaak is Senior Consultant and Lead Trainer at TheoMetrics, an organization dedicated to advancing Academic Faith Integration (AFI) through high-quality faculty development resources, keynote speaking, and multi-year consulting partnerships with Christian colleges and universities across North America. Dr. Kaak previously taught in the Honors College and served as Executive Director of Faith Integration within the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment of Azusa Pacific University, where he led dozens of annual faculty workshops, coached hundreds of professors, and worked alongside key university leaders to strengthen the institution's philosophical and practical commitment to AFI, while also serving as Faith Integration Section Editor for *Christian Higher Education: An International Journal of Research, Theory, and Practice*. Prior to his career in higher education, Dr. Kaak ministered to emerging adults as Lead Teaching Pastor and Director of Equipping at New Song Church in San Dimas, California. He holds a B.A. in Speech Communication, an M.Div., and a Ph.D. in Leadership. In his spare time Paul teaches regenerative gardening classes to older adults at Mt. San Antonio Community College and volunteers at The Farm at the LA County Fairgrounds where his wife, Kieva, is the Farm Manager. Paul and Kieva have two adult sons.

Breakout 1 Sessions

Rethinking Social Work Student Codes of Conduct So We Can Think Christianly

Russ Bermejo, Associate Professor; Antonio Mejico, Jr., Ed.D, Associate Dean of Division of SW;

Miranda Sparkman, MSW, CBU Alumni

California Baptist University

[FIA Conference Room A](#)

The purpose of higher Christian education is to help students “think Christianly.” Phrased by Dockery (2008), helping students “think Christianly” helps advance the unique and distinctive mission of Christian education. Yet many higher education campuses that were initially established as Christian institutions have moved away from or totally abandoned their heritage. According to Dockery, to think Christianly, we will need “a more fully formed theologically shaped vision for our work” that guides how we think, believe, act, teach, and prepare students. Student codes of conduct are an ideal place to start when examining the extent of Christian thinking Christianly within a university. This session will explore the rationale for a theologically shaped vision for using the supremacy of Christ as a foundation for revising a social work student code of conduct at a Christian university. Drawing from arguably some of the greatest Christ-exalting passages found in Scripture, particularly Colossians 1, the revisions aimed to inspire and motivate students to adopt Christ as Lord of all aspects of their lives. The session will also highlight the importance and opportunities to create a learning environment that is bound together by a culture of care and covenant (vs. contracts). The session will also identify other opportunities for social work educators to tether other aspects of their program to an exalted Christ.

Building Ethical Voice: The Impact of Lego Serious Play on Students’ Expression of Christian Business Ethics

Dr. Todd Pheifer, Associate Professor / Assistant Dean: School of Business and Management; Dr.

LaShan Epperson, Assistant Professor, School of Business and Management,

Azusa Pacific University

[FIA Conference Room B](#)

To determine whether the Lego Serious Play methodology could contribute to a business ethics course’s learning outcomes at a Christian university, an intervention was designed to help undergraduate students gain experience in expressing a Christian perspective on business ethics. Pretest versus posttest results revealed that the intervention significantly increased students’ experience in discussing Christian ethics. The results suggest that the Lego Serious Play methodology can be an effective tool for providing students in Christian universities with experience in expressing a Christian perspective on business ethics and can potentially contribute to other learning outcomes.

Measuring the Impact of AFI through the Kingdom Professional Model

Dr. Dretona Maddox, Assistant Professor; Dr. Maritza Bojorquez, Assistant Professor; Dr. Erica McIntosh, Assistant Professor, California Baptist University

[FIA Conference Room C](#)

This presentation explores the use of the Kingdom Professional Model (Jacobs & White, 2022) to assess evidence of academic faith integration in student reflection journals. Researchers analyzed journal responses from the same students across two semesters to determine the extent to which the model’s components were reflected in students’ written reflections. Findings provided insight into student development over time and the potential impact of intentional faith integration efforts.

Breakout 2 Sessions

Examining Faith Integration in Occupational Therapy Education

Tina Kraft, PhD Candidate, COTA/L; D. Scott Wengerd, D.Min, MOT, OTR/L, Academic Fieldwork Coordinator

Debra J. Hansen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

LT. Anjoli E. R. Cero, PhD, OTR/L

Liberty University

[FIA Conference Room A](#)

The results of a preliminary mixed-methods research study examining the emergent topic of faith integration in Occupational Therapy Graduate Programs in CCCU institutions will be discussed. Quantitative data regarding readiness for and beliefs, knowledge, and current practices of faith integration among faculty will be analyzed first, followed by an exploration of open-ended survey responses regarding actual faculty perceptions and practices. Themes from a follow-up focus group will provide further insight into these perceptions and experiences. Implications for occupational therapy education as well as interdisciplinary and institutional supports will be proposed with audience input solicited.

Faith Integration at the Edge of Chaos

Paul Gratton, Associate Professor of Business

Montreat College

[FIA Conference Room B](#)

Our world is increasingly full of “wicked problems”—ambiguous, dynamic, interdependent, chaotic challenges which are resistant to simple, rule-based solutions. How can we develop students who can walk in confident faith with God, even in a world filled with uncertainty?

This session presents practical frameworks for integrating biblical theology and Christian tradition with concepts from complexity theory. The goal of this framework is to cultivate antifragile learners who consider it pure joy when they face complex trials of many kinds, for the testing of their faith produces perseverance.

Student Perceptions of Faith Integration Practices

Dr. Yakiciwey Mitchell, Assistant Professor

California Baptist University College of Behavioral and Social Sciences Division of Social Work

[FIA Conference Room C](#)

Analysis of 10 semesters of narrative student feedback on faith integration within Dr. Mitchell's courses. The presentation includes examination of course type, undergraduate and graduate responses, student numeric ratings, response rates, and the number of comments referencing faith integration within the courses. This early-stage research project examines how students perceive the integration of scripture and prayer into every course session.

Breakout 3 Sessions

Growing as Learners and Researchers: How Multi-Year Undergraduate Research Participation Shapes Proficiency and Character Building

Sophia Mun, Associated Professor in Behavioral Science; Kenneth Nehrbass, Assistant Professor; Director of Assessment / Carol Minton-Ryan, Professor - Sociology • College of Behavioral and Social Sciences

California Baptist University

[FIA Conference Room A](#)

Undergraduate Research (UR) promotes academic development, yet less is known about how sustained engagement shapes research proficiency and character. This mixed-methods study compared novice (n = 84) and experienced (n = 94) undergraduate researchers in a four-course Research Methods Sequence at a private California university during 2023–24. Experienced researchers reported significantly higher gains across all research proficiency domains and stronger character growth, especially in humility, courage, industriousness, responsibility, and tolerance for obstacles. Findings suggest sustained UR participation enhances both research competencies and character development.

Navigating Disciplinary Diversity in Dean-Led Faith Integration Reviews

Jill Swisher, Dean of Graduate Studies

Northwestern College (Iowa)

[FIA Conference Room C](#)

While many institutions assess faith integration as a learning outcome, the administrative evaluation of a faculty member's ability to integrate faith remains an ambiguous task for deans. This session explores the dean's perspective on reviewing faculty performance in faith integration, specifically focusing on the tension between institutional standards and disciplinary identity. As a dean, the challenge lies in evaluating whether integration is effective and appropriate when the manifestations vary between disciplines. This presentation interrogates the criteria for acceptable integration.

Breakout 4 Sessions

Faith in Motion: Teaching Theological Scholarship and Faith-Based Action in Social Work

Krystal Hays, Associate Professor; Dr. Antonio Mejico, Associate Dean; Dr. Ken Nehrbass, Assistant Professor

California Baptist University, Division of Social Work

[FIA Conference Room A](#)

Doctor of Social Work (DSW) students routinely engage complex social problems such as homelessness, serious mental illness, and child abuse, yet many lack a cohesive theological framework to guide faithful practice. This workshop presents a curricular model that integrates theology, theory, and social action. Participants will be introduced to the Community Engagement and Social Innovation (CESI) Model, an eight-phase, biblically informed practice framework embedded within a faith-based DSW program. The session highlights a doctoral course emphasizing historical and contemporary social movements, theological analysis, and sociological inquiry, demonstrating how students develop integrative, faith-rooted responses to social problems.

Transformative Care: Challenging Educational Practices for Meaningful Change

Tyler Watts, Assistant Professor of Education; Brita Beitler, Assistant Professor of Education, Wheaton College; Neil Cantrall, Assistant Professor of Education, George Fox University; Amy Flagler, Assistant Professor of Education, Montreat College; Jenn Kritsch, Associate Dean of Instructional Innovation, Partnerships, and Communications, Point Loma Nazarene University; Carrie Wall, Professor of Teacher Education, Pepperdine University

Mercer University

[FIA Conference Room B](#)

Transformative care is a concept that seeks to extend care as a disruptive force, challenging the status quo and offering a new way forward. Our panel will explore how transformative care connects to their Christian faith and helps communicate the Gospel in ways that impact students' lives. The session will allow panelists to share how care is exercised in their classrooms, how it relates to their faith integration practices, and ways you can employ transformative care in your own classroom practices.

Building on the Pillars of Growth: Using a Business Case Study to Facilitate Faith Integration in the Classroom

Robert MacDonald, Professor of Business Administration; Deney Taylor, Assistant Professor of Business Administration

Crandall University

[FIA Conference Room C](#)

The business case study "Building on the Pillars of Growth: Fredericton Christian Academy's Vision for Expansion" explores a decision being faced by a Christian K-12 school. FCA has experienced significant enrolment growth, and leadership must choose between three capital-intensive alternatives, each of which carries distinct pros and cons.

In this presentation, the authors will demonstrate how a strategic business decision can be a venue for rich classroom discussion regarding how faith can inform and infuse the process. This will entail an exploration of three distinct areas of focus. First, both stakeholder and risk analysis will be discussed, contrasting secular perspectives with an integrative position that invites students not to ignore conventional methods, but rather to consider them in light of God's desires for growing organizations. This will involve a consideration of stakeholders as possessing more than simply an instrumental purpose, and the assessment of risk as extension of the stewardship of divinely owned resources. Second, financial analysis will be discussed as a means of exercising stewardship and exemplifying cardinal and theological virtues. Finally, the ultimate decision being faced by the organization will be presented as an opportunity to explore the process of wise discernment, drawing upon conclusions from the prior discussions concerning stakeholders, risk, and financial feasibility.

Breakout 5 Sessions

Weaving Faith Throughout the Curriculum: Practical Strategies from the OBU MS-SLP Program

Carol Koch, Director of Curriculum/Professor; AnnMarie Knight, Program Director

Nancy Quick, Director of Student Success

Oklahoma Baptist University

[FIA Conference Room A](#)

Explore a comprehensive, practical model for integrating Christian faith across a graduate curriculum. This interactive workshop draws on the Faith Integration Plan developed by the OBU Speech-Language Pathology faculty. The plan offers strategies, activities, and resources for embedding faith into course content, learning experiences, and assessments that could be modified to other disciplines.

Grace to Fail: Care-Centered Instructional Design

Tyler Watts, Assistant Professor of Education; Tiffany Hokanson, Assistant Professor of Art and Design,

George Fox University

Mercer University

[FIA Conference Room B](#)

In this practical session, the presenters will offer insights into care practices that they employ in their courses that focus on learner growth through revision, process-based assessment, and failure as a necessary condition of growth. The presenters will connect these deliberate instructional design decisions to their faith and share how this allows them to connect to students' holistic needs, including spiritual growth. Practical examples will be shared along with space for participants to share their own care-based practices.

Teaching Truth, Beauty, and Virtue: A Return to Classical Pedagogy

Carly Hsiao, Graduate Writing Consultant

Fuller Theological Seminary

[FIA Conference Room C](#)

Historically, education has aimed to cultivate the whole person, focusing on the development of moral and spiritual formation alongside intellectual growth. While this vision has seen renewed interest within Christian education, many instructors struggle to translate the three transcendentals—truth, beauty, and virtue—into concrete classroom practice. How can educators intentionally design curriculum that develops not only knowledge, but also wisdom, character, and aesthetic appreciation?

This interactive workshop will offer an overview of classical pedagogy from a biblical perspective, with particular attention to the book of Philippians, and explore how these principles can be meaningfully applied in contemporary teaching. Participants will engage in guided discussion, developing strategies to incorporate truth, beauty, and virtue within their own disciplinary contexts. Active audience participation is encouraged.