

*JUNE 16, 2017*

*David A. Armstrong, J.D. is the 14<sup>th</sup> president of Thomas More College and during his tenure the college has witnessed its largest-ever incoming class; procured the largest gift in the College's fundraising history; expanded co-curricular and extra-curricular activities; and, has consistently been ranked number one for Return on Investment in the state of Kentucky.*

## **Catholic Colleges Provide Value—and Values—Students Won't Find Elsewhere**

Saint Thomas More, patron of the college where I serve as president, wrote that “One of the greatest problems of our time is that many are schooled but few are educated.” That statement applies to this day and age as well, with one notable exception. I would argue that no better educational opportunity exists for today's student than a liberal arts curriculum grounded in Catholic identity, dedicated to ethical values, and focused on career success.

Statistics favor this belief. In a 2006 study, Hardwick-Day, Inc. found that the alumni of Catholic colleges were almost twice as likely to graduate in four years and far more likely to credit their schools with helping them develop communication and leadership skills.

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Pope St. John Paul II wrote in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* that a Catholic university must incorporate the Church's mission into its own by promoting “the ardent search for truth.” To accomplish this goal at Thomas More College (TMC), we have designed a Strategic Plan with the purpose of helping our students Value More, Engage More, and Thrive More. By encouraging them to value the transcendent meaning in their education, engage the resources and people necessary to achieve academic success, and thrive by serving others, we aim for students to earn a return on their investment that we call C<sup>3</sup>—an experience that forms their *character*, readies them for a *career*, and integrates them into a *community*.

In recent years, TMC has taken concrete steps to fulfill this mission. We became the first college in the country to add a graduate and undergraduate degree in Ethical Leadership Studies to our

academic offerings. We founded a Catholic Business and Professionals Network to link our students with mentors in the business community. We established a competitive Ministry and Service Scholarship that is designated for Catholic students interested in furthering their involvement in ministry and service. We also expanded our faith-building activities to include praise and worship events, retreats, service trips, and speakers on topics such as defending Catholic values.

Most significantly, we established the Institute for Religious Liberty, which brings together thinkers from multiple faith communities in an annual dialogue concerning religious freedom as an inalienable right. This year we welcomed Joshua Charles, author of *Liberty's Secrets: The Lost Wisdom of America's Founders*, as the keynote speaker. Charles presents the compelling idea that our Founding Fathers believed the ingredients necessary for a self-governing people are virtue (faith-based morals) and knowledge derived from education. Today we can trace many of our society's deficiencies to its increasing secularism and indifference to the search for meaning. No kind of education is better equipped to confront this culture than one that honors the human person as a creation of God. For that reason, a Catholic college's ability both to inform students' minds and shape their characters is second to none.

Author Jeff Selingo has warned that in the near future, new mass delivery methods for online courses will cause a disruption in the world of higher education for which few colleges are prepared. However, Selingo also believes that "high-quality institutions" who can distinguish themselves from the crowd, will endure.

It is clear that for a college in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, survival means differentiation. Because Thomas More College practices faithful stewardship of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and makes the formation of our students' characters the center of our mission, I am convinced that we will see not just our centennial year in 2021, but our bicentennial year many decades from now.

I am pleased to announce that the Ruah Woods education center has invited me to speak on this topic at its annual luncheon at Kenwood Country Club on Thursday, June 22, which is appropriately the feast day of St. Thomas More. Please join me by registering at [www.ruahwoods.org](http://www.ruahwoods.org) or call [513-407-8672](tel:513-407-8672).