

# Creating a Tool for Measuring Faith Integration Outcomes in Student Products

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## Abstract

Academic faith integration literature has largely focused on the behaviors of course instructors. Less has been written on student behaviors and work products that demonstrate the integration of faith and learning (Lawrence et al., 2005). It follows that even less has been done to measure the quality of student work in faith integration assignments. To address that gap, this article uses theoretical literature to create rubric dimensions that allow professors to measure academic faith integration. The process described serves as a guide for the development of rubric dimensions of academic faith integration. Practical applications and research considerations are discussed.

*Keywords:* Faith integration; student outcomes; faith and learning, rubric

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## Introduction

Faith integration (FI) has largely been viewed, by both scholars and students, as the work of the course instructor rather than the students (Purper et al., 2023, Sherr et al., 2007). However, some scholars have called for instructors to refocus faith integration work on the students (Lawrence et al., 2005), engaging students in meaningful faith-related work in the classroom. A restructured definition of academic faith integration, proposed by Kaak (2016), provides a foundation from which to do that. One question that remains is how will instructors measure student outcomes in academic faith integration? This practical paper takes a step towards addressing that gap by using existing literature to create rubric dimensions for academic faith integration.

## Literature Review

### *Definition and Purpose of Academic Faith Integration*

One purpose of faith integration is to engage students in faith-based thinking and behavior while they study an academic field at an institution that is dedicated to Christian education. For example, FI happens when students develop a Christian view of the arts, or of biology, or economics, and so on (Dockery, 2012; Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Gangel, 2002; Marsden, 1998). On a broader level, these authors stress that students in Christian higher education should resist the unfettered relativism that is endemic to postmodernism and should instead look for timeless biblical truths that can be found in the various disciplines. Additionally, graduates from these institutions should not only be prepared for careers but should embody values such as justice, sacrifice, and anti-consumerism (Carpenter & Ships, 2019; Holmes, 1975).

Note that this focus on worldview content goes a step beyond the objective of faith formation, which also focuses on Christian belief and praxis (Maddix, et al.,

2020) but does not necessarily address the ways that the Christian worldview impacts the academic fields of study. In this sense, faith integration is seen by some professors and scholars as an intentional formation of the mind to hold to particular beliefs and practices. Others conceptualize faith integration as intentionally bringing together the academic discipline and the Christian faith.

Kaak conducts a systematic review of the various ways the term faith integration has been treated and then proposes the following definition, which sharpens the focus on relating faith to disciplinary concepts:

Academic faith integration is the work carried out by Christian faculty members when they meaningfully bring the scholarship of their discipline or professional practice and the scholarship representing insights and perspectives from Christian faith into dialogue with each other, applying that dialogue and its results to their research, the courses they teach, and their discipline-related products resulting in disciplinary perspectives that are uniquely informed by faith and/or faith perspectives that are uniquely informed by the discipline or profession (Kaak, 2016, p. 192).

Nehrbass (2024) furthers the distinction by providing categories for these two approaches (namely, faith formation and faith integration), which helped us sort the purposes and practices of faith development activities. Faith formation is the development, more broadly, of the students' Christian worldview and practices. Teaching students about the value of humility would be a faith formation practice. On the other hand, Academic Faith Integration (AFI), using Kaak's (2016) definition, focuses on the thoughtful consideration of the academic discipline and the faith-based perspectives together. Teaching students how the value of humility aligns with the practices of a social worker in a social work classroom would be an example of faith integration.

### **Measures of Faith Development**

Measures of faith integration tend to align either with faith formation or with faith integration—but do not tend to measure both. Several measures of faith

formation exist that provide models or instruments that can be used to determine how much students have changed in their faith formation and spiritual development, such as Baylor's scale for faith and character (Dougherty et al., 2022) and the Practicing Faith Survey (Cheng et al., 2022). Other studies have shown that faith formation activities change students' beliefs about the nature of knowing and learning (McCoy, 2021) and can even change the way students conduct themselves after they graduate and are operating in professional spaces (Loosemore, 2021). The findings from studies like these indicate that faith formation activities can have measurable effects on students' beliefs and practices.

Although faith formation measures are being utilized, fewer studies that measure AFI activities (utilizing Kaak's definition) exist. Some studies report on AFI activities in the classroom but omit a measure of student outcomes. For example, Sauerwein (2022) reported on a class in which students were required to integrate faith and ethics into an accounting ethics class. Throughout the semester, students wrote about various discipline-based concepts and how they aligned or did not align with biblical values. Although this is a clear example of academic faith integration, the author did not have a means of measuring student work to determine the quality of the faith integration activities. Sauerwein's study would have been enriched with the use of a rubric.

### **Rubrics as Assessment Tools**

Rubrics preset the criteria for assessment and grading. They serve as "a scoring guideline that describes the characteristics of different levels of performance using scoring or judging a performance through the performance of a task" (Kan, 2007, p. 145). An advantage of rubrics is that they break down a task into "manageable parts" to ensure transparency and "objectivity in grading" (Sadler, 2009, p. 159). These scoring tools are a type of "performance-based assessment" (Kan, 2007), and they can be heuristic devices as well because they specify to the learners how the task will be measured.

Rubrics are good tools for assessing ideas, thinking, changes in perceptions, and application of new material within student artifacts. Empirical research shows that using rubrics leads to improved student

outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1994). They provide consistency, accuracy, and a process of feedback (Hack, 2015, p. 925). And when multiple professors teach sections of the same course, rubrics ensure inter-rater reliability (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Hafner & Hafner, 2003).

One limitation of rubrics is construct validity: No empirical evidence justifies “having the same number of qualitative gradations across” each domain of a learning task (Humphry & Heldsinger, 2014, p. 253). In other words, if there are four discrete levels of competence for dimension measuring a domain like “Articulation of Christian Doctrine,” this does not necessarily mean there will be four similar discrete levels of competence related to a domain like “Format and Style.” Additionally, Humphry and Heldsinger’s (2014) study discovered a halo effect related to these multiple levels of achievement: When raters believe students performed well on one domain of the rubric, they tend to rate all levels of the rubric highly.

### ***Existing Rubrics of Faith Integration***

While rubrics can be developed for single assignments, our desire was to find a generic rubric that can be applied to FI assignments across the university curriculum. These “general rubrics” (Marzano, 2002) keep professors from reinventing the wheel whenever they create an FI assignment. Unlike assignment-specific rubrics, generic rubrics do not have domains related to formatting, style, or organization because — while those domains are important— they do not measure faith integration. Additionally, a general rubric can be used to measure FI systematically across the various disciplines on campus to determine whether university outcomes related to FI are being achieved.

The authors were able to identify only two generic rubrics at colleges and universities (Vanguard University and California Baptist University) in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) that measure student outcomes related to FI.<sup>1</sup>

The Vanguard University FI rubric measures students in five domains: Faith articulation, faith application, vocational awareness, integration of faith and

learning, and Pentecostal perspectives (Vanguard, 2013). At the “highly developed” level, students would not only show biblical literacy and knowledge of the Pentecostal tradition but would demonstrate a commitment to living holy lives and would articulate how their career is an aspect of their Christian identity. In other words, the university outcomes can only be met if the majority of graduating students are professing Christians.

Just as the Vanguard University FI rubric has a domain related to its faith tradition, the CBU rubric expects students to have knowledge of Baptist Perspectives. Additionally (and like the Vanguard rubric above), students are expected to have biblical literacy, to apply the Bible to their own practices, and to be able to articulate the Great Commission (CBU, n.d.).

While the faith integration rubrics mentioned above describe an integrative Christian worldview, it is precisely their comprehensiveness that presented several challenges for use in specific college courses. The rubric dimensions cover too many theological concepts to be incorporated in any non-theology course, let alone a single assignment. It is impractical to design a single assignment for an art class where students 1) incorporate scripture in a meaningful way, 2) display a knowledge of the saving power of Jesus Christ and the redemptive story of the cross, and 3) adhere to the doctrines of the faith.

A new way of measuring student use of faith-based concepts in a discipline-specific assignment is needed. The new rubric must be adaptive enough to be used in different types of assignments across various disciplines. The theological components in the rubric need to be accessible to faculty and students with a wide range of theological training.

### ***Innovating an AFI rubric***

Creating a new academic faith integration rubric started with the integrationist approach, as described by Lyon et al. (2005), which maintains that faith-based concepts should be systematically integrated into all subject areas in the institution. Furthermore, (as discussed above) we positioned this work using the definition of academic faith integration (AFI) set forth

the rubrics. Note that Azusa Pacific University has a rubric to measure faculty proficiency in FI (APU, n.d.).

<sup>1</sup> Other rubrics may exist, but the authors were unable to locate them or find research on the development or use of

by Kaak (2016). Then, we defined the scope and types of academic faith integration using the Pathways to Integration Framework created by Nehrbass (2022). An iterative process guided the development and testing of the rubric dimensions

Nehrbass (2022) describes four onramps or pathways for faith integration: foundations, perspectives, practices, and pedagogy. For the purpose of creating the rubric dimensions, we selected Foundations, Perspectives, and Practices.<sup>2</sup> Each author created a draft of several rubric dimensions to measure those three pathways. We saw this as an iterative process, where we collaborated to revise and refine the dimensions, constantly referring back to Nehrbass' (2022) Pathways to ensure adherence to the framework until we ended up with a total of seven dimensions in the rubric. Three dimensions were related to Foundations, two to Practices, and two to Perspectives.

As we consulted faculty, we discovered that one of their frustrations with prior rubrics was that there were so many dimensions to be measured, and multiple rows on Christian faith and praxis tended to drown out the discipline-specific content. That same concern would be true if we left these seven dimensions in one rubric. Instead, we opted to create separate rubric dimensions that could be added, singly or in combinations, to any already existing rubric. The goal is for faculty to find one or more aspects of faith integration that best correlate with a specific course assignment, and then they can add the appropriate faith integration dimension(s) to the rubric they were already using for that specific assignment.

### ***Structured Process for Rubric Development***

To test the face validity of the dimensions, we adapted the iterative processes used to develop two similar rubrics: the Catholic Social Tradition rubric (Hudson et al., 2018) and the UVA Syllabus Rubric (Palmer et al., 2014). We gave the rubric dimensions to a group of professors who provided feedback on the clarity and usefulness. We then used the feedback to improve the dimensions and then gave them to a different group of professors and received more feedback.

<sup>2</sup> We did not develop a rubric to measure how students discuss their own worldview or faith pilgrimage, as these did not readily align with Nehrbass' (2022) framework, and

The dimensions were first given to a group of approximately 20 new faculty members who were completing a year-long seminar on teaching with a focus on faith integration. We wanted to see if the dimensions were clear enough that faculty members new to a faith-based institution would be able to understand and use the dimensions. Faculty members were asked to respond naturally to each dimension by commenting, asking questions, or revising the dimensions. Each dimension included a brief description of the concepts included in the dimension and the measurement criteria. The documents, with their notes and questions, were gathered and analyzed by the research team.

Overall, faculty members responded positively to the rubric dimensions, stating they felt the dimensions would be easier to implement than the general FI rubrics from Vanguard and CBU. Additionally, they felt the rubric dimensions gave them a clearer idea of what to expect on assignments. However, the participants also felt some of the indicators were confusing, or the expectations were too rigorous. For example, in one of the Practices dimensions, student work would be rated as "Excelling" if they created original scholarship. That was out of step with the other proficiency indicators on the rubric, which asked students to use existing scholarship to support their claims.

After reviewing the feedback, we determined that the Foundations dimensions were too context-specific to be useful on a broad scale, so we removed those three dimensions. We tightened up some of the other indicators in the remaining four dimensions and brought together another group of faculty members. This group was comprised of more senior faculty members who served on the university assessment committee. They were given the four dimensions and asked to score two student artifacts using the dimensions and then give feedback on the viability of those rubric dimensions.

One issue gleaned from the second review was with one of the Perspectives dimensions. Students were asked to either show agreement or disagreement

we did not implement the "pedagogy" dimension in Nehrbass (2022), as, understandably so, it was not reflect in any of the program learning objectives.

between the perspectives of their discipline and a biblical concept. The indicators for both agreement and disagreement were in the same dimension, which made it confusing and would have made scoring student work challenging. Professors also found it difficult to determine which dimensions to use when scoring the student work. For example, at times, they were unsure if the assignment they were scoring better aligned with the Practices or Perspective rows.

We reviewed the notes from the second faculty feedback session and had three reflection-discussion sessions between us, talking about the questions the faculty members asked and our understanding of the distinctions between the different dimensions. Through those discussions, we made revisions and removed two of the dimensions from the rubric—one from Practices and one from Perspectives. The remaining two rubric dimensions consistently received positive feedback from both groups of professors and were identified as the easiest to use.

**Rubric Dimensions Description**

For a deeper understanding of the two pathways being measured - Practices and Perspectives - and the other two pathways - Foundations and Pedagogy - we recommend reading Nehrbass’s descriptions of the four pathways (2022). The following descriptions focus on the narrowed scope of the two pathways that fit into the rubric dimensions we created.

The Perspectives dimension refers to the ways in which an academic discipline views the world: concepts about humanity, creation, ways of knowing and being, and more. Our AFI rubric dimensions

measure a student's ability to examine those academic perspectives through the lens of biblical truths, principles, and values. Does the Christian worldview align with the commonly held perspectives in the academic discipline, or are there areas of tension?

For example, education research has shown that relationships between teachers and students have a very strong influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Therefore, a key perspective of education is that relationships matter. When examined through a biblical perspective, this is not surprising. God exists in relationship with Himself through the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Additionally, the Bible references caring for, loving, and being kind to one another (Romans 12:10; John 13:34; Ephesians 4:32). Taken together, a student could claim that building rapport to support relationships is a perspective held by both the academic discipline of education as well as a biblical perspective. Therefore, these perspectives align with each other, and we find consonance in this perspective.

The beginning level of achievement on the Perspectives Rubric expects students to acknowledge that academic and biblical perspectives can be aligned, but it does not require students to give specific examples of such alignment. As the proficiency levels increase, students are expected to be clearer with specific examples. The dimension culminates in the Excelling proficiency level, which requires students to ground their claims in scholarly writing from their academic discipline or from biblical scholarship. Table 1 below shows the Perspectives Rubric Dimension

Table 1  
*Perspectives Rubric Dimension*

| Not Applicable                                            | Beginning                                                                                           | Developing                                                                                                                         | Proficient                                                                                                | Excelling                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Faith integration of Practices is missing from this work. | Lists one concept from academia and one biblical concept that contributes to a certain perspective. | Lists and references one or more concept from academia and one or more biblical concept that contributes to a certain perspective. | Compares and contrasts a biblical concept and a concept from academia to arrive at a certain perspective. | Compares and contrasts one or more biblical concepts and one or more concepts from academia to arrive at a certain perspective, citing scholarly writing from either the discipline or theology. |

Practices in the academic discipline are behaviors one would expect to see carried out by someone working in that field or profession. Christian practices, such as humility, are foundational to many academic disciplines. Research, for example, begins with an admission that we do not yet know the answer to our question, though we may suspect we know. Therefore, we start research with a posture of humility, admitting what we do not know, and begin a project. The

practice of humility is aligned with the academic discipline of science.

The beginning level of achievement in the Practices Rubric expects students to identify some biblical practices that may align with an academic discipline, but it does not ask students to give specific examples. At the excelling level, students will use academic literature or biblical scholarship to apply a Christian practice to their discipline. Table 2 below shows the Practices Rubric Dimension.

Table 2  
*Practices Rubric Dimension*

| Not Applicable                                            | Beginning                                                                                                                                  | Developing                                                                                                       | Proficient                                                                                  | Excelling                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Faith integration of Practices is missing from this work. | Articulates that biblical ideas form a foundation for or are related to practices in the discipline, but specific examples are not evident | Identifies one biblical principle or value and explains how it relates to a specific practice of the discipline. | Applies more than one biblical principle or value to a specific practice of the discipline. | Applies more than one biblical principle or value to one or more practices of the discipline and grounds claims in scholarly work from the academic discipline or biblical scholarship |

Before using the rubric dimensions to score student papers, we noticed that the rubric did not have an option for the rater to determine whether the faith dimension was missing or not applicable—a problem Hudson et al. (2018) found when testing the first iteration of their rubric as well. We added a “Not applicable” score and included directions for scorers to select that proficiency level if the faith integration component was missing (see the two tables above).

### Potential Uses and Implications

The new rubric dimensions move the work of academic faith integration forward by providing a tool for measuring outcomes related to the integration of faith and academia. Rather than being a full faith integration rubric on its own, the faith integration measurement tool is a single dimension that can be added to an existing assignment rubric. This facilitates the use and measurement of academic faith integration by reducing what needs to be measured, making the process less cumbersome.

These faith integration rubric dimensions, separated by different types of faith integration purposes, hold

promise for program evaluation at faith-based institutions. Programs may decide to evaluate students at different levels throughout the program to demonstrate growth in faith integration practices. Adding faith integration components to existing assessment measures is more efficient, practical, and user-friendly than asking professors to assess FI assignments with generic rubrics that have multiple domains, spanning Perspectives, Foundations, and Practices.

Programs and individual faculty members can implement these “add-on” rubric dimensions to conduct pre-post analyses of student work to see if instruction in the course or program causes students to integrate faith more effectively.

### Conclusion

As faith-based institutions seek to put learning at the center of “faith and learning” (Lawrence et al., 2005), more research is needed on which types of assignments work in which contexts and for what purpose. Additionally, more research is needed to determine what outcomes should be measured and how we can measure them. The academic faith

integration rubric dimensions are a step forward on this journey.

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