

# Integrating spirituality as the sixth dimension for institutionalizing service-learning: A rubric and framework for Catholic higher education institutions

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## ***Abstract***

In 1999, Andrew Furco revolutionized experiential learning assessment by publishing the *Self-Assessment Rubric for the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education*. Built upon five core organizational dimensions (Philosophy and Mission, Faculty Support, Student Support, Community Participation, and Institutional Support), this benchmark matrix allowed universities to measure their transition from ad hoc community volunteerism to fully embedded, sustainable engagement. However, for Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), community engagement is not merely an educational reform strategy or a civic obligation; it is a direct expression of the Gospel, the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) tradition, and an incarnational spirituality. Drawing from modern scholarly discourses this article argues that the classical five-dimension framework is structurally incomplete for faith-based academies. This study proposes and conceptualizes “Spirituality” as the definitive Sixth Dimension of service-learning institutionalization for CHEI’s. By expanding Furco’s multi-stage developmental continuum (Critical Mass Building, Quality Building, and Sustained Institutionalization), the author formulates a complete evaluation rubric tailored for CHEIs. This tool empowers institutions to measure how deeply service-learning serves as an itinerary of discernment, a site of theological and charism reflection.

***Keywords:*** service-learning, institutionalization, Catholic Higher Education, spirituality, Andrew Furco, assessment rubric, Catholic social teaching

## **Integrating spirituality as the sixth dimension for institutionalizing service-learning: A rubric and framework for Catholic higher education institutions**

### **1. Introduction**

Higher education today is in the grip of a major existential crisis. Under market pressures, rising corporate structures, and an increasingly utilitarian focus, modern universities have largely become technical training grounds, with a focus largely on career certification and economic utility. This instrumental focus has resulted in what higher education scholars call a decoupling of academic instruction from the ethical, moral, and inner formation of the human person. If education is limited to cognitive and technical development, ignoring the affective and existential dimensions of the students, it also leaves a critical gap in their development. The systemic moral failures in the political, economic and social sectors of the world point to a pressing need to re-engage higher education as a space for holistic human formation.

To address this challenge, institutions have increasingly embraced experiential education, with service-learning (SL) emerging as a premier pedagogy. By connecting rigorous academic coursework with organized community service, service-learning provides a powerful context for exploring issues of justice, human dignity, faith, and institutional responsibility (Tian & Noel, 2020). Service-learning seeks to transform students from passive consumers of knowledge into active agents of social change. For decades, the primary objective of service-learning advocates has been to shift this practice from a collection of isolated volunteer projects into a core component of the university's academic identity.

#### *1.1 The Gap in Existing Literature*

Evaluating how deeply service-learning is embedded within an academic institution requires structured assessment tools. For nearly three decades, the gold standard for such evaluation has been Andrew Furco's (1999) *Self-Assessment Rubric for the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education*. Furco's framework organizes institutional operations into five distinct dimensions: Philosophy and Mission, Faculty Support, Student Support, Community Participation, and Institutional Support. These dimensions are tracked along a developmental continuum from "Critical Mass Building" to "Sustained Institutionalization." While Furco's rubric remains a masterpiece of organizational design, a critical gap exists in the literature regarding its application within faith-based institutions, particularly Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). Furco's model operates on a fundamentally bureaucratic and structural worldview. It presumes that if an institution properly aligns administrative incentives, resource allocations, operational committees, and formal mission statements, service-learning will function optimally. However, this secular-neutral framework treats the university primarily as an administrative machine. It overlooks the internal, animating spirit that defines a faith-based institution. For a Catholic university, community engagement is not merely an indicator of "civic engagement" or a strategy for educational reform. It is an expression of the Gospel, a reflection of the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) tradition, and an encounter with the divine (Welch & Koth, 2009). When a Catholic university measures its service-learning program using only Furco's original five dimensions, it risks hollowing out its core purpose. An institution could reach the highest stage of institutionalization by establishing a highly efficient service-learning office with robust funding, clear faculty policies, and numerous community agreements. Yet, if these activities are detached from theological reflection, the institutional charism, and the spiritual formation of the participants, the institution has successfully institutionalized a secular practice while missing its specific evangelizing and formative mission.

#### *1.2 Primary Objectives and Hypotheses*

This study addresses this clear limitation by expanding the foundational framework of institutionalization. The primary objectives of this article are threefold. First, the author seeks to establish a theoretical foundation that

positions Spirituality and Charism Identity as the definitive Sixth Dimension of service-learning institutionalization within Catholic higher education. Second, the investigator operationalizes this Sixth Dimension into six distinct, structurally measurable components, which are Theological & Charism Alignment, Spiritual Reflection & Discernment, Campus Ministry Collaboration, Faculty Formation in Mission, Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity, and Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment. Third, the researcher formulates a complete, ready-to-implement assessment rubric that integrates these six components into Furco’s established developmental stages, providing CHEIs with a standardized tool to evaluate the spiritual depth of their community engagement operations. The author hypothesizes that integrating a dedicated spiritual assessment dimension will reveal that structural institutionalization (budgets, offices, policies) does not automatically guarantee mission-driven or spiritually integrated engagement. By introducing this rubric, it is proposed that CHEIs can systematically transition from a secular, transactional model of community service to an integrated, incarnational model of holistic education.

## 2. Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative, conceptual matrix-building design aimed at expanding Andrew Furco’s (1999) established institutional evaluation tool. The methodological process is governed by a rigorous four-phase matrix framework designed to translate abstract theological concepts into verifiable institutional structures while maintaining absolute organizational symmetry with Furco’s original rubric.

### 2.1 Phase 1: Topic Structuring and Variable Identification

The foundational step involved mapping out the core theoretical landscape using a two-dimensional matrix. The **Y-Axis (Rows)** isolates the six specific nodes of tension where a secular assessment model proves structurally blind when evaluating a faith-based institution: *Theological Alignment*, *Spiritual Reflection*, *Campus Ministry Collaboration*, *Faculty Formation*, *Partner Fraternity*, and *Spiritual Impact Assessment*. The **X-Axis (Columns)** details the distinct material and textual data sources utilized to contextualize and justify these variables within higher education scholarship (Furco, 1999; Welch & Koth, 2009; Lehmann, 2019; Tian & Noel, 2020; Isola et al., 2022).

Y-Axis: Key Themes / Variables (Rows)	Source 1: Furco (1999)	Source 2: Isola et al. / Uniservitate (2022)	Source 3: Welch & Koth (2009)	Source 4: Tian & Noel (2020)	Source 5: Lehmann (2019)
1. Theological & Charism Alignment					
2. Spiritual Reflection & Discernment					
3. Campus Ministry Collaboration					
4. Faculty Formation in Mission					
5. Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity					
6. Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment					

## 2.2 Phase 2: Intersectional Analysis

Each intersecting cell of the Phase 1 matrix was populated with direct qualitative data, findings, or institutional dynamics extracted from the literature. To establish rigorous content validity, these intersections were coded using descriptive tags indicating the exact operational nature of the relationship:

Variables (Rows)	Source 1: Furco (1999)	Source 2: Isola et al. (2022)	Source 3: Welch & Koth (2009)	Source 4: Tian & Noel (2020)	Source 5: Lehmann (2019)
1. Theological & Charism Alignment	[Organizational Continuity] Formulates the institutional rationale to mirror the “Philosophy and Mission” dimension.	[Theological Interdependence] Bridges service-learning directly to the Global Compact on Education and Catholic Social Teaching (CST).	[Pedagogical Extension] Grounds student community work within a structured faith journey rather than standard civic duty.	[Theological Interdependence] Frames community engagement during institutional crises as a lived expression of Gospel values.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Connects to personal “God concepts,” which affect moral worldviews but need structural alignment to influence student behavior.
2. Spiritual Reflection & Discernment	[Organizational Continuity] Expands regular academic reflection into a formal, structured institutional mechanism.	[Theological Interdependence] Integrates specialized contemplation models rooted in distinct religious charisms.	[Pedagogical Extension] Replaces simple cognitive processing with explicit theological reflection and vocational discernment models.	[Pedagogical Extension] Mandates deep reflection to process existential adjustments brought on by societal disruptions.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Provides an essential mechanism to translate internal moral evaluations into intentional, proactive actions.
3. Campus Ministry Collaboration	[Organizational Continuity] Integrates pastoral infrastructure with the central academic service-learning office.	[Theological Interdependence] Combines academic instruction with campus liturgy, sacramental life, and local advocacy.	[Pedagogical Extension] Aligns parallel student support frameworks to enhance both personal faith development and community action.	[Organizational Continuity] Pairs campus ministry networks with academic platforms to sustain community relief operations.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Provides the peer networks and social tracking needed to reinforce positive community service behaviors.
4. Faculty Formation in Mission	[Organizational Continuity] Connects directly to the “Faculty Support” dimension by requiring dedicated training pathways.	[Theological Interdependence] Preserves the institutional charism by training educators as holistic mentors or “agents of change.”	[Pedagogical Extension] Equips faculty to confidently guide students through the complex existential questions that arise during service.	[Organizational Continuity] Requires ongoing pedagogical and mission-driven support to handle digital or alternative service formats.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Validates the need for structured faculty training to model faith-based motivations within academic disciplines.
5. Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity	[Organizational Continuity] Redefines the “Community Participation” dimension using deep relational principles.	[Theological Interdependence] Shifts community roles from simple clinical learning sites to true co-educators based on human fraternity.	[Pedagogical Extension] Moves interactions from transactional community volunteerism to deep, mutual human solidarity.	[Theological Interdependence] Prioritizes the immediate needs and human dignity of vulnerable partners over institutional convenience.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Counteracts self-centered, transactional motives by framing partnerships around joint ethical goals.

6. Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment	[Organizational Continuity] Expands the “Institutional Support” dimension to monitor internal transformation.	[Theological Interdependence] Monitors long-term progress toward a true “education of the heart” and integral human development.	[Pedagogical Extension] Establishes tools to measure growth in student spiritual intelligence and interior transformation over time.	[Organizational Continuity] Assesses programmatic flexibility and mission resilience during periods of operational disruption.	[Empirical Predictor Gaps] Moves evaluations beyond tracking hours or inputs to measure shifts in long-term moral orientations.
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### 2.3 Phase 3: Synthesis and Theoretical Grouping

The populated matrix was analyzed vertically and horizontally to isolate systemic overlaps, operational blind spots, and emergent patterns across the distinct textual bodies. Overlapping themes were synthesized to group individual operational characteristics into a cohesive, standalone macro-construct: Dimension VI: Spirituality. This grouping ensures that spiritual assessment does not function as an isolated checklist, but as an integrated, multi-component diagnostic tool that directly fits Furco’s developmental continuum. This synthesis grouped the variables into three overarching operational constructs:

- Charism Integration (Components 1 & 5): Combines institutional identity, Catholic Social Teaching, and community relationships into a unified expression of human fraternity rather than transactional, market-based exchanges.
- Existential Processing (Components 2 & 3): Combines academic reflection with campus ministry programming, ensuring that cognitive disorientations are processed through structured spiritual reflection and vocational discernment.
- Mission-Driven Infrastructure (Components 4 & 6): Secures the institutional resources, faculty retreat funding, and holistic evaluation tools needed to make spiritual development a measurable and sustainable administrative priority.

### 2.4 Phase 4: Transition to Research Design

The finalized synthesis matrix was utilized to construct the operational assessment design. By running the six derived components through a logical, sequential path, the research team modeled a progressive developmental continuum. This allowed the study to map out how early-stage uncoordinated structures (**Stage I: Critical Mass Building**) evolve into centralized initiatives (**Stage II: Quality Building**) and ultimately stabilize into permanent, policy-backed, and mission-aligned operations (**Stage III: Sustained Institutionalization**), preserving Furco’s whole-number diagnostic scoring mechanics.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 The Structural Taxonomy of Dimension VI

The primary result of this study is the formal creation of Dimension VI: Spirituality as a standalone addition to the institutionalization matrix. This dimension is defined by six distinct components that match the structural focus of the original five dimensions. Theological & Charism Alignment measures how intentionally community engagement courses and projects are framed within Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and the institution’s founding religious charism. Spiritual Reflection & Discernment evaluates the transition from standard academic reflection to structured spiritual exercises and theological action-reflection frameworks like the See-Judge-Act methodology. Campus Ministry Collaboration tracks the structural and programmatic partnership between academic service-learning offices and the Office of Campus Ministry. Faculty Formation in Mission evaluates the availability, funding, and utilization of theological and spiritual retreats designed to equip faculty to guide students through

deep existential reflections. Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity measures the relationship with community partners, tracking the shift from transactional learning arrangements to deep solidarity and human fraternity. Finally, Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment evaluates the tools used by the institution to track changes in students' spiritual intelligence, moral orientation, and vocational discernment.

### 3.2 The Expanded Matrix

The complete evaluation matrix for Dimension VI, designed to be seamlessly added to Andrew Furco's (1999) original model, is presented below:

Components	Stage One: Critical Mass Building	Stage Two: Quality Building	Stage Three: Sustained Institutionalization
Theological & Charism Alignment	Service-learning courses and projects are secular in design and rarely connected to Catholic Social Teaching (CST) or the institutional charism. Connections are accidental or left entirely to individual initiative.	Service-learning courses occasionally reference CST principles or charism elements in syllabi, but these ideas are treated as conceptual add-ons rather than the core rationale for community engagement.	Service-learning is systematically operationalized as a direct expression of CST and the university's charism. Community engagement is universally understood as an essential spiritual practice and an itinerary of faith-based discernment.
Spiritual Reflection & Discernment	Reflection activities are strictly academic or cognitive. There are no formal mechanisms or guidelines for integrating spiritual reflection, theological processing, or vocation discernment into the service experience.	Reflection models include qualitative questions regarding values and ethics, but structured spiritual methods (e.g., the <i>See-Judge-Act</i> framework) are used inconsistently across courses.	Spiritual and theological reflection is a standardized, high-quality component of all service-learning courses. Formally designed reflection spaces, retreat days, and discernment journals are integrated into the curriculum to process community encounters deeply.
Campus Ministry Collaboration	The academic service-learning infrastructure and the Office of Campus Ministry operate completely independently. Service activities and campus faith or sacramental life are treated as separate spheres.	Campus Ministry and the service-learning office cooperate occasionally on ad hoc projects, holiday drives, or immersion trips, but they lack a structured strategy to link academic coursework with spiritual programming.	A formal, continuous partnership links Campus Ministry, academic departments, and the service-learning office. Liturgical celebrations, campus retreats, and pastoral care are purposefully integrated with local and global community engagement activities.
Faculty Formation in Mission	Faculty and staff receive no training on how to handle the spiritual and existential questions that surface during service-learning. Orientation programs focus purely on logistics and basic pedagogy.	The university offers optional workshops or retreats on the institution's mission and charism, but few service-learning faculty participate, and the training offers little guidance on facilitating spiritual reflection.	Robust, well-funded formation programs are fully established. The university requires or heavily incentivizes ongoing spiritual and charism formation for faculty, equipping them to confidently lead students through complex ethical and spiritual questions.
Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity	Community partners are viewed primarily as clinical sites or labs for student learning. Relationships are transactional, and partners have no insight into or connection with the university's spiritual mission.	The university recognizes the value of reciprocity, but interactions focus mainly on logistically balancing hours and outputs. Community partners are rarely invited into the university's broader reflection or spiritual circles.	Partners are embraced as co-educators and brothers/sisters in a shared mission of fraternity and care (Isola et al., 2022). The university actively participates in spiritual and communal dialogue with partners, ensuring that the community's voice shapes both project goals and reflection processes.
Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment	The institution measures service-learning success using only quantitative metrics, such as the number of participating students, total service hours completed, or financial inputs.	Evaluation instruments include qualitative questions about student attitudes and ethical awareness, but spiritual intelligence, long-term vocation choice, and inner transformation are not formally or reliably tracked.	The institution uses sophisticated assessment tools to measure the spiritual impact of service-learning on students, faculty, and partners. Data on spiritual growth, commitment to solidarity, and vocation orientation are regularly utilized to improve institutional planning.

3.3 Comparative Structural Mapping of the Complete Six-Dimension Model

To demonstrate how the newly formulated Sixth Dimension integrates with and completes Furco’s original work, the following table maps all six institutional dimensions across their primary focus areas, key operational variables, and the specific documentation required for evaluation.

Dimension	Primary Organizational Focus	Key Operational Variables Monitored	Required Assessment Evidence
Philosophy & Mission (Furco, 1999)	Institutional Definition & Definition Alignment	Presence of official definition; inclusion in university strategic plans; visibility in institutional messaging.	University charter; 5-year strategic plan; definition guidelines; campus public relations materials.
Faculty Support (Furco, 1999)	Faculty Engagement, Rewards, & Incentives	Percentage of participating faculty; leadership committees; tenure, promotion, and hiring credit systems.	Tenure and promotion bylaws; faculty survey data; faculty development funding lines.
Student Support (Furco, 1999)	Student Engagement, Access, & Leadership	Student awareness levels; number of SL courses; student leadership roles; transcript distinctions or scholarships.	Registrar enrollment sheets; student leadership logs; graduation transcript guidelines.
Community Participation (Furco, 1999)	Partner Reciprocity & Collaboration	Community awareness of goals; reciprocal resource sharing; partner voice in course design and project execution.	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) documents; partner advisory board minutes; project feedback evaluations.
Institutional Support (Furco, 1999)	Infrastructure, Staffing, & Evaluation	Centralized coordinating office; dedicated director and budget; programmatic evaluation tools.	Annual line-item budgets; organizational charts; internal programmatic evaluation reports.
Spirituality (Proposed Model)	Mission Integration & CST/Charism Alignment	CST/Charism alignment; spiritual reflection models; campus ministry links; faculty retreats; partner fraternity; spiritual tracking.	Syllabi reflection prompts; mission retreat logs; campus ministry plans; spiritual impact survey data.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Derivation and Framework Conception

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in explaining how the author arrived at the formulation of the sixth dimension and its constituent components. To establish content validity and maintain organizational symmetry with Andrew Furco’s original framework, the derivation process did not rely on abstract theological descriptions. Instead, it systematically converted internal spiritual indicators into external, operationalized institutional variables. This was accomplished by conducting a rigorous review of foundational faith-based educational mandates, primarily Pope John Paul II’s *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope Francis’s *Global Compact on Education*, and contemporary empirical literature linking service engagement to student interior growth.

By analyzing where the operational realities of a university intersect with a faith-based mission, the author isolated six specific nodes of tension where a secular assessment model proves structurally blind. The first component, Theological & Charism Alignment, was derived by recognizing that a Catholic university must anchor its community interactions within Catholic Social Teaching (CST) rather than neutral civic voluntarism. The second component, Spiritual Reflection & Discernment, was formulated because cognitive reflection alone fails to process the existential and emotional disruptions experienced by students confronting structural injustice. The

third component, Campus Ministry Collaboration, addresses the structural silo separating academic departments from pastoral teams. The fourth component, Faculty Formation in Mission, was conceptualized based on data showing that faculty cannot confidently guide student existential reflection without personal formation in the institutional charism. The fifth component, Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity, redefines traditional partnership metrics by shifting relationships from market-based labor transactions to human solidarity, as articulated in *Fratelli Tutti*. Finally, the sixth component, Holistic Spiritual Impact Assessment, was established because standard operational evaluations ignore long-term transformation, requiring tools that measure changes in student moral orientation and vocational discernment. This multi-layered derivation ensures that the sixth-dimension functions as an authentic organizational matrix that captures the spiritual “soul” of institutional community engagement.

#### 4.2 Operationalization Protocol

To systematically implement the evaluation of Dimension VI, the institution follows a streamlined, five-stage protocol designed to convert matrix criteria into verifiable institutional improvements.

- **Mobilization:** Convene a fixed, cross-functional committee co-chaired by Academic Affairs and the Office of Mission and Ministry, including faculty, student leaders, and community partners, to review rubric criteria and establish that the evaluation monitors operational structures rather than private personal faith.
- **Collection:** Sub-committees collect local institutional artifacts from the target review cycle, compiling course syllabi, theological reflection prompts, campus ministry joint plans, mission-induction funding logs, active Memorandums of Understanding, and student vocational impact surveys.
- **Scoring:** The committee reviews the physical evidence together to determine whole-number, consensus-driven baseline scores (1, 2, or 3) for each component, strictly rejecting decimal or fractional scores to guarantee absolute diagnostic clarity.
- **Planning:** For any component scoring below Stage Three, draft targeted remediation initiatives complete with specific timelines, dedicated operational budgets, and designated areas of joint administrative ownership to build long-term organizational capacity.
- **Integration:** Embed the final mission assessment data into permanent presidential reports and board-level institutional quality assurance cycles, scheduling a mandatory re-evaluation every two to three years to maintain a continuous quality feedback loop.

**Administrative and Operational Implications** - The introduction of this rubric highlights several key operational requirements for university leaders. First, it requires breaking down historical administrative silos, particularly the divide between Academic Affairs and the Office of Mission and Ministry. In many faith-based universities, these two areas operate independently, separating service-learning offices from pastoral initiatives. Campus Ministry Collaboration provides an explicit framework to evaluate and build structural partnerships between these divisions, ensuring that academic coursework and the sacramental life of the campus enrich one another. Furthermore, Faculty Formation in Mission highlights a critical truth: a university cannot expect faculty to facilitate deep spiritual reflection if they have not received adequate formation themselves. Many faculty members enter faith-based universities with excellent academic training but little familiarity with Catholic Social Teaching or the institution’s specific charism. If the university does not invest in dedicated mission-induction programs and spiritual retreats for educators, service-learning courses will naturally default to secular, transactional models. Achieving Stage Three institutionalization requires long-term, structural funding for faculty spiritual formation (Wagner, 2017).

Finally, Reciprocity Grounded in Fraternity challenges institutions to rethink how they manage community partnerships based on Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Traditional models look at reciprocity through a

logistical lens, focusing on balancing student learning hours with community labor outputs. This rubric encourages institutions to build relationships based on solidarity and human fraternity (Isola et al., 2022). This structural shift ensures that community partners are treated as true co-educators and equal partners in dignity, rather than clinical subjects for university research.

***Contributions to Holistic Formation, Social Engagement, Student Well-being, and Community Partnerships*** - The proposed Sixth Dimension contributes to the advancement of holistic human formation by expanding the assessment of service-learning beyond organizational efficiency and programmatic outputs. While existing institutionalization frameworks primarily evaluate structures, policies, and participation mechanisms, the proposed dimension recognizes spiritual growth, moral development, vocational discernment, and meaning-making as essential outcomes of higher education. This broader understanding supports the formation of students as intellectually competent, socially responsible, ethically grounded, and spiritually mature individuals. The framework likewise strengthens social engagement by ensuring that community engagement initiatives are rooted in human dignity, solidarity, and a sustained commitment to the common good. Through the integration of Catholic Social Teaching and institutional charism, service-learning becomes a transformative educational practice that encourages students and institutions to address social inequities while fostering long-term commitments to justice, compassion, and responsible citizenship. The framework therefore reinforces the role of Catholic Higher Education Institutions as active contributors to social transformation and community development.

In terms of student well-being, the framework provides structured opportunities for reflection, discernment, and personal integration. Community engagement frequently exposes students to complex social realities that can generate emotional, ethical, and existential questions. By incorporating spiritual reflection, accompaniment, and discernment mechanisms, the framework supports students in processing these experiences constructively, thereby contributing to resilience, self-awareness, purpose formation, moral clarity, and overall well-being. Such processes help students integrate their academic learning with their personal values and life aspirations. The framework also contributes to the development of authentic community partnerships. Rather than viewing community organizations as sites for student learning alone, the proposed rubric promotes relationships characterized by reciprocity, mutual learning, and shared mission. This approach elevates community partners from beneficiaries to co-educators, strengthening trust, collaboration, and sustainability while ensuring that engagement initiatives respond to genuine community needs and aspirations. Consequently, community engagement becomes a process of mutual transformation rather than a one-directional transfer of services.

At the institutional level, the Sixth Dimension contributes to mission integration by providing administrators with a systematic mechanism to evaluate whether community engagement activities remain aligned with the university's founding values and educational vision. The framework encourages alignment among academic affairs, student affairs, campus ministry, and community engagement offices, thereby fostering a more integrated institutional approach to formation and service. Consequently, the framework supports the long-term sustainability of mission-driven service-learning by ensuring that spiritual identity remains embedded within policies, programs, partnerships, and assessment systems.

***Mission-Aligned Recommendations and Future Research Implementation Plan*** - Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations are proposed for Catholic Higher Education Institutions seeking to institutionalize the Sixth Dimension. First, universities should establish formal policies requiring the integration of Catholic Social Teaching and institutional charism outcomes within service-learning course design. These expectations should be embedded within curriculum review processes, academic quality assurance systems, and faculty development initiatives to ensure consistency across academic programs. Second, institutions should develop structured formation programs for faculty and staff that include mission-oriented retreats, workshops on theological reflection methodologies, training on Catholic Social Teaching, and seminars on facilitating student discernment processes. Dedicated budget allocations, participation targets, and annual formation plans should be incorporated into institutional planning cycles to ensure sustainability and organizational commitment.

Third, stronger collaboration mechanisms between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Campus Ministry, and Community Engagement Offices should be formalized through joint committees, integrated planning sessions, and shared assessment frameworks. These structures can help eliminate organizational silos and ensure that academic objectives, student development goals, and mission priorities are pursued through coordinated institutional efforts. Fourth, institutions should invest in the development and validation of assessment instruments capable of measuring spiritual growth, vocation discernment, solidarity, ethical development, and mission integration among students, faculty, and community partners. These indicators should complement traditional quantitative measures such as participation rates, service hours, and program outputs, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of institutional impact.

Future research should focus on pilot-testing the proposed rubric in Catholic Higher Education Institutions to evaluate its reliability, validity, usability, and contribution to institutional assessment processes. Empirical studies may examine the relationship between spiritual institutionalization and student outcomes, faculty engagement, community partner satisfaction, and mission effectiveness. Comparative research involving multiple Catholic universities may further identify contextual factors influencing implementation and institutionalization. To facilitate practical adoption, a phased implementation strategy is recommended. In the first phase, institutions may conduct baseline assessments, adapt rubric indicators to their specific charism and mission, and establish governance structures for implementation. Second phase, pilot applications may be conducted within selected academic units, accompanied by stakeholder consultations and formative evaluations. The third phase, institutions may integrate the rubric into regular quality assurance processes, policy reviews, and strategic planning mechanisms while conducting longitudinal assessments of outcomes and institutional impact. This phased approach enables institutions to build capacity gradually while ensuring that spiritual and mission-driven dimensions become sustainable components of their service-learning practice.

**Study Limitations** - While this study provides a clear conceptual framework, it has certain limitations that must be addressed. The primary limitation stems from its specific theological scope, as the rubric was designed with a focus on Catholic higher education and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. While the underlying components can be adapted by other faith-based or secular institutions interested in holistic education, the specific criteria for Stage Three alignment require adjustment to fit different religious traditions or secular ethical frameworks. Additionally, the qualitative nature of this conceptual matrix means that the rubric relies on consensus-based self-assessment and qualitative evidence rather than providing numerical weights or quantitative statistical indicators for institutionalization. Finally, implementation challenges remain a concern, as the rubric's effectiveness depends entirely on the honesty, self-reflection, and commitment of the university's assessment team. If an institution approaches the rubric with a self-congratulatory mindset, it may score itself at Stage Three based on superficial criteria, thereby missing the opportunity for deep, transformative institutional change.

## 5. Conclusion

This article introduces a clear expansion of Andrew Furco's (1999) classic institutionalization framework by proposing Spirituality and Charism Identity as the essential Sixth Dimension for Catholic Higher Education Institutions. While traditional models focus primarily on evaluating the bureaucracy of service-learning, this framework provides an operational tool to measure its soul. By organizing this sixth dimension into six distinct, measurable components: Theological Alignment, Spiritual Reflection, Campus Ministry Collaboration, Faculty Formation, Partner Fraternity, and Impact Assessment. The author provides universities with a structured way to evaluate how deeply community engagement reflects their core religious mission.

The core research question of this study asks how Catholic universities can systematically measure and sustain service-learning as an expression of their identity. The solution lies in using the comprehensive rubric developed in this article. By evaluating community engagement operations against these detailed, stage-specific criteria, university leaders can clearly see where their spiritual and structural goals are misaligned. This tool ensures that service-learning is not reduced to a marketing point or a simple graduation requirement, but remains anchored as

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