

# L.I.F.E. UPDATE

*Leading the Integration of Faith & Entrepreneurship*



MIAMI UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. ALTMAN INSTITUTE  
FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## Director's Note: The Meaning of L.I.F.E.

The L.I.F.E. Research Lab was established in 2018 to develop research, teaching and practice focused at the integration of faith and entrepreneurship across religious and faith traditions. L.I.F.E.'s focus on entrepreneurship is innovative and intentional. It aligns with the rapidly growing industry trend of integrating faith and entrepreneurship around the world and complements this trend with academically rigorous, practically relevant knowledge creation. L.I.F.E.'s research, open to all faiths and inter-faith examinations, builds on Miami University's leadership position in interdisciplinary research and practice-based entrepreneurship education and in the areas of social entrepreneurship and impact investing. As part of the John W. Altman Institute for Entrepreneurship in the Farmer School of Business, L.I.F.E. is one of the first academic programs in the world to integrate faith and entrepreneurship. To date, L.I.F.E. has developed a pioneering international research conference, several academic studies, a budding student organization, and an initial academic course. The goal of L.I.F.E. is to increase knowledge at the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship and explore how students, entrepreneurs and investors may bring their whole selves into entrepreneurial ventures. L.I.F.E. attempts to give students the opportunity to learn about the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship and examine how they might use this knowledge after graduation.

## \$1 Million Endowment for L.I.F.E.

*Dan and Saroya Williamson Family*

### *Foundation*

Dan (M.U. '78) and Saroya Williamson have created a \$1,000,000 endowment to support the entrepreneurship department's groundbreaking L.I.F.E (Leading the Integration of Faith and Entrepreneurship) program.

This grant is the Williamson family's fourth contribution in the last two years. "We are incredibly thankful for the continued support by Dan and his family. Because of their pioneering and continued support, we are building a truly distinctive program creating world-class knowledge and student experiences at the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship," Brett Smith, founding director of the L.I.F.E. Research Lab, explained.

"I'm grateful for Dan's support of the LIFE program, which is making an important contribution to the movement of faith driven entrepreneurship. We need solid academic research to help shape best practices for those of us in the field," Aimee Minnich, co-founder and CIO of the Impact Foundation, said. "As a lawyer, entrepreneur and faith-driven investor, I am so grateful for the LIFE program and its contribution to this space. Dan's grant will help continue the tradition of solid academic research to support the burgeoning movement of founders and investors integrating their faith into their work."

Dan Williamson noted, "We're so excited to be a part of Miami's L.I.F.E. program and to see what we can do – not just at Miami, but around the world because of L.I.F.E.'s impact."

### IN THIS ISSUE

**IN THE NEWS: \$1M  
ENDOWMENT FOR  
L.I.F.E.**

**FIRST ANNUAL  
L.I.F.E. RESEARCH  
CONFERENCE**

**MAKING STRIDES  
IN ACADEMIC  
JOURNALS**

**FAITH AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN  
THE CLASSROOM**

## L.I.F.E. Research Conference: International Conference on Faith and Entrepreneurship

*1st-Ever International Conference on Faith and Entrepreneurship*

More than 120 academics from around the world spent a day discussing the ways faith and entrepreneurship intersect at the first Annual L.I.F.E. Research Conference. Through 2 keynote addresses and 6 lively panel discussions, scholars engaged in a wide variety of conversations about this interesting intersection. Dr. Melissa Cardon, Haslam Professor of Entrepreneurship & Innovation at the University of Tennessee explained, "Given that 80% of the world's population claims faith as important in their lives, to ignore this aspect of individuals as we study entrepreneurship is bad science. I don't believe we yet have any idea the extent to which or how, exactly, one's faith influences their engagement in entrepreneurship, nor the extent to which entrepreneurship might influence one's faith. Bringing together individuals who are experts in different aspects of entrepreneurship with individuals who are experts in faith and religious studies was a huge step forward in opening up these conversations so that we can start to examine this more deeply." By all accounts, the conference was a major success. Dr. Brett Smith, Cintas Chair in Entrepreneurship & Founding Director, L.I.F.E. Research Lab noted "The L.I.F.E. Conference achieved its goal: to advance the academic conversation on the role of faith and entrepreneurship. We are excited about how the L.I.F.E. conference may accelerate practically-relevant, academically-rigorous knowledge in premiere academic journals on the growing practice at the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship. Thanks to the participation of world-class scholars, the conference was described by participants as a 'water-shed event,' 'an event that we'll look back on as the creation of a new sub-field in entrepreneurship research' and 'super important because it introduces a conversation that is long overdue,'" Smith said. "The goal was really to take a next step, to build on what has come before us, to encourage more research, and to chart out new directions at the intersection of faith and entrepreneurship. And, we've done just that with the first L.I.F.E. conference."

## L.I.F.E. Research Lab Publishes in Top Journals

Publishing in top academic journals not only furthers L.I.F.E.'s intention to penetrate scholarship, but has a deeply practical relevance as well. By publishing quality research in top journals, professors around the world have access to the content coming out of the Research Lab. This in turn means that they can use the research in the classes they teach. Given that the average professor teaches a little over 4,000 students in their career, this is an incredible opportunity to reach students with knowledge and resources that can assist them in integrating their faith into their careers. One professor at our conference summed up the importance of publications for teaching students, saying, "students never connected the dots [of faith and entrepreneurship]. They were fascinated and surprised that they could do so." By having research-rooted conversations, students could be presented with the reality that not only is integrating faith and work possible, but it is actually quite common. Providing studies backs up this teaching, giving solid footing to the message and permission of integrating faith and entrepreneurship.

So far, we have been able to publish several papers in Financial Times Top 50 journals, including 4th-ranked business journal, *Journal of Business Venturing*, and *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, with several more projects in progress. Each was a team effort by faculty at multiple universities, and has been shared at conferences attended by professors and scholars from schools around the world.

## Faith and Entrepreneurship Resources

Given the novelty of this space, we recognized the need for a database that serves as a launching ground for scholars to engage in faith-related entrepreneurship research. Therefore, we have compiled a vast, ever-expanding academic resource guide. You can find the resource guide on our website [lifemiamioh.com](http://lifemiamioh.com). A similar database for practitioner resources including videos, podcasts, blogs, and conference information can also be found on our website. Additionally, we are making available the panel discussions and keynote addresses from the 2021 L.I.F.E. Research Conference. You can find the videos on our YouTube channel @L.I.F.E. Miami University.

# Faith and Entrepreneurship in the Classroom

*CSF 603 Integrating Faith and Entrepreneurship*

In the midst of COVID-19 challenges to higher ed, the Spring 2021 semester brought an exciting new course to the Farmer School of Business at Miami University: Integrating Faith and Entrepreneurship. The inaugural L.I.F.E. course focused on developing a toolkit for students to understand the opportunity to integrate their faith in their work. 20 students from 16 university majors engaged in weekly discussions of research, practitioner articles, podcasts, presentations by guest speakers, and reflective assignments.

Our guest speakers ranged from founders and CEOs of a variety of organizations, to university professors, researchers, and scholars. We are grateful to the 27 speakers that shared with our students. These speakers came from diverse faith backgrounds and engaged in varying degrees of faith and work integration.

Topics covered in class and by guests included stewardship, impact investing, redemptive and ethical models of entrepreneurship, and motivation, including faith-driven perceptions of success and failure.

Throughout the semester, students were asked to reflect on if and how their faith might influence their work. This included assignments on understanding calling and vocation, engaging with coworkers, and navigating the job market with intentionality.

Given the importance and value of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and the classroom, it was important to include speakers from different belief systems, genders, and ethnicities. The class itself served as an example of what it looks like to bring your "whole self" to work, and the challenges and opportunities related to doing so. Students were able to speak openly and learned to engage honestly and respectfully with peers who believed differently. This workplace microcosm gave students a realistic picture of what they will likely encounter after graduation, and many students commented on how helpful that was. If the purpose of L.I.F.E. is to demonstrate and give permission to integrate faith and work, this course far exceeded expectations and gives us great hope for future courses.



## In Students' Words

"Perhaps the biggest lesson that I learned in this course is that no matter what type of work I go into, it will always be more than work for me so I really need the guardrails of my faith to build into how I work and why I work." Bennett

"It is helpful and impactful to see people who are not just talking about a specific way of life, not just talking about integrating their faith and their work, but are actually doing it." Mary

"Until being in this class, the thought honestly never even occurred to me that there was an opportunity to integrate these two huge aspects [faith and work] of my life." Julia

"All semester I had really great conversations with those in the class who didn't really want to be there to those who were extremely passionate about faith but it was slightly different than mine and we didn't always agree. Before this year, if someone said something I didn't agree with, I would have gotten upset, ignored, or just rolled my eyes. Now, when I hear a new perspective, I want to know why they believe that and what in their life has shaped these decisions." Claire

"I genuinely love telling people about this class because it has entirely changed my perspective on what the integration of work and faith can look like after college. I knew that you didn't have to be a missionary to integrate these things, but I don't think I realized how many different ways it could look." Haley

"This is the main reason the course is so applicable: the content is able to connect to all facets of work, not just particular entrepreneurship areas." Jack

Learn more about the L.I.F.E. Research Lab at  
[www.lifemiamioh.com](http://www.lifemiamioh.com)