

BUMS Guide to CREDO, Part II

CREDO claims service to over 400 institutions during its 25-year history; they previously operated under another moniker earlier in their existence (Performa, Inc)¹. This installment surveys institutions CREDO mentions in their promotional material². A few other institutions are represented where publicly-available material indicates that CREDO has been retained. It seems as though some institutions take care to obscure direct reference to CREDO. In many cases it is impossible to determine what ideas have come from CREDO, and which ones are the byproduct of administrative brainstorming – though the tropes of repeated language may indicate something about CREDO’s fingerprint³. Resourceful and interested Bargaining Unit Members might want to delve more deeply into these macrotrends and share their findings, particularly if they have personal relationships with colleagues impacted by CREDO on their campuses.

This installment explores three questions and offers some thoughts:

- What trends emerge regarding the identity of CREDO client-institutions?
- What courses of action might we infer are the result of CREDO’s consultancy?
- What results have CREDO client-institutions seen following the retention of CREDO, presumably some of which are the result of CREDO’s recommendations?

Who are CREDO’s clients?

CREDO primarily serves small, private, liberal arts colleges. Many are strongly rooted in a Christian denominational identity (i.e. Southern Baptist, Adventist, Catholic - Jesuit, etc). CREDO’s work is overwhelmingly concerned with institutions in the upper Midwest and the Southeast; recently they appear to have served a few located along the I-95 corridor. These schools have little in common with Rider, though CREDO does mention that they are looking to broaden their clientele, and that they are working their way out of ‘startup’ mode after 25 years in the business⁴.

¹ <https://www.credohighered.com/about/what-we-do>

² <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/1703627/Digital%20Credo%20Overview%202019.pdf>

³Academics might bristle at the remarkably consistent use of uncredited similar language across institutional correspondence. The incessant use of the terms ‘survive and thrive’; ‘pivot’; ‘synergies’; and ‘holistic’ seem to indicate administrations drinking from the same well. Surveys of institutional strategic plans, their titles, and internal language also reveal similarity, and in some cases absolute congruence. It is of note that assistance with a strategic plan is another boutique service CREDO offers, and it may be that some institutions listed have included CREDO in this effort – especially given the remarkably similar language.

⁴ <https://www.credohighered.com/about/careers>

CREDO's advertising circular lists these schools: Alvernia, Bethel, Coker College, Dakota Wesleyan, Dunwoody, LaSalle, Luther, Marian University, Marquette, Maryville, Morehouse, Muskingum, University of the Ozarks, Palm Beach Atlantic, Randolph Macon, St. Norbert, Scripps, Spelman, St. Catherine, University of the Pacific, Wake Forest, Wartburg, and Wingate.

What trends can we see in CREDO client institutions that look like Rider?

Of the above-listed schools, only **LaSalle** has geographic and size similarity to Rider. However, like nearly all of CREDO's client-institutions, it is religiously affiliated. LaSalle University has experienced a near 20 percent reduction in enrollment and a six-year history of layoffs and downsizing⁵. Their bond rating has just been again downgraded⁶. In 2016 the school announced a 'tuition reset' that better reflected the institution's actual price – though like Rider, and many others, students saw little to no impact except for the reduction of aid.

As deficits increased, LaSalle's administration controversially chose to scuttle works of art from the University collection, touting a 7-million-dollar payoff. Administration consulted no members of the school's extensively well-regarded faculty or staff, and the ire of stakeholders was aroused. The completed sale garnered less than half of the promised payout (\$2.5 million), and the University was formally censured by the AAMD (Association of Art Museum Directors) for their decision to "... *use the proceeds from recent art sales to support operating budgets or expansion initiatives.*"⁷ Monies generated did not go back into the collection, but into other projects deemed essential by administration, hence the AAMD's concern.

An administration's attempt to monetize and liquidate a successful artistic program to benefit new projects will resound with the Rider community. Our administration has been engaged in similar questionable behavior – but with a few notable differences. LaSalle's attempt actually resulted in *some* income, albeit a percentage of what was promised. Furthermore, LaSalle's program in Art was only modestly impacted (the vast majority of the collection remained, though marred)⁸. The faculty

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/upshot/virus-colleges-risky-strategy.html>

⁶ <https://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/news/2020/09/29/la-salle-bond-rating-downgrade-bb-covid-19-fitch.html>

⁷ <https://aamd.org/for-the-media/press-release/aamd-statement-on-sanction-of-berkshire-museum-and-la-salle-university>

⁸ In our case, the Westminster Campus sits largely unused. Enrollments have been decimated; promised facilities to house the program in Lawrenceville remain unbuilt - and poorly retrofitted spaces impede program recovery and healing the breach with alumni and artistic partners. Some community members remain engaged in a bitter battle to stem administrative malfeasance and overreach, not in an attempt to inflict "unnecessary financial pain upon the entire Rider Community" as described by Kristine Brown in a recent Rider News article. Any resolution is likely many years away. There has been no payoff, and the costs of consulting fees, legal fees, and lost tuition revenue is on the order of many millions of dollars.

A previously fully-enrolled, world-renowned, and unique program (one likely to have continued to generate full enrollments due to its uniqueness, even through the upcoming 'enrollment cliff') is now exceptionally

were justifiably perturbed by a pattern of administrative overreach, and growing autocracy in pursuit of goals that do not hold up to scrutiny.

One faculty member stated,

"I think this is the result of the art sale and the administration's lack of consultation with the faculty in this and other decisions. There is also concern that faculty are increasingly sidelined in decisions that affect pedagogy, mission, and free speech."

The university has continued to deeply cut programs and reduce student services following Dickeson's academic prioritization process⁹. There has been little noticeable effect upon negative measures barring one - the president responsible for the hiring of CREDO has since left¹⁰.

Other CREDO client-institutions and themes

Prioritization: Undervaluation of Liberal Arts Programs and overreliance upon Dickeson

Inspired by Dickeson, and likely led by CREDO - Bethel, Elon, LaSalle, Marquette, and Wartburg have all made enormous reductions to core programs¹¹. Cuts, consolidations, and entire program closures have resulted. These include foreign languages, Classics, Political Science, Performing Arts, Visual Art, and History. Sciences, especially Physics, have undergone significant cuts as well. Even athletic programs have been sizably cut in some cases, though they are often the pet project of administrations. Dickeson's quintiles overwhelmingly favor immediately measurable outcomes from STEM fields, and undervalues these disciplines significantly.

At Bethel, faculty memorably acknowledged the cuts by setting aside a single day to wear black¹². One professor stated "...it's pretty clear that any departmental track that automatically leads to some kind of career is where the money is going" Others acknowledged that years of strategic planning had

vulnerable to the academic prioritization process. Gutting Westminster, and other programs sure to fall under CREDO's scrutiny, is endemically damaging to all of the university.

⁹ <https://businessofficermagazine.org/features/a-matter-of-priorities/>

¹⁰ <https://www.inquirer.com/education/lasalle-university-colleen-hanycz-xavier-leave-president-20210111.html>

¹¹ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/10/29/wartburg-college-and-other-liberal-arts-institutions-make-drastic-cuts-challenging>

¹² <https://www.bethel.edu/news/articles/2019/december/positioning-bethel>

<https://bethelclarion.com/2018/09/20/many-community-members-upset-confused-about-program-cuts/>

<https://bethelclarion.com/2018/09/17/its-a-bleak-monday-for-faculty-and-staff/>

accomplished little in preserving the school's mission¹³. The current mission statement makes no mention of liberal arts as a focus.

In response to massive changes at Elon, one alumnus wrote, "*Over four years at Elon University, I had watched the institution abandon its cardinal principles, as it transitioned from a liberal arts college and into a professional training center.*"¹⁴ Prioritization touts and exemplifies immediate employment after school as an acceptable outcome. Elon continues to move resources toward pre-professional programs and expensive certificate programs that survive the prioritization abattoir.

Gary Daynes was identified as the person who will guide Rider's Academic Prioritization. His writing exhibits thoughts that seem in conflict with the best traditions of critical thought and inquiry, and these threaten to erode any credibility that the Dickeson prioritization model might attempt (unsuccessfully) to claim.

*"Colleges need more participation and less transparency. We often contrast transparency with secrecy and imagine that sharing more information makes the members of the institution stronger. That assumption is wrong as often as it is right. In an ecosystem or a religious community, it is participation not information that matters. Participation shares opportunity and accountability. It strengthens the bonds that connect people, and it forces them to avoid both apathy and dogmatism"*¹⁵.

Also of note, and similarly unpalatable, is Daynes' reflection on "*Why America needs more for-profit colleges*"¹⁶ Prioritization may be a useful tool for measuring outcomes, but as a singular rationale for sweeping change is wholly insufficient, dangerously short-sighted, and rife for fallacious misinterpretation and abuse¹⁷.

¹³ <https://bethelclarion.com/2018/02/07/bethel-enrollment-drop-causes-6-million-shortfall-salary-freezes-staff-cuts/>

¹⁴ <https://perell.com/essay/saving-the-liberal-arts/>

¹⁵ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-small-colleges-should-worry-more-fragility-than-gary-daynes/>

¹⁶ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-america-needs-more-fewer-for-profit-colleges-gary-daynes/>

¹⁷ The term McNamara fallacy was previously mentioned in installment one, and refers to the US Secretary of Defense during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. McNamara's data-driven leadership style, borrowed from the profit-driven business world, positively transformed many aspects of government and intelligence services. However, the over-reliance upon metrics to the exclusion of other considerations led to many errors in the Vietnam era – a fact repeatedly and openly acknowledged by McNamara in the years following his retirement from public work. Anecdotally, a general trying to convince McNamara that the Vietnam conflict was a futile endeavor noted the fierce commitment of the North Vietnamese Communists as a factor that must be considered. McNamara is reported to have said that if he couldn't assign a measurement to it, then it was of no importance.

Autocratic, secretive, and bloated administrative leadership¹⁸

CREDO encourages leadership to ‘lead through disruption’ and at their client-institutions seems to have fomented exactly that result¹⁹. In Pivot: Soliday & Lombardi emphasize “...we recognize that strong leaders question and disrupt the status quo in order to remain relevant and meet the needs of learners into the future.”²⁰ Like a politician rousing their base, administration may paint itself in a deified role in the same vein as ‘only I can fix it...’ This threatens to discount the faculty’s understanding of their disciplines within the context of society at large, and allows governance structures to be lightly cast aside, especially when autocratic leadership envisions itself brilliant or, worse yet, infallible.

Fortunately, Soliday and Lombardi suggest neither administrative omnipotence or omniscience when they write, “*In such a culture, failure is lauded as a learning exercise on the path to success...*” Thus, administrators implementing their poorly-advised decrees (or ones endorsed by rubber-stamp working groups after the fact) should feel absolved of responsibility or accountability - they merely should treat it as a learning experience. Administration need not feel ethically responsible when their ham-handed toying with people’s livelihood (students, faculty, and staff) results in institutionally-crippling failure.

CREDO clearly anticipates that client-administrators should expect resistance, and in the traditions of a boutique service, helpfully promises strategies to stymie resistant faculty, students, and community members. Note a few excerpted phrases from their promotional literature that are especially chilling.

“What if we strategically plan how to overcome resistance to change before it occurs?”²¹”

“Breaking down faculty barriers to innovation and risk-taking”²²”

“Abandoning the elusive goal of consensus allows for the creation of ongoing inclusive opportunities for engagement and the acceleration of new ideas that, through trial and error, can propel the mission and vision of the institution forward.”²³”

¹⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/stop-feeding-college-bureaucratic-bloat-11559507310>

¹⁹ <https://www.credohighered.com/blog/questions-metrics-for-college-university-boards-leading-through-disruption>

²⁰ We’re giving the authors the benefit of the doubt here, assuming that the relevance they mention has to do with the academy, not an administration that merely makes itself essential by forever embarking upon disruptive changes.

²¹ https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/1703627/Credohighered_April_2016_Folder/Images/Credo_Thriving_Institute_2016_FINAL.pdf?t=150844004167

²² https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.naccap.org/resource/collection/85F0A651-CE9F-4984-B58E-3C4F92785A82/Pivot_Presentation_-_Tim_Fuller.pdf

²³ <https://www.credohighered.com/blog/abandoning-consensus-and-reimagining-committees>

Note that CREDO's prose is about proactively subverting the thoughtful examination and keen analysis that the academy expects when faculty evaluate student work, engage in peer-review, and in our committee responsibilities. Instead, CREDO's vision for the 'new university' creates a sandbox for administrations to learn their craft as they go, free of the irritation of consensus-building or fear of consequence when their actions are damaging.

These attitudes permeate CREDO's client-institutions. At **Marquette University** leadership ignored procedures dictated in the faculty handbook, instead issuing decrees²⁴. In a mockery of shared-governance, work groups were charged with the task of prioritization (ostensibly guided by CREDO), but these groups were not given access to crucial financial documents necessary to make those assessments.

Incomplete documentation was only provided after repeated requests, and though imprecise, suggested egregious overspending on administrative salaries and expenses as well as a marked decline in instructional and student service spending. The faculty-led task force, further aided by an independent audit, cited data that strongly indicated a need for significantly curtailed administrative spending – not instructional costs. Ultimately this showed that students at Marquette spend more money paying for administration than they do for instruction²⁵. When students asked questions and raised objections, they were the target of harassment by administration^{26 27}.

In 2004, **Averett University** (another of CREDO's success stories) found itself alienated from its denominational heritage (and access to funding) when a religion professor penned an article supporting the Episcopal Church USA's ordination of an openly gay bishop²⁸. The denomination was further vexed by the presence of a student-led campus event at Averett held by the Gay/Straight alliance, and removed funding from the school the next year²⁹.

With the start of new executive leadership in 2008 a desire to restore the lost funding from the Baptist association was expressed, something the current leadership described as a 'pinnacle experience'³⁰. In 2011, the school reconciled with the BGAV (the Baptist General Association of Virginia) stating that "...changes had been made in the religion department and that the school is seeking a New

²⁴ <https://ourmarquette.net/files/FacultyCouncilopenletteronbehalfoffacultyDec32020.pdf>

²⁵ <https://marquetteaaup.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/draft-uas-resolution-for-discussion-120720.pdf>

²⁶ <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2020/12/09/troubles-at-marquette-university/>

²⁷ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/11/04/marquette-faces-student-and-faculty-pushback-planned-cuts>

²⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/05/08/feeling-the-wrath-of-va-baptists/cfe02522-82dd-49c1-9d01-9b32687c08aa/>

²⁹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/gay-pride-week-strains-ties-between-va-baptists-and-averett-university.html>

³⁰ <https://issuu.com/averett/docs/at2019web/s/10195339>

Testament professor who will become the department's head. ³¹” The professor responsible for writing the controversial editorial retired in the same year. Furthermore, Averett’s president stated that new policies with respect to student organizations were adopted, implying that no further demonstrations by students would be an issue. Religious authorities were further appeased when Averett University agreed to allow the BGAV’s control of three voting seats on the school’s board of trustees. The school no longer has a Gay/Straight Alliance³².

Rider’s community may already feel as though administration sees faculty (and shared governance) as obstructions to their larger vision, and that they’ve tried to ‘overcome resistance’ throughout their tenure. Are faculty and students merely to sit by while Administration engages in a ‘trial and error’ approach that has already done great damage to Rider’s reputation, mission, and future?

CREDO would further embolden an increasingly autocratic administration whose competence is in question, and provide them with further license to wreak havoc.

Other trends through institutional summary

Marian University – In the initial CREDO webinar Marian University was cited as an example of CREDO’s successful recent work. On May 27, 2020, Marian declared an ‘enrollment emergency’ slashing programs and suspending much of the faculty handbook³³.

Salem College was on probation by their regional accreditor, and is now pivoting to focus on “Health Leadership”. Funding for this pivot was found via an efficiencies process where faculty participation on committees was virtually nil - 1 out of 11 Academy Committee (Secondary Education); 2 out of 13 (College Committee)³⁴.

Wartburg University - Utilized the campus planning and architecture aspect of CREDO’s services in 2010, and continued using them for other campus design projects³⁵. In 2015, the college began dismantling aspects of their liberal arts curriculum - only to again use Credo for further construction projects in excess of 8 million dollars³⁶.

³¹ <https://baptistnews.com/article/virginia-baptists-to-consider-renewed-ties-with-averett-university/>

³² <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/12/01/controversy-shorter-over-faith-statements>

³³ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/coronavirus/catholic-colleges-ignored-faculty-handbook-provisions-layoffs-report-alleges>

³⁴ <https://www.salem.edu/#faq>
<https://thirdcentury.salem.edu/health-leadership/faq>
<https://thirdcentury.salem.edu/phase2>

³⁵ <https://www.credohighered.com/news/2010/11/29/work-begins-on-wartburg-college-campus>

³⁶ https://wfcourier.com/news/local/education/wartburg-breaks-ground-on-clinton-hall-renovation-project/article_b61d8885-b95f-50a2-a6f9-d6261461cde2.html

University of the Pacific - Saw an increased teaching load for faculty, and student-centered programs were drastically cut³⁷. Budgetary decisions that directly impacted instruction were made with little or no faculty input or notice, and handed down by decree. Even student-centered programs were not immune³⁸.

Conclusions

CREDO's skill set is deficient. Their core team lacks appropriate successful administrative leadership experience to meet the coming challenges we face as a university. Their traceable work with institutions they tout as successes in their own promotional material further erodes their credibility as practitioners of best practice.

The solutions that they offer, and for which we are surely paying a good deal of money, have already been tried out by the current administration – and to disastrous effect. Bad advice isn't better because you're paying an army of well-remunerated consultants to give it to you³⁹. A new "Path Forward" for Rider University is desperately needed. A path led by administration immune to neatly packaged, imprecise jargon and trendy corporate branding campaigns and gimmicks. We need fewer alliterative catchphrases and myopic corporate outcomes, and more commitment to the substance of academia and life-long inquiry and critical thought that transforms students, not just in their first job after college, but through their whole life.

Rider's future is wholly dependent upon an administration and cabinet willing to engage, trust, and defer to the expertise of faculty – who have a longer vision and vested interest in our students and school. Rider's students and alumni deserve leadership that will engage the issues we face honestly and boldly with vision, instead of resorting to a shell-game approach of new programs and vanity projects that distract from lackluster results and justify exorbitant salaries.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/10/29/wartburg-college-and-other-liberal-arts-institutions-make-drastic-cuts-challenging>

³⁷<https://www.pacificalumni.org/s/749/16/interior.aspx?sid=749&gid=1&pgid=252&cid=8617&cid=8617&ciid=37875&ccid=0>

³⁸ <https://www.pacific.edu/pacifican/opinion/spring-budget-cuts-target-student-centered-programs>

³⁹ Admittedly, the actual cost of things is hard to envision when one makes more in a single month than the cost of a year's worth of (pre-discounted) tuition, and one lives and rides on the institutional community's dime.