In 1789, the founding of Georgetown University marked the beginning of Catholic higher education in America. At that time, 15 of the 17 existing colleges in the country had denominational roots. Women’s education became a particular emphasis of Catholic higher education, and by 1936 there were more Catholic women’s colleges than women’s colleges of any other type in the nation.

Today, there are more than 260 Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States located in 40 states. They enroll nearly a million students, a 20% increase in enrollment in the last 15 years. While two-thirds of students at Catholic colleges and universities are undergraduates, 210 of the 260 schools award masters degrees. A third (88) of the schools award degrees at the doctoral level, 28 have law schools, 25 have engineering schools, and 25 have ties to medical programs.

And their role in women’s education continues. Indeed, women represent 62% of all students in Catholic colleges and universities, compared to 44% in other private four-year institutions. Nearly all of the recent growth in Catholic higher education is due to increased female enrollment.

Catholic colleges and universities also outperform the averages in terms of degree completion rates in four and six years. Nearly half of all students, and more than half of first time/full time students, complete their degrees in four years and nearly two-thirds in six years. More than 90% of entering freshmen at Catholic institutions receive some type of financial aid.

Endowments are a central challenge for Catholic colleges and universities. Half (53%) have endowments of less than $25 million. As costs rise, as well as the need for constant investment to maintain excellence in the face of rapid changes in educational methodologies, the need to strengthen endowments is a growing concern.

DIVERSITY IS ON THE RISE
In 1980, only 16% of students on Catholic campuses were minorities. Today, that number is 26%.

Catholic campus students are not necessarily Catholic. In fact, 42.5% of students are not, a portion that has been consistently rising.

On Catholic campuses 28.7% of students participate in study abroad programs, three times the national average, making Catholic campuses and their students some of the most broadly experienced in international issues in the world.
IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Catholic colleges and universities have very strong degree completion rates, implying a robust, successful cohort of alumni. The growth in professional and post-graduate programs also suggests advanced degrees with higher income earning capacity. This should lead to more successful fundraising among alumni.

Women’s wealth in the U.S. is growing markedly as women are awarded the majority of BA and advanced degrees. The trend will gather strength as these women enter into their highest earning years. Indeed, nearly half of individuals with $1.5 million or more in investable assets are women. In the 1970s, only 7% of married households had wives earning more than husbands. Today that portion is 38%. This phenomenon of women’s wealth accumulation can be seen even more strongly at Catholic higher education institutions whose female students represent a higher demographic concentration on campuses than at other colleges and universities. This is a huge asset base for Catholic higher education fundraising plans, and it argues for dedicated knowledge and strategy to engage women.

As in other areas of Catholic life, culture and diversity are increasingly important parts of fundraising strategy. For higher education, this also means approaches that reach non-Catholic alumni and families from diverse backgrounds. Diversity extends to global experience as well, with a need to relate fundraising to the global academic experiences of students whose worldview may be broader than at many other institutions.

Despite rapid growth and higher graduation rates, alumni from Catholic institutions are not giving at the same rate as alumni from other colleges and universities. Changing Our World created two samples from the Voluntary Support of Education data published by the Council for Aid to Education. One addresses Catholic baccalaureate institutions and one addresses Catholic masters institutions, for a total of 56 institutions. More than half of the baccalaureate institutions and more than half of the masters institutions fell below the national average for that group of schools as regards the percent of alumni donors relative to solicited alumni.
WHAT YOU CAN DO

The new norm is set by companies like Amazon that have trained consumers to expect their preferences to be known. Amazon serves its customers according to these known preferences, instantly and consistently. Advancement must also show that it knows its supporters or potential supporters. This means that Advancement must collaborate with all aspects of the university that touch students, alumni and constituents, so those insights inform the specifics of funding strategies and tactics.

**MAKE DATA DRIVEN DECISIONS**
Catholic school enrollment increases that exceed those of the nation, better performance in degree completion, and growing professional education argue for greater investments in fundraising on the part of Catholic colleges and universities. There is no reason that alumni giving rates at Catholic institutions should not be at or above national averages. There is no theory that would support performance below the mean. There is work to be done, and data should be harnessed to the task - data of all types and from multiple sources.

**FOCUS ON WOMEN & DIVERSITY**
The tailgate is no longer the dominant tool in the fundraising toolbox. Diversity argues for more nuanced approaches to students and alumni, and a particular focus on women. Not pink brochures, but a deeper understanding of the views, aspirations and preferences of women and diverse alumni, and fundraising strategy that is segmented to meet those views.

**EMBRACE COMPLEXITY**
Advancement must begin to develop a deep understanding of its constituents not when degrees are handed out, but at admissions. The entirety of a student’s experience will be embedded in his/her emotional connection with the school and will set the tone for advancement overtures decades hence. Therefore, advancement officers must work closely with all aspects of the student affairs staff to deeply understand how this newly diverse and female student population is experiencing the university and develop advancement strategy and tactics accordingly.

**BEGIN WITH ADMISSIONS**
Alumni views cannot be solicited simply because of a fundraising campaign on the horizon. Advancement must work with all aspects of the university conducting any and all student and alumni surveying to ensure that a continual flow of insights about knowledge, behaviors and attitudes flows into the advancement office. Advancement must be the “silo buster” within the university.

**COMPETE FOR LOYALTY**
One of the complexities of higher education, especially for BA and MA programs, is that successful alumni have multiple degrees from multiple institutions. That is particularly true in the context of Catholic colleges. In today’s economy, a BA is the equivalent of a high school degree 40 years ago. Alumni will go on for further degrees, and they may (probably will) do so other than at your school. Catholic higher education fundraisers will need to focus on primary loyalty, on how the first experience, not necessarily the last experience, has been foundational in a life of progress and success. In a world where multiple degrees are the rule not the exception, alma mater loyalty cannot be taken for granted at any point in the arc of change for an alumni. You are competing for that loyalty not only with other causes, but with other colleges and universities. Being prepared to compete constantly is critical to successful strategy.