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THE FUTURE OF CALLINGS—AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SUMMIT ON THE PUBLIC OBLIGATIONS OF PROFESSIONALS INTO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM:

REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE HELD
APRIL 24-25, 1998

Neil W. Hamilton†

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I. THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERDISCIPLINARY SUMMIT

In the summer of 1997, the leadership of the Minnesota State Bar Association formed a planning committee with members from a number of professions to organize an interdisciplinary summit of the professions.† West Publishing agreed to host the summit on

† Trustees Professor of Regulatory Policy, William Mitchell College of Law.
1. I would like to thank the following people for organizing the conference planning committee: Lucy Dalglish, Dorsey & Whitney; Fred de Sam Lazaro, KTCA-2 Television; John Forliti, St. Olaf Catholic Church; Jeffrey Keyes, Briggs &
April 24-25, 1998, and the William Mitchell Law Review agreed to publish a report and call to action as well as essays submitted by participants.

The planning committee adopted the following statement of purpose:

The professions have long traditions of responsibility and public service that have defined the disciplines. One manifestation has been the collective effort of the professions to promote the public good and to meet changing societal needs. A second manifestation is the measure of voluntary public service contributed by individuals within the professions.

“The Future of Callings” summit will bring together thought leaders in several professions to discuss the public duties of their professions, changing values, and changing reputations affecting their profession, and whether the time-honored traditions of collective and voluntary public service are a viable means to serve society in the future.

The invited participants come from the fields of law, medicine, nursing, dentistry, law enforcement, accounting, architecture, engineering, journalism, and the clergy from North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Missouri.

The ideas and energies of the interdisciplinary participants will form the basis of a report and a call to action. Participants will be challenged to carry the themes and conclusions to their states and professional groups to continue the dialogue.

Participants will examine the following questions:

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Morgan; Kathleen Meyerle, Mayo Clinic; Sheryl Ramstad Hvass, Rider Bennett Egan & Arundel; Sharon Reich, University of Minnesota Law School; Joy Rikala, University of Minnesota Police; Karen Tokarz, Director of Clinical Education; and Dean Trongard, Minnesota Court of Appeals.

I would also like to thank the following people who assisted in the conference. From The West Group: Tim Blevins, Linda Armstrong, Valerie Contreras, and Kim Woodwick. From the Minnesota State Bar Association: Tim Groshens, Denise Plachecki, Pat Everheart, Christine Sogard, Dick Ericson, and Joni Fenner.
“What are the public duties of your profession? What are examples of collective efforts of your profession to promote the public good? What are the expectations of your profession for voluntary public service of its members?

“What are the traditional values that have guided your profession? How have these been changed by regulations and by changing societal expectations?

“What new values are emerging in your profession? What steps does your profession need to take to meet its commitment to serve the public good?”

Participants in “The Future of Callings” heard from three principal speakers and attended both morning and afternoon small group breakout sessions designed for in-depth examination of the questions. This report and call to action is a summary of the major themes in both the speakers’ remarks and small group sessions. It is intentionally brief, not exhaustive, in the hope that the leadership of the professions might read it and commit themselves to continue both interdisciplinary dialogue and action.

II. MAJOR THEMES OF THE SPEAKERS

A. John Seigenthaler

John Seigenthaler is chair and founder of The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, founding editorial director of USA Today and Chair Emeritus of The Tennessean newspaper in Nashville. Mr. Seigenthaler’s major theme is that we live in a new age where skepticism has become cynicism, and all professions are seen as self-serving. The public believes that all professional groups are promoting their self-interest, not the public interest.

Seigenthaler believes “The Future of Callings” summit is essentially asking what we can do to respond to the deep public cynicism that is dragging all the professions down together. He proposes three courses of action. First, each profession must have confidence in itself and in the transcendental purpose that it serves in order to defend itself. This confidence has been shaken by public cynicism and must be rebuilt. Second, in order to combat the pub-
lic cynicism that all professional groups are promoting their self-interest, not the public interest, the professions must explain themselves. Seigenthaler sees little effort on the part of the professions to explain themselves to the public in terms of each professions' transcendental purpose. Third, Seigenthaler notes that "The Future of Callings" summit has national implications. He hopes the conference can start a national conversation and awakening on these issues.

B. William May

William May is currently the Maguire Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University. Before joining SMU he chaired the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University and served as a professor of Christian Ethics at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University. He has written extensively on the theological and philosophical meaning of the professions.

Professor May's remarks focus on recovering a sense of the professional's public obligation by examining the concept of "a profession" and then explaining how market forces, money specifically, affects the discharge of the public duties of a profession. May concurs with Seigenthaler that the professions face substantial public cynicism and distrust. The public cynicism and distrust give rise to the paradox that:

[W]hile professionals exercise great power and enjoy the vast material privileges of a ruling class, they are beleaguered rulers. They do not perceive of themselves as power wielders. They feel marginal, insufficiently appreciated, suspect, and harassed. 2

May concludes that:

Since professionals perceive themselves as marginal and beleaguered, they tend to obscure for themselves their public duties as rulers. Indeed, psychologically and morally, their public duties fade to a distant fifth on the list of their obligations—dis-

distinct from and lagging after their duties to clients; their responsibilities to the bureaucracies, firms, or corporations for which they increasingly work; their duties to their colleagues and guilds; and their private commitments to their careers and to their families who depend upon the flourishing of those careers. The obligations of the professional to the public seem at best remote, peripheral, and occasional. This weakened commitment to the public weal defects from the classical understanding of a vocation and a profession, diminishes morally the practitioners of the several professions, and fatefully impoverishes their service to the common good. They often wield public power for private purposes, a state of affairs, that Aristotle once characterized as the basic corruption of tyranny.3

Professor May urges the professions to recover their commitment to the common good and consequent public duties by probing what it means to be a professional. Being a professional has three dimensions: intellectual, moral and organizational. In the intellectual dimension, the professional must "profess" something, namely a body of knowledge directed to a specific area of human need. In the moral dimension, a professional places the knowledge at the service of the human need of the persons to be served.4 In the organizational dimension, a professional belongs to an identifiable group, not just for self-promotion but for self-improvement. The difference between the cattlemen's association and a professional association is that the major purposes of the latter are: (1) weeding out the incompetent or unethical, (2) increasing the quality of the profession; and (3) service to others.5 A professional as-

3. Id. at 27-28.
4. In his published essay, Professor May touches also on the historical roots of the meaning of a profession. See id. at 28-30. Historically, professionals took a religious vow claiming a public identity and promising to use the specialized knowledge for the common good. See id. at 33.
5. The state licenses professionals. The social compact is that in return for special privileges and standing, the professional group and each member must state publicly standards of excellence, conform to those standards individually and enforce them upon colleagues within the guild. See id. The public power granted to and wielded by professionals thus also has corresponding public duties. See id. at 33-34. Finally, Professor May emphasizes that the training a professional re-
pires to three virtues correlative with each of these three dimensions. The intellectual dimension points toward the correlative virtue of practical judgment and discernment in the application of the body of knowledge for the benefit of the person served. The moral dimension points toward the virtue of fidelity to the person to be served. The professional reins in self-interest for the betterment of the client. The organizational dimension calls for the correlative virtue of public spiritedness. The professional practices the art of acting in concert with others in producing and ensuring the quality of the service, and also in ensuring that the service reaches others.

Professor May then turns to how forces outside of the professions affect the discharge of the professions' public duties. He focuses on the impact of money on the professions. Money has a number of positive effects.

1. Money feeds.
3. Money is something of a marker of worth.
4. Money connects us with strangers. When a professional puts out a shingle, he or she is saying "I am available not just to friends but to strangers."
5. Money is ecumenical. It transcends the boundaries of nations.
6. Money talks to mobilize energy and open doors.
7. Money moves easily and facilitates rapid change to redesign the world.

Money also has a number of negative effects in a profession.

1. Up to the eighteenth century, humankind lived in smaller communities, but since that time, we increasingly live in societies of strangers where persons temporarily connect through cash transactions. Modern professionals are increasingly

ceives in a university is the result of the work of many generations. See id. at 34. This inescapably generates a sense of indebtedness to society. See id.
platoons of paid strangers. For example, litigation flourishes in a society of strangers who try to resolve disputes through money.

2. While the original understanding of a profession was both making an adequate living and more importantly answering a calling in pursuit of the public good, this has changed to a concept of a career in pursuit of money and private goals.

3. This emphasis on money corrupts and vulgarizes traditional understandings of profession and calling.
   b. Money corrupts the professional relationship to the person served. In a marketplace transaction, each tries to protect self-interest. In a professional relationship, the professional reins in self-interest for the betterment of the client. In a professional relationship, the professional is called on to meet the transformational, not just the transactional, needs of the client. Teaching is part of the professional’s service to his or her client. The professional is called to help the client discover the client’s best interests. To take lawyers for example, the emphasis on money distorts the lawyer’s duty of loyalty away from teaching and transformation toward an excessive zeal or zealotry to gain money for the client.

4. Money excludes. Only those who can pay are served. Inability to pay for essential professional services is cruel proof that a person does not belong.

Fundamentally, May urges that professionals recognize that money is a useful but unruly servant; professionals are paid for their work, but the work itself transcends the marketplace. Professionals must constantly attend to and renew their transcendental purpose of their work, or money will sweep the field to corrupt and
C. Stephen Carter


Professor Carter emphasizes the theme that the professions or guilds are an effective response to the problem of control of government power. The professions play a central role in monitoring the health of our democracy as democratic intermediaries, not controlled by government, to which people give strong allegiance. He urges the professions to celebrate and preserve a radical autonomy from the culture and the government.

Professor Carter observes that the question of how to prevent any government, including a democracy, from simply becoming totalitarian is an ancient and most difficult problem. Separation of powers and elections help, but as Alexis de Tocqueville noted, one of the things that makes America unique is the plentitude of associations, or as we now call them, democratic intermediaries. These are institutions not controlled by government, but possessing power because of the strength of the voluntary allegiance given by members. These democratic intermediaries weaken the power of government because the members are exposed to and often believe a different set of meanings than those the state proposes. The government will try ceaselessly to co-opt the various intermediary institutions around it. Carter argues that the professions are critical intermediary institutions that are guided by moral understandings distinct from the moral understandings that guide the state. For example, lawyers defend unpopular clients and cases from the state; journalists publish stories the public would rather not hear; clergy preach ideas that many Americans do not like.

Professor Carter urges that for the health of the polity, it ought to be one of the defining characteristics of each profession to pursue its autonomy, including a clear moral understanding of its pur-

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pose. Too many professions are losing a clear and autonomous moral understanding. In particular, Professor Carter emphasizes that materialism as a principle and money as a goal have polluted much of the several understandings of professions. Journalists and clergy for example, do not seek radical autonomy in expressing their views and truth, but are guided by what others think, what will sell or what will fill the seats. Lawyers do not seek to move the nation closer to the ideal of justice, but just to do what clients want and will pay for. Our democracy loses strength as consequence of breakdown in the intermediaries.

Professor Carter urges caution in seeking what the professions have in common. He urges the professions to focus on moral principles that give them the radical distinctiveness and autonomy that is needed in order to act as reliable and effective democratic intermediaries.

III. Major Themes from the Morning Breakout Session

A. What are the Public Duties of Your Profession?

The format for discussion was to divide the participants into four large breakout sessions with at least three professions represented in each breakout. Within each breakout session, smaller groups consisting of participants from one profession first considered the questions outlined in the purpose statement, and then reported back to the larger group for general discussion.

The conclusions of all of the small professional groups in the four breakout sessions show a striking overlap with each other and with the major themes of Professor May’s remarks. Each professional small group strongly agreed that there is a collective duty of the profession in the area of the profession’s responsibility to promote the public good. In Professor May’s words, the small groups strongly endorsed the moral dimension of a being a professional—a professional places his or her special knowledge at the service of the human need of the persons to be served. Each professional small group had a clear sense of both the transcendental purposes that the profession serves in society, and the duty of the profession as a collective group to provide leadership and service so that society can realize the transcendental purposes of the profession. For example, the lawyer groups strongly endorsed collective responsibility for justice, the justice system, and in particular for access to the justice system for those with limited means. Law enforcement
groups also strongly endorsed a collective responsibility to assure equal justice for all and public safety.

The health professionals focused on public duties to improve and to protect health and safety and in particular to protect the health and safety of the underserved. Journalists emphasized the duty to report thoroughly and accurately to inform the public in order for our democracy to function. Accountants similarly stressed thorough and accurate information in order for the economy and government to function. The clergy's public duties were to provide sanctuary for people to get in touch with their God; to create community in general; and in particular, to prepare and facilitate communities of faith to serve in the world; and to advocate for justice. Architects stressed commitment to art, safety, environmental responsibility and affordable housing. Engineers overlapped architects on environmental responsibility and safety. Engineers also emphasized invention and innovation to foster human progress.

B. How Do Forces Outside Your Profession Affect These Public Duties?

On the question, "how do forces outside your profession affect these public duties?," the conclusions of the small groups again showed a striking overlap with each other and with the major themes of John Seigenthaler, William May, and Stephen Carter. In agreement with a major theme of Professors May and Carter, the dominant theme of all the small groups, except for law enforcement, was that market and business pressures and values were the major force outside of the profession that affected the public duties of the profession. The market is undermining professional traditions and virtues, including professional obligations for the common good.

The small groups emphasized dramatic pressures to "bill more," "work harder," "speed up," "cut costs" and "show bottom-line results." Money increasingly defines the value or worth of a professional. Even the clergy, for example, cited increasing pressure to define success as "buildings, bodies, and bucks." Journalists noted that, at least for television media, the market has undermined the transcendental purpose of the profession. The mission is not the duty to report thorough and accurate information to the public but to secure high ratings. Architects thought that as cost pressures increase, the interest in architecture as art decreases.

These increasing market pressures undermine professional re-
relationships. For nearly all the professions, being a professional means being in a personal relationship with the person to be served. In nursing, for example, the central virtue of being present and compassionate for the person in need is undermined by cost pressures to speed up all procedures. For all professions, it also means fostering strong relationships with peers in professional associations to practice the art, in Professor May's terms, of acting in concert with others to ensure the quality of service and to ensure that the service reaches others. Increasing market pressures mean there is no time for these relationships. Many groups commented on the lack of any time or energy for volunteerism to fulfill the public duties of the profession.

Finally, the shift in the health care professions to corporate organizations and managed care makes health professionals employees with cost cutting and other pressures that undermine the traditional public duties of the health professions. May, in his remarks, emphasized that large hierarchical organizations will also threaten the health of a collegium and the tradition of peer review.

A number of small groups stressed another force outside the professions that affects the public duties of the professions: a growing narcissistic emphasis on “me” rather than the community, and an excessive emphasis on individualism and individual rights without attention to the correlative duties of citizens and professionals to their communities. Essentially every modern society has an elite, made up substantially of professionals; the question is whether the elite recognizes any sense that with privilege comes responsibility. It is one of the great and unintended consequences of the 1960s that its rejection of a perceived oppressive tradition and “judgmental” moralities and its celebration of tolerance as a supreme virtue were supposed to liberate the best in each human being. “You do your thing and I will do mine” metastasized into the “whatever culture.” Unfortunately, the revolution undermined the institutions of culture that temper and check with other values the vices of narcissism and greed. Along this same vein, the clergy groups noted that the marginalization of religion and spirituality as purely private matters, not to be honored in the public square, has played in a role in both undermining the elites’ sense of duty to the community and exaggerating individualism without attention to costs to community.

Several groups noted other forces outside the professions that affect the public duties of the professions. Increasing specialization
and dramatically increasing size of the professions mean less opportunity for the individual professional to practice what May calls "the art of acting in concert with others in producing and ensuring the quality of the service, and also in ensuring that the service reaches others." Finally, several groups concurred with Seigenthaler that widespread public and media cynicism toward the professions has undermined professionals' commitment to the public duties of the professions.

IV. MAJOR THEMES FROM THE AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSION

A. WHAT STEPS DOES YOUR PROFESSION NEED TO TAKE TO MEET ITS COMMITMENT TO SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD?

1. Nearly all the small groups focused on the socialization of graduate students in the professional schools, new entrants into the profession, and the continuing engagement of the experienced practitioner concerning the transcendental purposes and public obligations of the profession. Many groups emphasized the importance of mentoring and storytelling from one generation of profession to the newer generation as the way the ethical tradition of the profession is remembered. The overall theme was that the graduate schools and the organized professional associations must do more to make "calling" a part of professional culture.

Professor May noted that what we need is leadership on high aspiration for each profession. We need to move beyond the regulatory toward the inspirational. For example, in the socialization of graduate students and novices, or the engagement of experienced practitioners, is there permission or encouragement for those motivated by spiritual values or traditions to seek guidance there?

There were several specific proposals. First was to make available more opportunities for experienced professionals to engage in discussion with students and novices on the issues of this conference. In the legal profession, the Inns of Court are an example where senior, middle-level and entry-level professionals meet to reflect on what it means to be a professional. Second, a number of groups proposed that the professional associations and graduate schools identify criteria for public service of distinction and give

more recognition and honor to those who do voluntary work to serve the public good. Third was to make public service under a good mentor a curricular requirement in the graduate schools. A fourth proposal was that professional schools should select candidates who have a record of public service.

2. Many of the small groups, agreeing with Seigenthaler’s remarks, emphasized that the professions must do more to address public cynicism and the distrust of the professions. Each profession must explain itself so that the public understands the traditions and objectives of the profession and how the profession serves the public good. The question left open was “how can we follow up specifically with our organized professional associations to make this happen?”

Mickie Bebeau, University of Minnesota professor of Dentistry, pointed out that professional relationships with persons to be served are essentially dependency relationships. We have all been in dependent relationships as children and students, and we know that were there is dependency, there is the potential for hostility. Adults in a dependent role tend to suspect the motives of the professional. It is critical for the professional to educate and explain his or her role to the person served and to speak up when others engage in “profession bashing.” Professional associations should do much more to educate the public about the role of the professional in the community.

3. The graduate schools and the organized associations must focus on the excessive pressure to work and bill long hours. Employers must create time for professionals to fulfill their commitments to a relationship with the person served, to their families, and to their public service in the community.

B. What Steps Could All the Professions Take Together to Serve the Public Good?

1. A proposal on the socialization of graduate students that deserves special emphasis is to organize regular discussions among the professors who teach professional ethics at the graduate schools in our region. This group could do a great deal to promote interdisciplinary conversation so that we understand, support, and learn from each other.

2. A number of small groups recommended the formation of coalitions and strategic alliances among the professions in order to work collectively on critical societal issues like housing, profes-
sional services for the poor, violence and crime, or the crisis of the family. One group suggested a pilot project funded by the associations. Another suggested bringing the leadership of the professional associations and leading firms together to focus on the care and common good of the Twin Cities.

3. Several groups suggested more programs like this summit to bring together the professions for interdisciplinary education and discussion. A specific idea was to host another interdisciplinary summit in one year on the same issues of the public good, and to have each senior person bring one junior person with under five years experience.

4. Three groups focused on the role of spirituality in motivating professionals to work for the common good. One recommended having a theology professor teach in other graduate schools, particularly the law schools. Another group proposed that the congregations generate interfaith dialogue and action among professionals seeking the common good. Finally, a group suggested that the congregations sponsor small discussion groups with a mix of professionals to consider the moral issues of professional life.

V. CALL TO ACTION

This report will be distributed to several thousands of professionals beyond those who attended the April 24-25, 1998, summit. As reporter, I invite feedback from any professional regarding which of the proposals we should pursue. I am asking for more than your vote; I am asking for your commitment of time, energy, and resources to the projects you endorse. If even a small number commit ourselves to one or several projects, we can make a difference for the common good of this community. The professional associations and leading professional firms will support interdisciplinary efforts.

I would like to emphasize three ideas that have particular power for me personally.

First, I agree with Professor May that what the professions need is leadership on high aspiration. We need to move beyond the regulatory to the inspirational. My law students came to law school in the hope they can provide service and help to others, to add value to others' lives, to make a difference in their community. I am certain this is true in all the professions. The graduate students and novices in the professions look to the experienced profession-
als for inspirational leadership.

Second, in my ethics seminars for law students, I ask the students to write a personal ethic or credo focused on what is their life purpose as a person and professional? What kind of person and professional do they want to be? What defines their values or ethics? I have come to understand that for most adults, spirituality and religious tradition play the central role in defining the purpose of life, the morality of the individual, and the individual’s commitment to the common good. This is why the clergy played a critical role at this interdisciplinary summit and why I think they should play a significant role in our future direction. I believe that we must give permission and encouragement for graduate students and practicing professionals to explore and connect with their spiritual tradition in performing their work. The current socialization of professionals is disintegrating in the sense it disconnects the graduate student from his or her tradition.

Finally and closely related to my first two points, we must focus on the increasing monetization of value in our culture and what it is doing to the professions. As Professor May noted, professionals must recognize that money is a useful but unruly servant. A professional must make a living and self-sufficiency is an important virtue, but the work of a professional transcends the marketplace. Each profession’s work plays an essential role in defining who we are as a society and civilization. In a market economy, however, professionals must carefully attend to and renew their commitment to the transcendental purpose of the profession or money will sweep the field as the definer of value; it will corrupt and undermine the profession.

The question I ask my students to answer is in light of their life purpose, how much money is enough? Many professionals today seem to have no answer to either the question of life purpose or how much is enough. The time famine in professional life is driven by this unrestrained desire for more income and wealth. We have met the enemy and they is us. My generation of professionals, the baby-boom generation, has led the way toward the monetization of value in the professions and the time famine of professional life. The next generation, with our help, can lead us back toward renewed commitment to the common good and balanced professional lives.