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Opinion

Allen Mendenhall: New tool helps families find Christian colleges that are non-hostile to Christianity

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 07.26.25



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The American Reformer's [Center for Academic Faithfulness & Flourishing \(CAFF\)](#) – winner of a 2025 Heritage Foundation Innovation Prize – exists because someone finally had the guts to say what everyone knows but no one will admit: Christian higher education has been captured by the secular progressive forces it was supposed to resist.

This isn't some genteel disagreement about curriculum or campus athletics. It's a struggle for the soul of Christian learning. The left didn't politely request permission to transform Christian colleges into indoctrination centers. It didn't hold faculty senate meetings to debate whether biblical truth should be subordinated to intersectional theory. It simply [marched through the institutions](#) and now enjoys the commanding heights.

CAFF understands this reality. As Dr. Jesse Rine, the Center's Executive Director, explains, CAFF is "a nonprofit research center dedicated to strengthening authentically Christian higher education." The organization holds that "faith-based institutions are an indispensable component of the American system of higher education and thus should be preserved for future generations."

Its mission is threefold: to empower Christian colleges and universities to advance their faith-based missions, equip campus leaders with the resources necessary to flourish in our present age, and encourage broader support for these unique and valuable institutions.

While conservative intellectuals have spent decades writing elegant essays about the importance of liberal education and the Western tradition, the left has been busy seizing actual power: hiring committees, accreditation bodies, financial aid offices, and student life departments. The left captured institutions and implemented programs while conservatives labored over logic, philosophy and argumentation.

The Center's approach is refreshingly direct: equip campus leaders to fight back. Not to "engage in dialogue" or "build bridges" or any of the other euphemisms for surrender that have characterized conservative institutional strategy for the past half-century. To resist. The term explicitly recognizes the presence of adversarial forces that must be countered.

Consider what CAFF does: it strengthens governance structures, improves financial independence, and builds networks of opposition. In other words, it treats institutional capture as the serious threat it is and responds accordingly. It doesn't waste time lamenting the good old days or hoping that reasonable people will come to rational conclusions. It forces confrontation.

The college guide it publishes serves a crucial function: it tells parents the truth about what's happening at supposedly Christian institutions. Rine recognizes that "choosing a college is one of the most consequential decisions a young person will make," yet families are often frustrated by the difficulty of finding meaningful information about institutions that truly align with their values.

CAFF's response was comprehensive: its team "invested over 2,000 hours of research into developing a one-stop shop for understanding the Christian college market," Rine says. The result is a free, online directory of over 250 authentically Christian colleges and universities from across the country.

Unlike most guides that attempt to rate or score institutions, CAFF takes what Rine calls a "just the facts" approach, presenting "objectively measured, independently verified, comprehensive, and relevant information so that parents and prospective students can make their own value judgments." Users can learn not just the basics – acceptance rates, tuition costs, academic majors – but also crucial details about a school's faith tradition, campus policies, and spiritual life that "reveal a college's true character."

The Guide's power lies in its functionality: users can filter institutions by geographic region, theological tradition, average net price, acceptance rate, majors offered, and varsity sports, among other criteria,

empowering families to define what matters most to them and narrow their options accordingly.

For readers in Alabama, the Guide's relevance is particularly striking. As Rine notes, "Alabama is a culturally conservative state which boasts world-class public research institutions where people of faith can succeed." Yet many Alabamians seek "college options that explicitly affirm their Christian values."

The Guide profiles 44 Christian colleges and universities within a 300-mile radius of Birmingham alone. For those seeking "an undergraduate experience where classroom teaching is informed by Christian perspectives, spiritual development is intentionally encouraged, and classmates are seeking to live faithfully," Rine submits, the diversity of nearby options may come as a surprise.

Because here's the dirty little secret: many Christian colleges have become more hostile to traditional Christianity than their secular counterparts. At least secular universities don't pretend to share your values while systematically undermining them.

This is what effective conservatism looks like: clear-eyed about the nature of the opposition, committed to building institutional reformation, and unashamed about defending its principles. The only question is whether it's too late – whether there are enough people left who still believe that Christian education should be, alas, Christian.

Correction: The original article incorrectly stated that CAFF won the Heritage Foundation Academic Prize rather than the Innovation Prize. We regret the error.

Allen Mendenhall is a Senior Advisor for the Capital Markets Initiative at the Heritage Foundation. A lawyer with a Ph.D. in English from Auburn University, he has taught at multiple colleges and universities across Alabama and is the author or editor of nine books. Learn more at AllenMendenhall.com.

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And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."
Matthew 4:19

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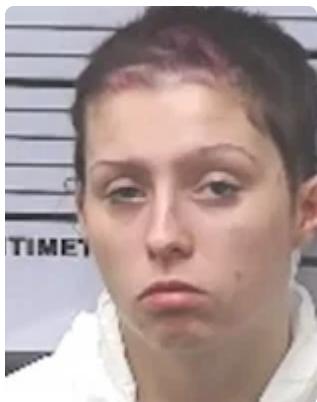
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