# Examining the Language of the Christian Business Academy

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**ABSTRACT:** The *Christian Business Academy Review* (*CBAR*) has now been in existence and published for eight years. This article examines the content and offers descriptive statistics regarding the mechanics of articles appearing within it. Comparisons to a secular counterpart are also included to ascertain how closely the two align and whether there is a need for this publication or not.

## INTRODUCTION

The *Christian Business Academy Review* (*CBAR*) is published by the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) and has published one volume in the spring of each year from 2006 through 2013. Its purpose is to promote Christian business education by publishing faith-based articles in a number of categories: creative instruction, curriculum development, professional issues, and research in business education. Per its mission statement, it "aims to publish manuscripts which add to the body of knowledge" while "The aim is to publish the combination of scholarly skills … [and] pedagogical exploration (new ways of teaching — or thinking about — the subjects and materials in which *CBAR* readers are most interested)."

Assuming that the content in the *CBAR* can serve as a bellwether of the academy's thoughts and dialogues, a question worth examining is what topics are being discussed through its pages and how closely do those topics align with those in other journals dedicated to similar purposes? By analyzing the content of the eight volumes that have been published, it may be possible to create a zeitgeist of what is important to the academy and to Christian business faculty as a whole.

## AREAS TO EXAMINE

In order to eliminate as much subjectivity from an assessment of the content as possible, it is necessary to define the criteria used for the examination. The variables chosen for the examination were: the frequency of words appearing in parts of the journal, the use of colons in titles, the number of authors, and the length of the titles. The basis for each of these criteria is discussed in the following sections.

### Frequency of Words

When writing about search engines, John Battelle (2005) discussed the knowledge that can come from looking at an aggregate of words and labeled it a "database of intentions." That aggregate can be the words used to perform a search, indicating what has become popular, but it could also be the words used in the titles and abstracts of articles. The author of any submitted article uses words designed to catch the attention of the reader, and the editor's job is to help to make sure the content is relevant to the "subjects and materials in which *CBAR* readers are most interested." By looking at an aggregate of the words used in those titles and abstracts, it should theoretically be possible to find those topics the academy is thinking about.

Substantiating this, Whissell (2012) looked at 12,313 titles from *American Psychologist* from 1946-2010 and found

trends that varied over the years. The differences included variations in words, connotations, punctuation, and other variables. These changes indicate that the titles do indeed represent gauges of topics popular and prevalent at the time of their writing and subsequent publication.

## Colonicity

Colons are commonly used with compound sentences, even though there are always other ways to word the phrase: use two sentences, dashes, or any of a number of other elements of punctuation. The colon, however, has become the de facto punctuation standard in titles. Ideally, the purpose is to make the title more informative; the first part of the title can be the subject heading and that following can provide details. Dillon (1981) was one of the first to study the use of colons in article titles and associated them with indicators of scholarship. His study of 30 journals in a number of fields found that 72 percent of the titles in scholarly journals used colons while only 13 percent of those in non-scholarly journals did. The colon, he asserted, is the "primary correlate of scholarship, evidenced in five regards: publishability, productivity, complexity of thought, distinction of endeavor, and progress of the enterprise" (p. 879).

Numerous studies have been published since Dillon without reporting such a high percentage of colon usage. Several studies have been done of different disciplines (Hartley, 2007) and found that the estimated percentage of titles with colons differs greatly based on discipline. The range is from 9 percent for engineering to 66 percent for music (Busch-Lauer, 2000), with business coming in at 33 percent (Fontanet, Posteguillo, Coll, & Palmer, 1997).

Michelson (1994) looked for a relationship between the use of colons and journal status, contending that the older the journal, the "higher its approximate status in the field." Looking at 2,216 titles from seven industrial relations journals, they found the rate of colon use at 38 percent and the status of the journal in which it was being published inversely related — the higher the number of titles with colons, the lower the journal's status. The implication is that the colons with titles could relate to the "desire for scholarship." Hartley (2007) found that the use of colons in titles had no effect upon citation rates, but "students and academics generally preferred titles with colons to titles without them."

Not only is the colon itself important, but position can also play a role. The "closer the colon is to the beginning of the title the more relevant it is likely to be" (Schwartz, 1995). The more relevant it is, the more it adds value to the title, and the more likely the article is to be read, and subsequently cited.

## Numericity

The number of authors contributing to an article can impact the title of the article in many ways. Schwartz (1995) found author numericity – the number of words in title as related to the number of authors – is correlated. Using the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* as his base, he found that articles written by one author tend to have eight-word titles, while those written by two authors average 10-word titles, and three authors average 13-word titles. When the number of authors increased to four, the trend reversed and the average dropped back down to 8.5-word titles. Further, a study of four scientific journals found a positive correlation between the number of authors and the number of words in the title (Kuch, 1978).

## Length of Titles

Similarly related to the number of words in the title, is the number of characters. Since it is important for the title to be informative enough to attract a reader, it is assumed that the longer the title, the more informative it is (Yitzhaki, Davis, Wilson, & 2001). When the number of words is small, but the number of characters large — implying the average number of characters per word is large — it can point to the use of industry jargon or large words that slow reading. Previous studies have found that award-winning articles are "more readable, as measured by indexes focusing on sentence and word length, than non-winning articles" (Sawyer, Laran, & Xu, 2008).

## METHODOLOGY

All eight volumes of the *Christian Business Academy Review* were elected for analysis. All articles that contain abstracts were analyzed, with the exception of book reviews and case studies (both of which automatically include elements such as colons in the title), and notes from the editor. What remained should represent the actual articles and discussions. This set of text was used for examining the most popular words and colon usage. When looking at other journals, commentaries and rejoinders were also excluded.

When abstracts were added to the data set to enable looking at the most popular words overall, those for case studies were also added in. As a general rule with case studies, their titles include little more than the name of the company, but their abstracts contain far more than just the name of the company and are written with words intended to appeal to the expected audience (members of the academy).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aggregating the article titles from the eight volumes of the *CBAR*, then breaking them into individual words, sorting, and counting each rendered the following ten most popular words within the titles (excluding prepositions such as "in," or "for," and articles such as "the" as well as "a/an"):

1. Business
2. Christian
3. Teach(ing)
4. Student(s)
5. Integration
6. College(s)
7. Faith
8. Management
9. Education
10. Faculty

As a comparison, the same study was done of the ten most popular title words during the same time period in the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. *AMLE* could be considered the secular equivalent of *CBAR* and is the official publication covering management learning and education by the Academy of Management. The audience for it "includes scholars, educators, program directors and deans at academic institutions, as well as practitioners in training and development and corporate education" (http://aom.org/amle/). Publishing quarterly, they published 326 articles (sub-tracting commentaries, rejoinders, book reviews, etc.) during the time period studied and the most popular words were:

1. Management
2. Education
3. Business
4. Learning
5. Introduction
6. Social
7. Research
8. Leadership
9. Academic
10. MBA

It is worth noting that the top three entries for *AMLE* also appear in the top ten for *CBAR*. What is surprising is that "learning" appears here while the word "teaching" replaces it in *CBAR*. Both are active verbs related to education, but they represent a very different angle of approaching the material. While learning is centered on self, teaching is focused on others.

While the most popular words can serve as a zeitgeist of topics, it is conceivable that titles may employ a prosody that includes puns and words that catch attention but don't really reflect the actual article content. To account for this, the words from every abstract from all eight volumes were added to the title and the same frequency study done. Whissell (1999) had looked at abstracts and titles as well and found them a better representation of the content than just

**Figure 1: A Word Cloud of the Thirty Most Frequently Appearing Words in *CBAR* Titles and Abstracts**
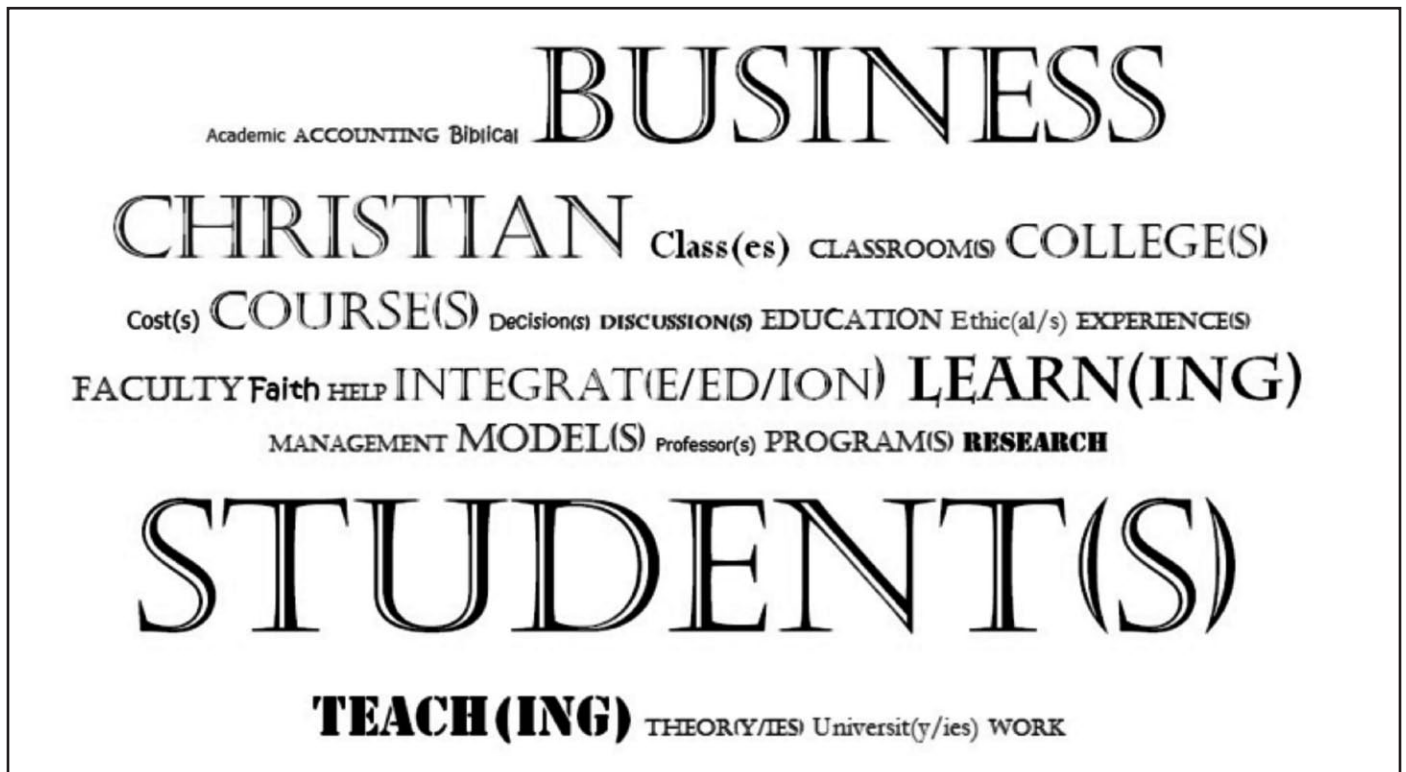
**Table 1: *CBAR* Article Title Averages Based on the Number of Authors**

| Number of Authors | Percentage Titles with Colons | Average Number Words | Average Number Characters |
|---|---|---|---|
| One | 45% | 11.55 | 82.8 |
| Two | 54% | 11.58 | 87.25 |
| Three or more | 71% | 10.57 | 80 |

**Table 2: *AMLE* Article Title Averages Based on the Number of Authors**

| Number of Authors | Percentage Titles with Colons | Average Number Words | Average Number Characters |
|---|---|---|---|
| One | 75% | 10 | 74 |
| Two | 56% | 10.67 | 77.4 |
| Three or more | 67% | 12.29 | 92.25 |

the titles. When this was done with the content appearing in *CBAR*, the word "student" became the most popular (which would often complement "teaching"), but "business" only moved to second place.

A word cloud was created using the frequency of each word as its representative font size (the more frequent the word, the larger the font and thus the larger the prominence). Figure 1 shows the word cloud visualization of the top thirty words appearing in *CBAR*.

The presence of the words "Biblical," "Christian," and "faith" in the top thirty — and their absence from a secular counterpart — points to the need for the existence of *CBAR* to provide a venue for exploration and one that is being met. While all other words could be found within the *AMLE* in the past eight years, none of these three appeared a single time.

Further comparisons of the differences between *CBAR* and *AMLE* found few. One notable exception is that — discounting case studies, commentaries, rejoinders, and letters from the editor — in *CBAR*, 66.7 percent of the articles are written by only one author, while with *AMLE*, that number is 37.5 percent. Less than 12 percent of the *CBAR* articles are written by three or more authors, while 32 percent of those in *AMLE* are written by three or more. This suggests that *CBAR* provides a more accessible venue for individual authors to voice their thoughts with the academy.

From a colonicity standpoint, studies of other journals have found that more single authors than multiple authors use colons (Hartley, 2007), but that is not the case with *CBAR*. Without factoring in case studies and book reviews (which automatically incorporate a colon in the title), the use of colons in the title is proportional to the number of authors of the article, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2 shows the same descriptive statistics for articles appearing in *AMLE*. As the number of authors increases, there is a clear pattern toward using more characters and more words in the title.

Lastly, Schwartz (1995) found the position of the colon to be as important as its usage and on average titles in *CBAR* utilizing colons did so 45 percent of the way through the title. By comparison, articles in *AMLE* did so 41 percent of the way through. The contention is that the title with the colon will stand out more and be more likely to be cited. Of the ten articles that have appeared in *CBAR* and then cited in subsequent volumes, five have included colons and five have not. Disproportionately, while 67 percent of the articles in the journal are written by a single author, only 30 percent of those cited were written by one author — perhaps identifying that those with multiple authors delve into more substantial topics and are thus likely to be referenced later on.

### CONCLUSION

The writing mechanics employed by *CBAR* closely resembles those of a similar journal in terms of colon usage and title structure. The topics are also similar with the exception of *CBAR* prominently incorporating discussions on issues that include "Biblical," "Christian," and "faith"; their absence from articles in a secular counterpart point to the need for *CBAR* and one that is being well met.

While it would be easy to discount the similarities and differences between articles in other journals and *CBAR* as trite, the trend is anything but. The fixation elsewhere with verbosity and attempts to sound academic could be keeping the academy from topics that might otherwise be voiced, studied and taught today. By making a conscious decision to focus on the issues not addressed elsewhere, *CBAR* is publishing content that stands apart from its counterparts.

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