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Value Identity of the Students of the Faculty of Pedagogy⁴

Abstract.

As the predecessor institution of the Faculty of Pedagogy at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the Reformed Teacher Training College of Nagykőrös has a long history rooted in centuries-old traditions and a distinct value system. At the time of its re-establishment, these traditions and values shaped the spirit of the curriculum and were emphasized in the Faculty's teaching, research, and third-mission activities.

Hungarian higher education, as all around the World, focuses on market-oriented values such as indicator-driven output ones, managerial view-based practical values, or practical usage of the degree. The literature states that these

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values have overcome the traditional values of higher education as the student population itself changes and looks for new and modern, practical face of the sector. Against the backdrop of the ever-changing student population and the emergence of global trends, key questions arise: to what extent traditional values are important for today's students, and whether value alignment influence their admission choice.

Keywords: higher education, teacher training, traditional values, indicator-driven values, admission decisions

Introduction

In the era of the knowledge-based society and economy, higher education frames its role within a tripartite system of responsibilities. Teaching, research, and the third mission are increasingly integrated in the strategic agendas of higher education institutions.

These institutional strategies not only reflect medium- and long-term development goals but also define the values associated with the expected outcomes. The long-term strategic and quality objectives outlined in the institution's mission statements represent the core values that the university seeks to uphold through its activities. Accordingly, teaching, research, and third-mission activities are shaped by this underlying value system.

Students engage most directly with the university's value system through educational activities. They also benefit from research integrated into the curriculum and may participate in research directly, particularly as PhD or DLA students. The most common form of student involvement in third mission activities is through internship programmes with corporate partners.

The primary aim of this research is to examine the alignment of students with the institutional values of the Faculty of Pedagogy of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (KRE PK). Accordingly, primary attention was given to the values reflected in educational activities. The presence of these values was examined based on the following key sources: the traditions of the University's legal predecessor, the Reformed Teacher Training College of Nagykőrös, and the University's mission statement.

As the legal predecessor institution of the Faculty of Pedagogy, education was initiated at the Reformed Teacher Training Institute of Nagykőrös in October 1839. The Institute, based on the traditions of Reformed education, was taken over by the state in 1948, and the final class graduated in 1952. Following the fall of the communist regime, education was re-established in October 1990. In 1993, the Reformed Teacher Training College of Nagykőrös became a founding faculty of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.

The Faculty, which currently operates in three locations in Hungary – Nagykőrös, Budapest, and Kecskemét – and in one outside Hungary, in Târgu-Mureş, Transylvania, has centuries-old traditions and values. At the time of its re-establishment in 1990, these traditions and values shaped the spirit of the curriculum and the life of the College. They are still considered a priority in teaching, research, and third-mission activities. The characteristics of the campuses, their different student populations, and the changing global values of the 21st century can all influence how the transmission of values is reflected in the curriculum or in the organization of education.

The aim of the study is to map students' value preferences at the Faculty of Pedagogy to compare their reflections on traditional and indicator-driven values. It assumes that students seek different values at each campus and base their admission choice on distinct value systems.

Role and Mission of the University

The mission statement, as the fundamental base of the institutional strategy, plays a key role in the process. In the mission statement, a university defines the strategic and quality goals to achieve by its operation. Identifying the goals, the university focuses on the mean of its own existence, and the values were defined by the founders. These long-term objectives serve as the foundation for medium-term strategic plans. Consequently, the value system articulated in the mission statement must be integrated into the institution's broader strategy. Defining medium-term strategic and quality goals, institutions must consider their current environment and try to react to emerging changes. This environment includes feedback from stakeholders, inputs from partners, current and expected social and labour market expectations, expected research trends, and the indicator system of the public-financing agreement itself, which provide financial stability.

Management structures and financing are becoming increasingly prominent in higher education. Maintainers expect transparent financial management along with the provision of high-quality education, research, and third-mission activities.⁵ At governance, model-shifting universities, public-financing agreements, and the introduction of a managerial perspective have brought new forms of performance management, which may result in discrepancies between organizational and individual goals. Students are primarily affected by indicators, related to the quality of teaching excellence and the number of students. Previous quality goals and related values may be compromised to retain the number of students. The latter one may also pose a risk to quality.⁶

Simultaneously, a “customer-oriented” attitude and market-oriented values became common in higher education, demonstrating that students prioritize the quality of education and a flexible learning environment. Among universities with similar values, those tend to emerge as winners in this competitive landscape that have an internal value culture for quick respond to market changes. In this environment, students seek values such as more flexible learning pathways and a more student-friendly and supportive educational atmosphere.⁷ Thus, universities have to adapt rapidly to market demands as a value, which also put student engagement into the focus. In response to the continuously changing external environment, universities aim to enhance students’ learning capabilities. These values may manifest in the commercialization of research efforts or the emphasis on project-based curricula. As a result, students are in the forefront, as their academic success increasingly depends on how well they can manage themselves within these projects. In this context, student engagement and identification with their institutions play an important role.⁸

⁵ DERÉNYI, András (2020): Az intézményi működési keretek átalakítási kísérletei a magyar felsőoktatásban. In: *Educatio*. 29, 1. 64–77. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2063.29.2020.1.5>.

⁶ KÁDÁR-CSOBOTH, Péter – KOVÁTS, Gergely (2023): A teljesítményfinanszírozás kihívásai a szervezeti és egyéni teljesítménymenedzsment-rendszerek kialakítására a modellváltó egyetemeken. In: *Educatio*. 32, 3. 470–485. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2063.32.2023.3.8>.

⁷ HEIDRICH, Balázs – JARJABKA, Ákos – KÁSA, Richárd – NÉMETH, Tamás (2022): Egyetemes értékek – piaci célok? A piacorientált szervezeti kultúra az átalakuló magyar felsőoktatásban. In: *Közgazdasági Szemle*. LXIX, December. 1507–1532. <https://doi.org/10.18414/ksz.2022.12.1507>.

⁸ KIRÁLY, Gábor (2019): A vállalkozó egyetem fogalmi tere. Elméleti keretek és gyakorlati kérdések. In: *Közgazdasági Szemle*. LXVI, November. 1187–1209. <https://doi.org/10.18414/ksz.2019.11.1187>.

As the values and missions of higher education institutions evolve, students play a significant role in shaping these changes. Fitting with the expectations of the knowledge-based society, universities must adopt problem-solving, service-oriented approaches.⁹ From the students' perspective, this is particularly evident in the practical realm such as the labour market value of a degree or the availability of flexible learning pathways. Therefore, the value system and activities of higher education are increasingly shaped by employability expectations and the evolving nature of knowledge.¹⁰ Universities operating within regional areas, however, emphasize their third-mission activities and prioritize knowledge transfer. Although regional innovation ecosystems do not directly impact a university's core values, a managerial perspective of the knowledge-based society is present within the value systems.¹¹

The market-oriented approach and the integration of entrepreneurial values within the university's framework provide the institution with a distinct competitive advantage. It can react quickly to external environmental changes, but it is also able to continuously provide content and an approach for the students making them successful in the labour market.

This management approach does not diminish the importance of research or third-mission activities. Supporting research with immediately practical applications, or strengthening knowledge transfer, is a respond to the needs of regional stakeholders and partners. These are just the same values that are also expectations towards higher education in the 21st-century environment. Within their organizational culture, these universities focus on performance and effectiveness, while traditional values, such as the training of intellectuals, are given less emphasis.

The transformation of the Hungarian higher education environment and the spread of the performance-based institutional financing model instead of the task-based one have strengthened this approach. There is a strong competition for students between

⁹ VEROSZTA, Zsuzsanna (2010): *Felsőoktatási értékek – hallgatói szemmel. A felsőoktatás küldetésére vonatkozó hallgatói értékstruktúrák feltárása*. Dissertation. Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, Szociológia Doktori Iskola. <https://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/506/>.

¹⁰ DERÉNYI, András (2010): A felsőoktatás és a foglalkoztathatóság kapcsolatának értelmezései. In: *Educatio*. XIX, 3. 361–369. <https://epa.oszk.hu/01500/01551/00053/pdf/667.pdf>.

¹¹ KÁLMÁN, Anikó (2019): A regionális ökoszisztéma és az egyetemek szerepe az innovációs folyamatban. In: *Iskolakultúra*. 29, 9. 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.14232/iskkult.2019.9.51>.

higher education institutions with similar values. Moreover, dropout indicators, student expectations, the development of the most flexible learning paths, and the emphasis on market-oriented knowledge, traditional values, and the intellectual-training character have become side issues.

Values Then and Now

Established in 1839, the Reformed Teacher Training Institute in Nagykőrös was grounded in Protestant theological principles.

The role of theology in university education is summarized in John Henry Newman's work. His book, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*, states that the higher education without the unity of theology and philosophy gives a distorted image of the universal knowledge. He argues that theology is not only a religious practice or devotion. Theology is an integrated part of science. As others, theology also creates a system of the discipline talking about God, humanity, and moral questions. He describes the structure and principles of education getting real knowledge by Christian revelation. For this reason, educational systems that deny theology as discipline and do not integrate into education cannot show the real knowledge. These systems limit education only to natural sciences, closing out the transcendent dimension of human life. He states that students of non-religion-based education lose their moral compass and have no knowledge about the final goal of human life.¹²

Newman's 19th-century arguments put theology into a central role. The founders of the Institute had the same considerations. Theology fundamentally shaped both the structure and the principles of education. József Zákány, former professor of the Institute, characterized education as the cultivation of the human being. He argued that the development of students' inherent abilities and the development of physical and mental abilities are equally important. The Institute emphasized the role of the intellect, the power of judgment, memory, and imagination, as well as moral and religious sensibilities,

¹² NEWMAN, John Henry (1873): *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*. In: Newman, John Henry: *Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics of Dublin*. London, Basil Montagu Pickering. (Reprint, e-book, 2008). Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24526/24526-pdf.pdf>.

as key manifestations of human talent. These elements strengthen the personalities of teacher candidate students.¹³ To this day, the character of talent development in Reformed schools continues to be shaped by these foundational principles. An accepting and supportive culture grounded in biblical values and reinforced by a strong sense of community belonging serves as the basis for fostering and realizing individual talent.¹⁴

The Institute paid special attention to the intellectual advancement of teacher candidates, the pedagogical and religious knowledge, cultivation of national consciousness, and the encouragement of patriotic sentiment. The training of future teachers was also characterized by a strong focus on discipline, moral exemplarity, helpful conduct, and community cohesion. The spirit of the Institution emphasized a sense of vocation, self-worth, fraternal love, active civic engagement, a commitment to justice and education, and respect for God. In the frame of religious and moral education, morning devotions, Bible study groups, Sunday school, and designated days of service also had a particular role. They served to cultivate religious sentiment, provide a forum for engaging with questions of public life, and promote formative educational influences. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Institute embodied a spirit dedicated to nurturing the highest potential of teacher candidates, demonstrating a conscious and committed approach to talent development. This commitment was reflected in activities such as self-study, participation in youth groups, and involvement in choral and orchestral events.¹⁵

Another dimension of the theological foundations was community building, which highlights the relationship and fellowship with God.¹⁶ Regular meetings and programmes

¹³ PAP, Ferenc – SZETÉY, Szabolcs – FEHÉR, Ágota – LEHOCZKY, Mária Magdolna (2022): A nagykovácsi református tanítóképzés a 19–20. században a tehetséggondozás tükrében. In: *Danubius Noster*. X, 4. 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.55072/DN.2022.4.207> (Last download: 04.11.2025).

¹⁴ FEHÉR, Ágota (2022): A „Lélek által való nemesedés” szolgálata. Református kollégiumok küldetése a tehetségek támogatásában. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 67, 2. 2013–230. <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbtref.67.2.10> (Last download: 04.11.2025).

¹⁵ PAP et al. 2022.

¹⁶ GORBAI, Gabriella Márta (2024): A vallás és spiritualitás mint védőfaktor a kolozsvári RTZK vallástanár szakos hallgatóinak mentális egészsége szempontjából. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 69, 11. 236–255 DOI: 10.24193/subbtref.69.11.12.

support the formation and sustained continuity of close-knit circles of friendship.¹⁷ Thus, the community itself also played an important role in the life of the School. The strength of the community contributed significantly to the positive development of students' character and self-concept. Ferenc Osváth, former teacher at the Institute, declared the goal of education of future teachers as being an educator, a servant of the Church, and a member of the society.¹⁸ These are all about preparing students for community life, as education or church service are activities within and for a community. Moreover, education in community life cannot exist without a living community.

As Áron Hegymegi Kiss, former director of the Institute said, "getting used to joining forces"¹⁹ had a strong influence on the moral and social formation of young people. The close professional relationship between instructors and teacher candidates and the continuous monitoring of student progress reinforced a strong sense of community, commitment, and intrinsic motivation.²⁰

Memoirs of former students describes teacher–student relation as teachers "considered teacher candidates as their colleagues".²¹ Older students and the teachers served as examples for the younger students. Setting an example can be found among teachers' duties, just as students' intellectual and moral education.²² As Osváth states,

¹⁷ SIBA, Balázs (2023): A barátságkaraván jelensége és jelentősége az életben. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 68, 11. 263–282
DOI: 10.24193/subbtref.68.11.16.

¹⁸ OSVÁTH, Ferenc (2021). *A nagykőrösi református tanítóképző-intézet története. Első rész: Az intézet megalapításától a világháborúig (1839–1914)*. Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Kar. 168.

¹⁹ PAP et al. 2022, 218.

²⁰ PAP, Ferenc – SZETEY Szabolcs – FEHÉR Ágota (2022): A keresztyén pedagógus szerepe a hagyományok közvetítésében a nagykőrösi tanítóképzés történetének alapjaiban. In: *Katedra: A szlovákiai magyar pedagógusok és szülők lapja (Dunajská Streda)*. XXX, 2. 18–20.

²¹ SERI, András (1982a): Az intézet történetének rövid összefoglalása. In: Hegedűs, Károly (ed.): *Szemelvények a Nagykőrösi és Dunamelléki Református Tanítóképző Intézet életéből*. Nagykőrös, Self-Publishing. 27.

²² OSVÁTH 2021, 96.

“the lack of written rules was compensated by the personal influence of the director and the teachers on the students”.²³

Béla Juhász, former leader of education at the Institution, claimed that teachers’ “interaction with students is the most significant factor in students’ development”.²⁴ And the teacher community must form a working community together with the students.²⁵ This is the “close relationship” that became the core of the system as Osváth describes in his work on the history of the Institution.²⁶

Nothing could show the power of the community better than the participation of former students in the opening ceremony of the Institute’s reestablishment in 1990.²⁷

The Reformed Christian Education and Teacher Training College of Nagykőrös and the Danubian Church District was re-established in October 1990. In 1993, the institution was incorporated as the Teacher Training College of the newly established Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The intellectual and value unity is also emphasized in the preamble of the University’s mission statement. The mission statement defines “universal Christian moral and spiritual values in the spirit of the biblical Word” as the primary educational goal.²⁸

The values embodied by the former Institute and confirmed in the University’s mission statement continue to shape the life of the Faculty of Pedagogy today. The Faculty places particular emphasis on talent management and conducts both non-religious and religious programmes. Non-religious ones are bachelor’s teacher training degree programmes, postgraduate and master’s programmes for teachers, as well as a BA programme in community organization. Religious education includes Christian Education,

²³ Op. cit. 167 [All translations of originally non-English texts/quotations are mine throughout the article unless otherwise stated.].

²⁴ SERI, András (1982b): Dr. Juhász Béla a neveléstudományok tanára. In: Hegedűs, Károly (ed.): *Szemelvények a Nagykőrösi és Dunamelléki Református Tanítóképző Intézet életéből*. Nagykőrös, Self-Publishing. 62.

²⁵ Op. cit. 67.

²⁶ OSVÁTH 2021, 170.

²⁷ Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Pedagógiai Kar (n. d.): *A nagykőrösi Tanítóképző Főiskola rövid története*. <https://pk.kre.hu/index.php/karunkrol/torteneti-attekintes>.

²⁸ *Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Küldetésnyilatkozata*. <https://portal.kre.hu/index.php/home/kuldetesnyilatkozat.html>.

Cantor and Reformed Community Organization programmes at the bachelor's level. Religious and non-religious programmes coexist in Nagykőrös, which forms a student community between the different programmes. In Budapest and Kecskemét, only non-religious programmes are available, but their educational content also includes ecclesiastical subjects in the same way as the non-religious programmes in Nagykőrös.²⁹ In the content development of these programmes, it is a key aspect that ecclesiastical subjects do not exist in isolation. Their elements are systematically built up in the internal content of the subject groups, connecting non-religious and religious contents. Thus, the ethical, value-oriented elements such as the Christian identity and Protestant theology appear in the internal contents of these programmes.³⁰ The methods used in the delivery of content are adapted to the characteristics of lectures with a larger number of students, and seminars and professional practices with a smaller number of participants. Due to the special terms of Hungarian higher education, the participants of part-time programmes make up two-thirds of the students of the Faculty, so full-time is carried out in smaller groups.³¹ However, the curriculum of part-time programmes also includes seminars with a smaller number of participants, providing an opportunity for deeper competence development. Due to institutional traditions of developing skills and communities, the Faculty focuses on the role of teaching in smaller groups. The direct and intensive relationship between the teacher and the student makes the transfer of professional content and development smoother, which also creates the basis for talent management.

The Faculty is based on the triad of religious life, talent management, and community building, just like the former Institute. However, in the case of value determination, the Faculty and the University itself cannot ignore the managerial approach required in the 21st century, which focuses on competitive knowledge that can be applied immediately in

²⁹ Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Pedagógiai Kar (2025): *Képzéseink*. <https://pk.kre.hu/index.php/oktatas-informaciok/kepzesek>.

³⁰ Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Pedagógiai Kar (2024): *Tanulmányi tájékoztató 2024/2025. Képzések, mintatantervek*. https://portal.kre.hu/tajekoztato_kiadvany2024/pk/content/kepzesek.php.

³¹ Oktatási Hivatal (n. d.): *Felsőoktatási statisztikák. 2.2. A hallgatók statisztikai száma fenntartó típusonként, intézményenként, karonként, képzési helyenként, munkarendek és képzési szintek szerint*. <https://dari.oktatas.hu/firstat.index>.

practice. This kind of profile is the true nature of the Faculty's training programmes. In these programmes, all students prepare for a practice-oriented career, so practical subjects and professional trainings are organized together with partner institutions. Incorporating these into the curriculum results in that fresh graduates will be able to apply immediately their knowledge in the labour market. However, in the case of teacher training, this is not a 21st-century value or a management approach but a centuries-old tradition of teacher and religious education itself. Nonetheless, several of the management-oriented elements appear as new values in the external communication of the Faculty and the University. The Faculty exists in a competitive environment. To make it attractive, the Faculty mixes traditional and new, competitive values.

Values in the External Communication

Due to the rise of digital culture and diverse student populations, communication strategies of higher education institutions have significantly changed over the past decade. Future and current students, and even the alumni community, are accessible online, urging universities to maintain an active presence on social media platforms. Social media plays a central role in dissemination and a more active, faster, and more direct communication. Today, it has become an integral part of the student experience. At Károli Gáspár Reformed University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (KRE), this evolution is evident in the slogans, visual messages, and campaign communications. Nonetheless, the question is that to what extent previous values appear in current university communication, especially in social media platforms and student feedback.

Between 2015 and 2023, KRE used the slogan “*KRE*áld a jövőd!” ‘Create your future!’,³² as documented in the university's previous branding manual.³³ This slogan aimed to encourage students to take an active role in shaping their own futures. In 2023, both the University's visual identity and slogan were revised, and the motto “Minőség.

³² ORBÁN, Endre (2015): *KRE*áld a jövőd! – Bemutatkozik a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem. In: *Ars Boni*. III, 1. 43–45.

https://epa.oszk.hu/02700/02769/00006/pdf/EPA02769_ArsBoni_2015_1.pdf.

³³ Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem (2015): *Arculati kézikönyv*.

http://www.kre.hu/portal/images/doc/KRE_corporate_design.pdf.

Közösség. Károli” ‘Quality. Community. Károli’ was introduced.³⁴ It seeks to reflect the University’s values and objectives. It also emphasizes the University’s commitment to high-quality education and supportive community. The two slogans represent distinct communicative approaches: the former is more individual-centred, while the latter is community-centred. Both communicate the feeling that the University provides supportive, quality environment for its students.

In the original image and aspect of the University, traditional values such as talent management, Christian spirituality, community experience, and even practice-oriented education have not completely disappeared from the current communications, as now these appear in an integrated form together with new elements. At the same time, the communication of values frequently emerges in a fragmented and inconsistent manner. The University’s current character is shaped by a youthful and open spirit, a unique scholarship system, international mobility opportunities (such as the Erasmus+ programme), and its wide range of sports facilities.

Table 1 clearly shows that the slogans and catchphrases used on social media platforms, i.e. Facebook,³⁵ Instagram,³⁶ TikTok,³⁷ and YouTube,³⁸ differ from each other. TikTok primarily communicates the University’s sporty, youthful, and community-focused side. Most videos are based on trends and often use slang, which may be attention grabbing for the target audience but is not necessarily related to the University’s traditional values. The following catchphrases are emphasized on TikTok: sporty university, youthful community, community experience, and outstanding scholarships. On the contrary, Instagram and Facebook posts represent a more refined communication of values, as these platforms focus on talent management, quality education, and scholarship opportunities.

³⁴ Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem (2023): *Arculati kézikönyv*.

http://www.kre.hu/portal/images/KRE_corporate_design_2023.pdf.

³⁵ Facebook page of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. <https://www.facebook.com/karoli.gaspar.reformatus.egyetem>.

³⁶ Instagram page of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. <https://www.instagram.com/karoliegyetem/>.

³⁷ TikTok page of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. <https://www.tiktok.com/@uni.karoli>.

³⁸ YouTube channel of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyBDRfDQ8AU6_fQSClgiOTA.

These posts are more consistent visually and use a more formal tone. The YouTube platform mainly features longer, more structured videos. These include graduation ceremonies, lectures, presentations, and promotional videos.

Table 1. *Online platforms of the University*

	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube
Followers	18,535	4,825	9,127	5,170
Content updates	daily, every other day	daily	weekly	monthly, bi-monthly
Interaction	like, share, comment	♥, share	♥, comment	like, views
Target audience	future and present students, alumni	future and present students	future and present students	stakeholders
Goal	information, result communication, promotion	information, result communication, promotion	raising awareness, promotion, entertainment (information)	dissemination, reviewing/listening events
Tone	official	formal, direct	youthful, slang	formal
Style	modern, informative, structured, up-to-date	postmodern, structured, informative, simple	postmodern, spontaneous, diverse	professional, value-conveying, diverse

The differences between the faculties are particularly striking, as the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Law are much more active in central communication. Compared to them, the Faculty of Pedagogy has a minimal presence; it is rarely mentioned in central posts. Among the values conveyed by the individual faculties, talent management and a family-like atmosphere stand out at the Faculty of Pedagogy, while the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences emphasizes values such as sports, openness, and international mobility. The Faculty of Law offers competitive knowledge and practical, high-quality education. The Faculty of Economics, Health

Sciences, and Social Studies highlights a supportive community and a sporty environment, while the Faculty of Theology emphasizes Christian spirituality and the importance of outstanding scholarships.

New campaigns are visually consistent, with a modern and easily recognizable design. Messages such as “Get lifetime experiences at Károli” fit well with the values of Generation Z. The podcast series, Educatio videos, and some TikTok content show a significant shift towards more authentic, experiential communication.

Value-centred communication remains an element of the current communication strategy at KRE, but it is not always clear. While traditional values are often retained at a formal level, their effective implementation and targeted communication towards student audiences appear inconsistent across various domains. The formation of student identity is significantly influenced by the messages conveyed before, during, and after studies. A discrepancy between the slogans and the actual student experience could damage the institution’s image in the long run.

Overall, the University’s current central slogan – “Quality. Community. Károli” – represents a stable positioning. To this end, communication on faculties, differentiation of online presence, and consistent use of value-based narratives are essential. Students seek not only information but also authentic connection and meaningful value communication. When these elements are successfully integrated, the slogan will become not just a message but an experience.

Methods

Our question was how our students reflect on the new, “competitive university” and the traditional Institute values.

In May 2025, students from the Nagykörrös, Budapest, and Kecskemét campuses were surveyed regarding their value preferences. A total of 194 students completed the questionnaire. The proportion of responses from each location corresponds to the student population ratio at the Nagykörrös site, exceeds it in Kecskemét, and falls below it in Budapest (see *Figure 1*).

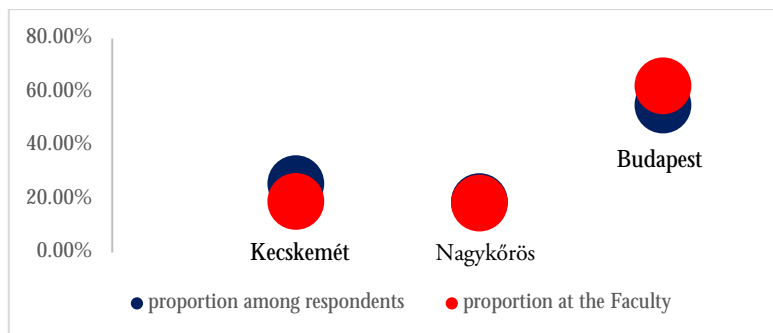


Figure 1. *Proportion of respondents and students by campuses*

The questionnaire explored the influence of values on students' admission choices (input) and assessed how students experience the presence of these values in both the classroom and broader university life (mid-box). The questionnaire used ranking and rating questions to map preferences. Present students were asked to what extent the values communicated to stakeholders are present in their everyday university experience and which values influenced their decision to choose KRE PK over other higher education institutions. The religious character of the University was addressed as a separate input variable, given its significant role in shaping both the educational content and the spirit of the Faculty. Accordingly, it was included as a key dimension of the values embedded in everyday university experience.

The answers were separated by the training location of the respondents to explain the difference between the admission choices and everyday experiences of the students at different campuses.

Results

The role of religious identity in institutional choice appears to be relatively limited among applicants. A division by campuses shows that religious values were most influential in Nagykőrös (3.28/5.00), followed by Budapest (3.04/5.00), and to a lesser extent in Kecskemét (2.84/5.00). The variability of responses within each group was moderate ($NK\sigma = 1.44$; $BP\sigma = 1.65$; $KE\sigma = 1.39$), indicating a diverse range of opinions regarding the impact of the institution's religious character on admission choice (see *Figure 2*).

In contrast, students reported a stronger perception of religious values in everyday university life than during the admissions process. The same ordering was observed across locations: students in Nagykovács perceived the strongest presence of religious values in daily university life (4.28/5.00), followed by those in Budapest (4.06/5.00) and Kecskemét (3.95/5.00). Standard deviations were relatively low across all three groups ($NK\sigma = 0.87$; $BP\sigma = 0.91$; $KE\sigma = 0.96$), suggesting a higher level of agreement among respondents regarding the integration of religious values into the university's day-to-day environment.

These findings raise important questions regarding the influence of religious identity on student retention. Many students did not consider religious values a primary motivation for applying to the Faculty. Thus, students were asked whether they would choose the Faculty again. Interestingly, the pattern of responses reversed: students in Budapest and Kecskemét assigned the highest likelihood (4.49/5.00), while those in Nagykovács reported slightly lower though still high levels of reaffirmed choice (4.38/5.00). Standard deviations remained low ($NK\sigma = 1.15$; $BP\sigma = 1.11$; $KE\sigma = 0.98$), indicating a general consensus in favour of the institution across all campuses.

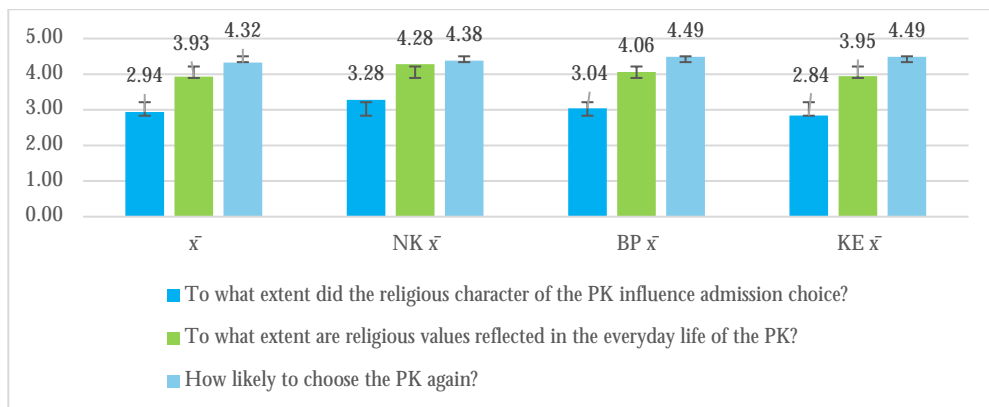


Figure 2. *Importance of religious values in admission choice and university life (average)*

The findings indicate that the integration of religious values within the curriculum and everyday university life does not generate negative or adverse reactions among students. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority express a willingness to choose the Faculty of Pedagogy (PK) again.

When the inquiry is approached not directly from the perspective of religious values but rather through the values preserved as a legacy of the predecessor institutions of the Faculty, a similar pattern of results emerges (*Figure 3*).

Besides religious content of education and spirituality, we asked students to rank values that influenced their choice. Among the seven values to be ranked were those represented by the Nagykovács Teacher Training Institute, such as quality education, family-like atmosphere, supportive community, and talent management, as well as those that appear as new, indicator-driven elements in the University's external communication, such as youthful, open university, sports and scholarship opportunities.

Quality education was the primary factor influencing students' choice across all three campuses, followed by the presence of a supportive community. While the supportive community received comparatively lower ratings from students at Kecskemét, it ranked second at both Nagykovács and Budapest. The family-like atmosphere was consistently ranked third across all three campuses. Notably, talent management was more highly valued by students at Kecskemét, whereas those in Budapest and Nagykovács generally placed it lower in their priorities. Scholarship opportunities, along with the University's youthful and open character, were relatively more important to students in Budapest and Nagykovács. Conversely, the availability of sports facilities was consistently ranked as the least significant factor at all locations.

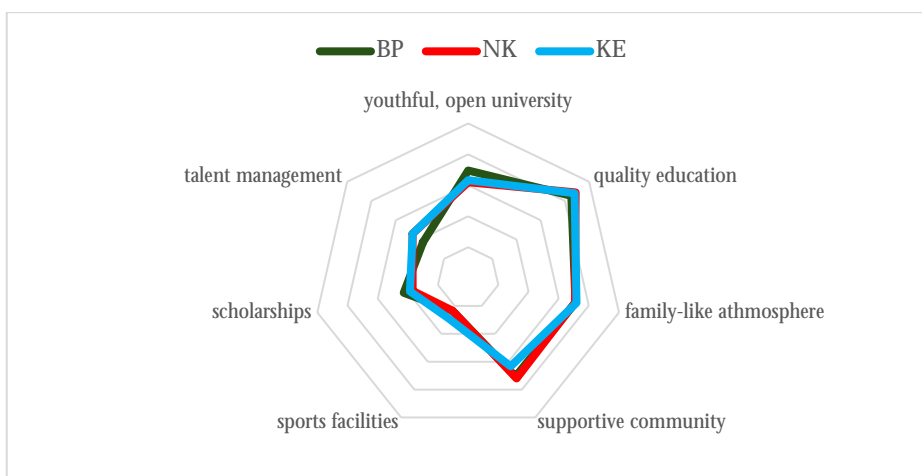


Figure 3. *Importance of values at the time of admission choice (%)*

Beyond motivations for institutional choice, we also surveyed the extent to which the identified values are reflected in their everyday university experience. Specifically, we examined how well the university meets their expectations, aspirations, and self-defined priorities. In this context, the previously separated religious aspect was integrated into the broader set of values, allowing respondents to select multiple elements. We analysed the proportion of respondents at each campus who mentioned each specific value (100% indicating that all respondents at that campus identified the given value) (*Figure 4*).

At this stage, differences between the individual campuses became more obvious. Compared to the initial decision-making factors, the value of a family-like atmosphere gained greater importance, surpassing the previously top-ranked high-quality education. In Nagykovács, the most frequently mentioned values were the institution's religious character (82.00%), the family-like atmosphere (78.00%), and the quality of education (72.00%). Additionally, the supportive community also exceeded the 50% threshold (68.00%), indicating that more than half of the respondents perceived this value as present in the everyday life of the Faculty of Pedagogy.

In Budapest, students most frequently selected the family-like atmosphere (78.50%), the supportive community (64.49%), and quality education (56.07%). The religious character (52.34%) and the youthful, open university environment (50.47%) also received mentions from more than half of the respondents.

In Kecskemét, high-quality education was the most widely perceived value in daily university life (72.97%), followed by the family-like atmosphere (62.16%) and the religious character (59.46%). The youthful, open university (56.76%) and the supportive community (54.05%) were also identified by most respondents as relevant values.

In response to this question, participants more strongly affirmed the differentiated messaging associated with each campus. Specifically, respondents at Nagykovács highlighted the integration of religious and non-religious education, while those at the Budapest and Kecskemét campuses emphasized the family-like atmosphere. Notably, talent management – despite being a central topic in institutional-level marketing campaigns – did not appear as a relevant or influential factor in either students' admission choice or their everyday university life.

Among the key values associated with the former Nagykovács Teacher Training Institute like religious character, quality education, talent management, supportive community, and family-like atmosphere, only talent management failed to appear in the top three choices at any of the campuses. Furthermore, values associated with a newer, indicator-driven managerial approach did not rank among the top three at any site. The “youthful, open university” value exceeded 50% only in Kecskemét and Budapest.

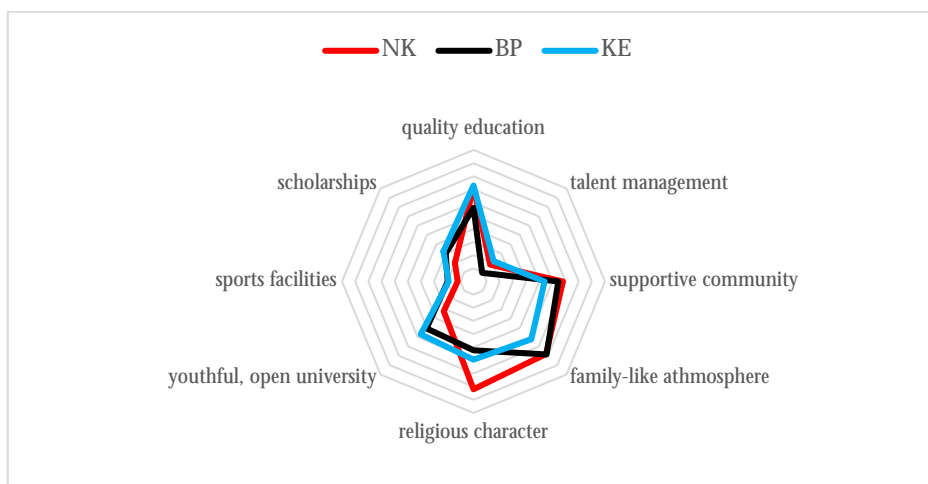


Figure 4. *Importance of values in everyday university life (%)*

However, it is also useful to examine the responses to this question from another perspective. What do those say who were less influenced or remained neutral regarding the religious character of the Faculty in their institutional choice?

Among the students in Nagykovács, the religious character of the institution was the most defining factor in their admission choice. 46.00% of the respondents rated this aspect at 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. In Budapest, this figure was 44.86%, while in Kecskemét it was 32.43%. This indicates that the religious character of the University was the least likely to be a significant factor in the students' choice in Kecskemét (*Figure 5*).

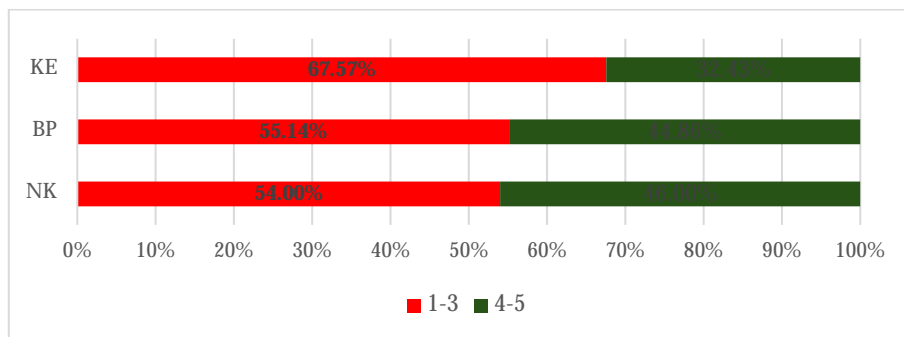


Figure 5. *Importance of religious character at the time of admission choice*

Among those for whom the religious character had little or no influence on their choice (i.e. those who rated it 1–3 on the 5-point scale), the question arises as to whether they were more likely to perceive values associated with an indicator-based approach or those characteristic of the Nagykőrös Institute in their everyday experience.

At all three campuses, only the family-like atmosphere and quality education appeared in the top three most frequently mentioned values for all respondents in this category. The family-like atmosphere ranked first at all locations. In Kecskemét, quality education received the same proportion of mentions as the family-like atmosphere (68–68%), resulting in a tie for the top position. In Nagykőrös, 85.19% of the respondents mentioned it, in Budapest 74.58%. The second position in Nagykőrös was taken by the religious character (77.78%), while in Budapest quality education and supportive community shared second place (59.32%). In Kecskemét, the “youthful, open university” was ranked second. In Nagykőrös, quality education and the supportive community were also tied (66.67%) at the third place, while in Budapest the “youthful, open university” received just over 50% of mentions (50.85%). In Kecskemét, the religious character (52.00%) made it to the top three. Beyond these values, none received more than 50% of mentions (*Figure 6*).

Thus, those who did not choose the Faculty for its religious character placed the same values in the top positions as the overall group of students in Nagykőrös. In Budapest, the top rankings remained unchanged. However, in Kecskemét, the supportive community was no longer among the values mentioned by at least 50% of the respondents, indicating a deviation from the typical characteristics of the campus.

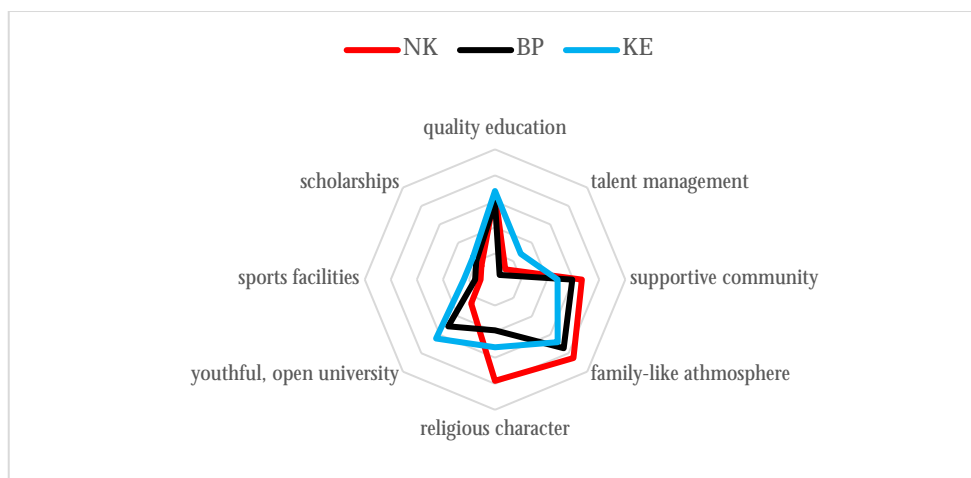


Figure 6. Value ranking if religious character had little or no influence on admission choice (%)

How do those significantly or fairly influenced by the religious character of the institution (i.e. those who rated it 4 or 5 on a 1–5 scale) think about the university (Figure 7)? Among those who chose the Faculty for its religious values, quality education was more strongly perceived in Nagykovács (78.26%) than among those for whom the religious character was not a key motivator in their admission choice (66.67%). There is no significant difference in the perception of the supportive community between these two groups (1–3: 66.67%, 4–5: 69.57%). However, those who were attracted to the religious character more strongly perceive its presence in their daily life (86.96%) compared to those who gave a lower rating (77.78%). In contrast, family-like atmosphere shows an inverse pattern. Among those seeking the religious character, 69.57% mentioned its everyday presence, while 85.19% of the other group reported the same. Despite these differences in proportions, the values that emerged were the same as those seen in the full group of respondents from Nagykovács.

In Budapest, the “youthful, open university” and “quality education” were less perceptible to this group (50.00% and 52.08%, respectively) compared to the religious character (68.75%), supportive community (70.83%), or family-like atmosphere. Like the 1–3 group, the family-like atmosphere was the most frequently mentioned

value (1–3: 74.58%, 4–5: 83.33%). The supportive community ranked second (1–3: 59.32%, 4–5: 70.83%), with the religious character in third place (68.75%), while it was only mentioned by 38.98% of those who rated it 1–3. Both quality education (52.08%) and the youthful, open university (50.00%) received around 50% of mentions. Students in Budapest who chose the Faculty for its religious character, perceived its significance more strongly. However, among the values associated with the Nagykovács Institute, only family-like atmosphere and supportive community appeared in the top three in both groups, thus creating an overlap between the two cohorts.

In Kecskemét, a different picture emerges compared to the other two campuses. Among those whose choice was driven by the religious character, quality education was the most frequently mentioned value (83.33%), which was the same as for those who did not seek the religious aspect. The second most mentioned value was the religious character itself (75.00%), followed by supportive community (66.67%). Family-like atmosphere and scholarship opportunities were mentioned by around 50% of respondents, with no other values reaching the 50% threshold.

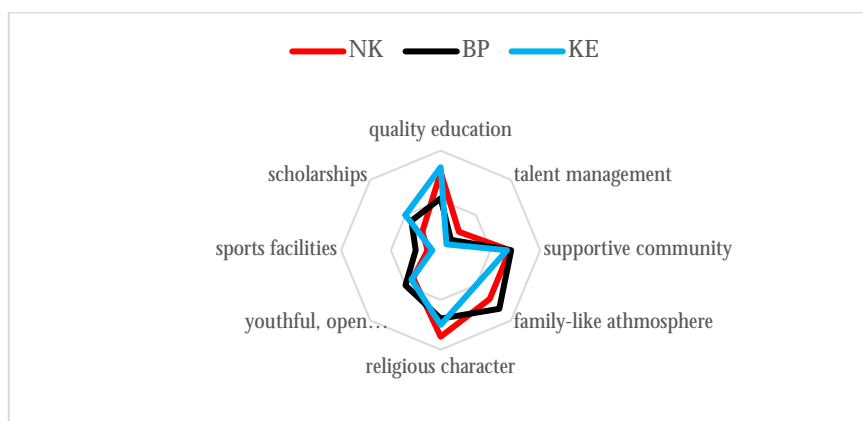


Figure 7. Value ranking if religious character had significant or fair influence on admission choice (%)

There was no campus where any value was consistently perceived in the same way across both groups: those who sought the religious character and those who did not. However, this division is in line with the unity of each campus in that indicator-based values generally do not appear to be strongly present in everyday life.

Summary

In our study, using both qualitative and quantitative tools, we mapped the current value communication strategy of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary in social media and compared it to the values sought by the Faculty of Pedagogy students in the higher education market. The university's external communication reflects both the values of its predecessor, the Reformed Teacher Training Institute of Nagykőrös, and the modern, indicator-driven, managerial values of the University. The representation of the religious character and traditional values clearly defines the Faculty. However, in the University's unified external communication, these values might be pushed out by modern values. However, the mission statement of the University expresses its commitment to the value system of its predecessors.

Students from the Faculty's three Hungarian campuses clearly indicated in their responses that although the religious character of the University was not a dominant factor in their admission choice, they strongly feel the presence of traditional values. Regarding institutional choice preferences, the relatively small variance in responses indicates a high degree of homogeneity within the groups studied, suggesting that the average values reflected well typical responses. The students from all three Hungarian campuses can feel a connection with the religious character in both the educational content and the everyday life of the university, as they typically would choose the Faculty again.

Yet these values significantly shape their positive university experience and are associated with high levels of student satisfaction and willingness to re-enrol. In contrast, values aligned with modern institutional branding played a secondary role and were less consistently recognized in university life.

In our study, we assumed that at the three Hungarian campuses of the Faculty of Pedagogy, students would seek different values at each campus and make their admission choice based on varying values. Our hypothesis was only partially confirmed.

Protestant-theology-based values like "cultivation of the mind" (today as quality education), supportive community, and family-like atmosphere (potential of small student groups' community building), all consistently ranked highly across all three campuses.

However, differences emerged due to the distinct characteristics of the Nagykőrös, Budapest, and Kecskemét campuses. In Nagykőrös, the search for and experience of the

religious character ranked first. This demonstrates the close coexistence of religious and non-religious study programmes. In contrast, at the Budapest and Kecskemét campuses, among those who did not choose the Faculty for its religious character, the “youthful and open university” was a key attraction, and students there also felt its presence in their daily university life.

The research demonstrates that historical, theology-based academic values remain relevant and attractive for students even in a competitive, market-oriented higher education system. The nearly two-century-old value system of the Faculty of Pedagogy remains an in-demand product in the higher education market today, and it is capable of attracting students to fill institutions in the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education institutions.

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