

Fac/Staff Convocation 23 August 2005

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The Opportunity of Renewal

Faculty and Staff Convocation

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This year, like any new year, is a time of excitement and renewal. We are renewed by the new members of our community— faculty, staff, and students. This year, we are not only renewed by new members joining our community but we have an opportunity to renew our most fundamental mission in the education of our students. And, I believe, in this renewal we have an opportunity to move forward to fulfill the promise of this University and deepen our commitment to our mission. Why do I have this hope? I say this because there are a number of important initiatives that we will be either undertaking or completing this year. What are they? First, at its October meeting, the Board of Trustees will move forward with a strategic plan for the University. This plan comes out of years of discussion and will give us a focus and strategy for our choices and decisions. At the same time we on campus will take up three initiatives that are crucial to our Mission. First, we will be involved in the process of re-accreditation by the Southern Association. A crucial element to this process is the development and carrying out of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP): “Thinking Critically, Acting Justly.” Second, we will also begin a review of the Common Curriculum this year. The Common Curriculum has been a part of all undergraduate education at Loyola and a vehicle for the Jesuit use of the liberal arts. Finally as we search for a new Vice President for Student Affairs we have an opportunity to strengthen the education role of Student Affairs and integrate it further with Academic Affairs. Each of these

initiatives is part of a moment to enhance and deepen student learning.

While these initiatives primarily focus on faculty and students, they touch all aspects of the life of our University. I am mindful that we must also do corresponding planning for administration, facilities, and fund raising to support these initiatives. Our work in these areas, and staff support for them, is critically important to our ability to succeed in our initiatives. The success of these initiatives depends on all of us.

These three initiatives, the Common Curriculum, the QEP, and Student Affairs are an ambitious agenda. But, I think that our ability to succeed, and the degree of our success, with each of them will be determined by the extent that we understand that these initiatives are not discrete events but they are inter related and mission centered. Each one touches on some important aspect of our core mission and I believe they are most completely understood against the horizon of the core experience of our life as a university: the education of our students. Each of these projects invites us to examine how we educate students –in the classroom and outside it– and they challenge us to think how we can do it better.

For a few moments today I would like to put these different projects, and the renewal of our mission, in a broader historical context of Jesuit education. The mission of Jesuit education is rooted, ultimately, in an experience of God and spirituality. It is this experience and spirituality that has led Jesuits, in their ministry in education and scholarship, to affirm the goodness of the world and the human, and to see education as a way of making a better world, by improving human life, and in so doing, serve God. So, it is not surprising the Loyola's Mission Statement should speak of an education in the liberal arts that helps men and women find God in

all things; that education should help men and women lead meaningful lives; that education should lead a person to wisdom; and that the person educated at Loyola should work for a more just world, a world better than the one she was born into.

Let me speak briefly to the initiatives for these three educational initiatives: the Common Curriculum, the QEP, and Student Affairs.

Liberal Education and the Common Curriculum

An understanding of liberal education can be hard to pin down. We can often say what it is not. Liberal education is not specialized knowledge (professional or graduate). Liberal education is not learning a skill set (surgery or truck driving). Liberal education is not only education about something (knowledge inputs) but it is also a learning about self. The roots of liberal education were captured by Plato in Socrates' claim: The unexamined life is not worth living.¹

It is not hard to trace the development of liberal education in western universities. But an interesting, and important question, is how or why did the early Jesuits become so involved in schools. After all, the Society of Jesus was formed, in the 16th Century, to travel to the ends of the world, preaching the Gospel. How did they get into the business of running schools? This is a long, complex story.² However, one can say that the members of the early Society needed schools to educate new members of the Society. Education in much of Europe, at that time, was

¹Plato, *The Apology* 38a

²John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 6.

chaotic. The link to the liberal arts is tied to the experience of St. Ignatius and his first companions at the University of Paris where he came to understand how education in the liberal arts could further his goals of helping people find fulfillment and find God in all things. At Paris, the early Jesuits encountered a systematic structure of education, rooted in the liberal arts of the Renaissance. They not only encountered a system of education, they encountered a view about the liberal arts, and an essential view of the Renaissance, which held that humanistic education was not only about learning “how” but it was also about becoming a better human being and about building a better society.

The Renaissance humanism captured in the curriculum of the University of Paris, fit well with the fundamental spirituality of the Jesuits. Believing that the human being was sacred – a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit – and that God could be found in all things, the commitment to liberal humanism provided the suitable anchor and beginning for the Jesuit educational endeavor. University education shaped by the liberal arts helps people to develop as full, flourishing human beings. And, since God could be found in all things, the study of literature, the arts, music, and sciences opened doors for people to find God. And, since education was not only for the individual, but could help serve the community, it is not surprising that Jesuit universities became involved in professional and graduate education, such as law and business. So, very quickly, as the early Jesuits moved throughout the world they founded schools.

The Jesuit practice of the liberal arts tradition was captured in a document known as the *Ratio Studiorum* which established a curriculum for Jesuit colleges and universities for centuries. But, in the last century, Jesuit colleges and universities moved to adapt curriculums to time,

place, and circumstance. Indeed, Loyola's Common Curriculum is in many ways a descendent of the Ratio. But the world – and knowledge – have changed. And so it is time to revisit the Common Curriculum.

We live in the era of the “information revolution.” But, information, by itself is not knowledge. And knowledge alone is not wisdom. In his poem, *The Rock*, T.S. Eliot asked questions that confront us now: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”³ Our students are confronted with a world of information and they understand very well the technology to access that information. A challenge for us is to be sure that we have a curriculum that can help our students, at any level, move to knowledge and wisdom.

The process of curricular renewal will not be easy. It will invite us to reflect the core of who we are as a university. It will invite us to think about our graduates and who we would like them to be. It will challenge us to imagine what it is to be a flourishing human being in the 21st century and to think about the kind of curricular options that would help students towards such flourishing. This renewal will also challenge us to think about the kind of mentoring and advising students will need to move through curricular choices. These changes also challenge us in how we think about graduate and professional education.

Justice and Ethics and the QEP

On several different occasions I have argued that the aim of Jesuit higher education is to make

³T.S. Eliot, *The Rock*

people better and to improve society.⁴ This aim is tied to the humanistic roots of Jesuit education. This goal is not about knowledge as a good in itself but rather the goal is the good that can be done with education and knowledge. And this goal is what first attracted the early Jesuits to work in education. They shared the humanist ideal that liberal education changed people. Education was not just about knowledge but it was about who we are and who we become.

In our contemporary world this goal has been cast in the language of justice and ethics. At the convocation last spring, I spoke about social justice. Clearly the language of justice is part of our educational mission. Our University Mission speaks of the development and use of knowledge “for a more just world” and that a Loyola education that will “benefit the larger community.” We have an opportunity in the QEP to take stock of how well we are doing. I also believe that we have a moment in our history as we search for new leadership in Student Affairs to more carefully examine what we are teaching outside the classroom in the ways our students live with one another in a community.

As I argued last year,⁵ justice and ethics are areas where there will be differing, and sometimes conflicting views, of how they are interpreted. To say that Jesuit education –a Loyola education– is committed to justice and ethics is not to say that we are committed to a particular set of answers or a particular ideology. (To do so would be to make us a school for propaganda, not a university.) We are committed to the questions of justice and the good life. We are a place

⁴Inaugural Address, 15 October 2004, see http://www.loyno.edu/presidentsoffice/speeches_whitepaper/

⁵ Convocation Address, 7 January 2005, see http://www.loyno.edu/presidentsoffice/speeches_whitepaper/

where these can be discussed and argued freely and with civility. We are committed to educating women and men to a particular habit of mind that asks the questions of justice and ethics. We are committed to educating minds that ask these questions, and lives that live out of the habit of the questions rather than pat answers. I see our QEP project as an opportunity to examine these aspects of our educational enterprise and look for ways to do them better. To my knowledge, this type of evaluation has not been done at another Jesuit university.

Student Life and Cura Personalis

Jesuit education is frequently characterized by a commitment to the care of the whole person. Too often, I fear, we delegate that care to Student Affairs or University Ministries. This year, we have an opportunity to review and strengthen what we do in the area of Student Affairs as we search for new leadership in that area and as we more deeply integrate Academic and Student Affairs. In so doing, I think, we can provide a deeper, richer humane education for our students.

I also believe we have an opportunity, in the life of our University, to examine education beyond the curriculum. We have an opportunity this year to examine the quality of students' experiences beyond the classroom and to examine the total learning experience and environment of our students. T.S. Elliot once said that "Hell is the place where nothing is connected with nothing."⁶ We have an opportunity to look at the whole of the student experience and look for integration and offer students and educational experience that is connected.

This is also an opportunity for us to realize that we have a chance to educate young men

⁶T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*

and women in their lives outside the classroom. We have a chance to help them understand better, in a lived reality, the opportunities and responsibilities they have to those they live with –right here on campus– as well as those in our city and nation.

Conclusion

I am very mindful that as we move forward in this renewal that higher education is in a turbulent environment in the United States. In a few weeks the United States Congress will take up a number of pieces of legislation, from the budget to the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, that can dramatically affect the conduct of our institutions and the ability of students to have access to higher education. There are many, in and out of Congress, who would like to control and regulate higher education much more closely. A few weeks ago, PBS aired a documentary, based on the book, *Declining by Degrees* which took a very critical look at American higher education.⁷ (While I am skeptical of the show and the book, I understand the kinds of questions it represents and why they are so troubling for many Americans.)

Many people have questioned the cost of American higher education. And, there are important concerns about accessibility for students. There are also increasing concerns about the quality of what goes on in higher education. And there are those, who under the banner of ‘balance’ want to control the content of what goes on. There are many who normally champion deregulation in American life who want to regulate what goes on in the academy.

⁷R. Hersh and J. Merrow, *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk*, (New York: Macmillan, 2005).

There are different ways higher education can respond to these questions and challenges. We could ignore the challenges. But, there are two risks with this strategy. One is that others will seize the moment and change the structures of higher education in a way that is harmful to our ability to live out our mission. Another risk is that the world will change around us in ways that we will no longer be responsive to the real needs and challenges of our time. We will be irrelevant to society.

I think our best response to the political, social, and intellectual challenges before us is to renew ourselves, in academic and student affairs, in terms of our basic mission and identity. This renewal gives us the opportunity to critically examine what we are doing and how well we are doing it. We need to be able to say clearly who we are, what we do, and show that we are doing it as best we can. This will help us explain ourselves better to the world beyond St. Charles Avenue. I argue for this response because I believe that transparency is a key to honesty and trust. And, I argue this because I think what we offer our students, undergraduate, graduate, and professional, a type of education that is sorely needed in our world.

There will undoubtedly be critics who will watch our work on curriculum, student life and learning, and say that we have abandoned our tradition. I would argue that in reviewing and adapting we are in the end being most faithful to our identity as a Jesuit university. I say this for two reasons. First, in his writings St. Ignatius constantly tells, urges Jesuits to adapt to time, place, custom, and circumstance. We are doing nothing less. Second, in the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius exhorts the retreatant to make choices that should lead to the greater glory of God. Jesuits often speak of this as the “magis”. There is a hidden, relentless logic here in seeking the

magis. The person who makes the Exercises forms a habit of mind/heart that keeps asking the question, what is for the greater glory of God. We find ourselves asking: How can I do it better? It is a restless and relentless spirituality. So as we seize this opportunity for renewal, we as a University are adapting to time, place, and circumstance and asking ourselves how can we do it better. We are living in the deepest fidelity to our Jesuit mission and heritage.

The late 19th century there was a time of crisis in American higher education. The development of the university movement, initiated with the founding of Johns Hopkins, was changing American higher education. The movement from small, sectarian colleges to universities represented fundamental changes in how education, indeed knowledge itself, was understood. Jesuit colleges were caught in this turmoil.⁸ But, over time they changed, adapted, and flourished.

I would argue that we are in analogous circumstances. In the information revolution there are profound challenges for how we educate human beings and how we think about what it is to be an educated human being. And we are confronted with similar questions that faced Jesuit education in the late 19th century about how to educate men and women when the paradigm of education is changing. Jesuit education met the challenges of that time and went on to flourish in the 20th century. I am confident that as we face new questions about education and the educated person in the 21st century we can and will respond and find educational and scholarly models that help to move women and men from mere information, to knowledge, and finally, to wisdom so

⁸Kathleen A. Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

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that they might flourish and serve the wider human community. And I am confident that in seizing this opportunity for renewal Loyola will not only be faithful to its heritage and mission but we will provide an example for American higher education.