

# **Engaged, Integrated, Global: Jesuit Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**A 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Lecture, in collaboration with the Schemel Forum**

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In my 2011 inauguration address, I asked “What does it mean to say that Scranton is a 21st century Jesuit university in North America? My answer: The University of Scranton—a Jesuit University—can and should excel in providing its students an education that is engaged, integrated and global. I suggested then that my understanding of Jesuit higher education was open to revision. This evening I would like to continue the conversation begun on my inauguration day by presenting further reflections on what makes Jesuit education so distinctive. Into my third year as university president, I remain convinced that we at The University of Scranton are well-positioned to read the signs of the times and to see the world with new eyes.

Let me first acknowledge the obvious: these are anxious times in the world of higher education. Issues such as cost, quality, access, and accountability provide easy targets for both academic heavyweights and media talking heads. We can’t bury our heads in the sand. In the near future, we will face serious challenges, in many ways symbolized by President Obama’s recent visit to the Electric City. His remarks confirm the seriousness of the larger national debate over the cost and purpose of higher education. Although we often see ourselves as unique and isolated from such challenges, the reality driven home by the President’s visit and our smaller entering class is that we are not. This is important for us because the general economic picture has already limited our ability to raise tuition, and will likely limit us even further. Furthermore, the national debate and the President’s recommendations for making higher education more affordable will require of us a variety of responses, most intrusively with regard to ongoing academic assessment, reporting requirements and financial aid tracking.

Given the quality and creativity of our institution, these challenges, while real and serious, need not be understood as negative. Rather, they present an opportunity to re-examine closely our mission and the presumptions and practices with which we approach that mission. We will need to be clear on what it means to be a Catholic and Jesuit master’s university in these uncertain times. And in so doing, we have an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine the mission of the university or, in the words of Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus, to “re-found ‘the universities of the Society.’”<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary Jesuit leadership remains vigilant on what is an appropriate starting point for our conversation this evening: “‘As we look to the future, we need consciously to be on guard that both the noun “university” and the adjective “Jesuit” always remained fully honored’ (GC 34, D 17, n. 5). Catholic and Jesuit, descriptors that define us as an institution, are not simply two characteristics among many. Rather, they signify our defining character, what makes us uniquely who we are.”<sup>2</sup> The contemporary university *qua* university is characterized by “peer reviewed research, research-grounded teaching and

teaching as mentoring, and service, all within a climate of academic freedom.”<sup>3</sup> What universities claim to be teaching their students—specifically, to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems, and communicate clearly—is necessary, but not sufficient, for Catholic and Jesuit universities. For a Catholic and Jesuit university should ask more of its students by educating and forming them to become men and women of faith and of service to their communities. This is the “value added” of Catholic and Jesuit education.

As a Catholic university, then, the University of Scranton “remains the home for the conversation that explores and advances the Catholic intellectual tradition. . . . For the Catholic, thinking is part of believing, and the Catholic view sees no conflict among faith, knowledge, and reason; it looks to how they illuminate one another.”<sup>4</sup> At root, the Catholic tradition of inquiry is characterized by an “uncompromising commitment to truth”—truth that “is explored and revered ‘in whatever way it discloses itself,’ as theologian Michael Buckley, S.J., has written.”<sup>5</sup>

That said; permit me as I continue to focus on the category “Jesuit” rather than “Catholic.” Historian Stephen Schloesser, S.J. is helpful here. For him, Catholic is a genus; Jesuit is a species. “[T]he Jesuit species of Catholicism is marked by a strong, perhaps even extreme, belief in the compatibility of Christ and culture. . . . [T]his Jesuit accommodation departs from other Catholic voices that hold for a strong division, distinction, or even opposition between Christ and culture, between the Church and world. If Catholicism is a big tent, Jesuits stand somewhere close to the door with at least one foot jutting out into the world. This isn’t an accident or an aberration. It’s essential to the location of the Jesuits within the wider institutional church.”<sup>6</sup>

The University of Scranton is animated by the vision of St. Ignatius Loyola and his first companions. The Society of Jesus is just short of 475 years old and continues to educate young men and women by applying insights born of St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. The insights include: “the experience of a divine and forgiving love that in turn enables us to recognize our complicity with sin; a personal calling that frees us to embrace our truest passions in following Christ and in service of others; the redemptive possibility of self-giving love that invites us to attend to the cries of those who suffer; the experience of enduring goodness that gives hope for a world in which the Spirit always labors.”<sup>7</sup> These insights in turn shape the Ignatian worldview and inform as organizing principles much of Jesuit education—“encouraging students to see the hand of God in all things, to discern the ‘magis,’ or the better course of action, [and] to ‘engage the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation’ (GC 35).”<sup>8</sup>

One of the key phrases capturing the charism of Ignatian spirituality is “to love and serve in all things.” In Ignatius’ Spanish it reads “*en todo amar y servir.*” Here lies the key to Jesuit higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For a Jesuit university should ask more of its students by challenging them to make Ignatius’ charge—his notion of service—their own. Jesuit educators can do this by shaping not just what students know but who they become: men and women of adult faith, of competence, for and with others. This is the Jesuit difference.

But one might ask how a Jesuit university is to achieve this ultimate learning outcome. What I would like to do here is to expand on my earlier proposition that a distinctively Jesuit education should be engaged, integrated and global.

Jesuit education has engaged mind, heart, and hands since the 16th century when St. Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus. In 2000 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., then Superior General of the Jesuit order, called for a new Jesuit educational standard. “Tomorrow’s ‘whole person,’” he said, “cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world.” For that reason, he explained: students “must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage in it constructively.” They should learn, he said, to “perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed.”<sup>9</sup>

This is the contemporary standard for engaged learning in a Jesuit university. To apply these Jesuit “marching orders” students should be encouraged to enter worlds beyond Scranton, to gain an education that no classroom alone can offer, to learn with and from people in marginalized communities, and so to become global citizens for a new century.

This educational strategy calls for personal transformation that would lead to transforming society. The ideal of a personal transformation requires a rigorous education to prepare students to become ethical and compassionate leaders who will infuse society with faith and justice, informed by knowledge. For personal transformation to be effective, academic, moral and spiritual experience must be integrated with and enhanced by learning outside the classroom. But it must be experiential learning in which immersion and reflection on experience are intertwined and focused on the needs and concerns that many in our world face.

But there is a catch here, a shift in educational philosophy: It is not just serving others and learning about people, but learning with and from people who are often excluded from participation in economic, social, and political life. And further, it integrates academic inquiry, creative imagination, and reflection on experience that inspires fashioning a more just and humane society. Or as Mark Ravizza, S.J. put it so well during a recent campus conference: integrating accompaniment, spirituality, academic excellence and community will lead university students to a depth of thought and imagination that are distinguishing marks of the Ignatian tradition. Through these experiences faculty, students, community partners, and indigenous peoples become dynamic partners. In sum, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Jesuit university should encourage profound engagement with the real and so commit itself to a pedagogy of active, collaborative, transformative learning about social justice, as an integral part of a liberal education.

To deliver a transformative education in the Jesuit tradition requires the integration of academic, moral and spiritual learning—the union of mind, heart and soul. Our Scranton alumni tell us, and we know from our own experience, that college is a time of profound change and formative encounters with ideas and authors to be sure, but more. We know that the heart of a transformational educational experience also includes encounters with professors and mentors, roommates and teammates, coaches and directors, and many other members of our University community who shape

and form our students in the gradual but steady process of moving from late adolescence into young adulthood.

But again, much more. We also know that any university that claims—as we surely do—to educate and form the whole person cannot pretend that the religious life of that person is somehow an optional or accidental dimension that can be relegated to the sidelines or attended to as an afterthought. Rather, the experience of a Jesuit education can and should provide our students with the tools and opportunities to develop the habits of mind and heart that will enable them to encounter the living God. Only in this most important of all encounters will our students discover the truth about themselves as well as the meaning and implications of the call that comes with being a human being.

In the words of Georgetown Jesuits reflecting on undergraduate education at Georgetown: “The journey of selfhood should also ideally include the cultivation of a freedom to choose our truest selves.”<sup>10</sup> Promoting this project of self-discovery and discerning one’s deepest vocation is consistent with our University’s vision to “provide a superior, transformational learning experience, preparing students who . . . will ‘set the world on fire.’” The task of providing these tools and opportunities is not the job of any single office or division of the University. Rather, this task is the focus of our entire University community and is arguably our *raison d’être* as a Jesuit university.

So Jesuit universities in the 21st century should be about student formation. Jesuit schools have long had “a keen interest in formative concerns and in the ways in which such concerns intersect academic work.”<sup>11</sup> Robust collaboration between academic and student affairs and the continued vitality of general education on Jesuit campuses highlight this concern for formation among undergraduates. As we educate students we aim to invite them into a broader formational experience that will enable them to grow into human beings of a certain kind, blessed with gifts of heart, mind and soul. It is this human formation that provides the context within which our students’ education takes on its proper perspective, its deeper purpose and its true meaning.

John Donne got it right: “No man is an island.” We are all, as he said, “involved in mankind.” But we in Jesuit universities say more: we are responsible for humankind. As Pope John Paul II insisted, “We are all really responsible for all.”<sup>12</sup> Our vision draws us always outward, in a widening circle of knowledge and understanding, compassion and responsibility. Our curiosity, concern and commitment must stretch to include all humanity. This stretching should be part of any university’s core vocation, or at least of any Jesuit university. Catholic teaching on solidarity is clear: We are one human family; we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking or “globalizing” world. So my claim that Jesuit education should be a global education remains a simple one. Call our current students the “global generation” and so we need to encourage them to think “locally, regionally, nationally, internationally, and globally” in whatever they study.<sup>13</sup> Providing greater opportunity for international study, increasing diversity on campus, and expanding multicultural experiences for our community, combined with ongoing critical reflection, would help our students think globally in a responsible manner.

As a university community, we gather to create new knowledge, to expand understanding by engaging in teaching and learning, and to promote the public good. But our living tradition at The University of Scranton calls us deeper, to do more. Make no mistake: The students who show up on our campus every fall, filling our residence halls and classrooms with energy, our work and teaching with meaning, are first and foremost children of God. They are created out of love, called to love and destined for love. It is our job to help them recognize that truth about themselves and, further, to help them tease out its implications for the lives they will lead as “citizens, husbands and wives, parents and as friends”<sup>14</sup> in the years after they leave our campus. We can achieve this with an education that is engaged, integrated and global. This is the Jesuit difference and “[t]he real measure of our Jesuit universities [will lie] in who our students become.”<sup>15</sup> Thank you.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today,” in *Shaping the Future: Networking Jesuit Higher Education for a Globalizing World*, Report of the Mexico Conference, April 2010, ed. Frank Brennan, S.J., at 7,

[http://www.ajcunet.edu/Assets/Publications/File/Mexico%20City%20Report\\_07-11.pdf](http://www.ajcunet.edu/Assets/Publications/File/Mexico%20City%20Report_07-11.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), “Preamble” to *Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument*, at 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center, Boston College, *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: A Conversation at Boston College*, July 2010, at 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, at 5.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Schloesser, S.J., “Jesuit Hybrids, Catholic Modernities, Futural Pasts,” Inaugural Lecture, LoSchiavo Chair in Catholic Social Thought, University of San Francisco, San Francisco CA, September 1, 2005, at 7 (para. 53), [http://www.usfca.edu/uploadedFiles/Destinations/Institutes\\_and\\_Centers/Lane/Events/documents/Schloesser\\_JesuitHybrids\\_InauguralLecture.pdf](http://www.usfca.edu/uploadedFiles/Destinations/Institutes_and_Centers/Lane/Events/documents/Schloesser_JesuitHybrids_InauguralLecture.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Members of the Georgetown Jesuit Community, *A Distinctive Education: Reflections by Georgetown Jesuits on Education at Georgetown*, Spring 2010, at 2.

<sup>8</sup> AJCU, *op. cit.*, at 3.

<sup>9</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Higher Education,” Santa Clara Lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara CA, October 6, 2000, at 8. <http://www.marquette.edu/mission/documents/TheServiceofFaithandthePromotionofJusticeinAmericanJesuitHigherEducation--Kolvenbach.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Georgetown Jesuit Community, *op. cit.*, at 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, December 30, 1987, at #39.

<sup>13</sup> Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte, “Framing a Global Education,” 40 *Conversation on Jesuit Higher Education*, Fall 2011, at 50, <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/>.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Healy, S.J., *Georgetown: Meditation on a Bicentennial*, Washington DC, 1989, cited in Georgetown Jesuit Community, *op. cit.*, at 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Kolvenbach, *op. cit.*, at 8.