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Professional Education

Where We Come From, What Lies Ahead

By Jeffrey von Arx, S.J.

As with our first entrance into running schools in the sixteenth century, Jesuits in the United States backed into graduate and professional education without much of a plan. Certainly, there was no planning at the national level. For one thing, there was little differentiation between levels of instruction in Jesuit schools until well after many American colleges had developed into universities with clear graduate divisions under the influence of the German model in the later nineteenth century. In the early 1840's, St. Louis University started (short-lived) law and medical "departments" within the university, but it would appear that the credit for having the first distinct professional schools that persisted goes to Georgetown, which established medical and law schools in 1849 and 1870 respectively; and Creighton opened its medical school in 1892.

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a flurry of new professional schools that would become a hallmark of Jesuit education in the twentieth century: especially law schools (Fordham in 1905, Loyola Chicago in 1908, St. Louis reestablished in 1908, Gonzaga in 1912; San Francisco 1912, for example); but also schools of education (which were often the entrée for women into Jesuit education), business, and three medical schools (St. Louis reestablished in 1903; Fordham opened in 1905, closed in 1921; and Loyola Chicago, 1917). Clearly, Catholics of this era aspired to the professions, and since members of their faith were not always welcome in existing professional schools, Jesuit universities were quick to meet the need. By the end of the century, professional schools had truly proliferated

at Jesuit universities: Allied Health Professions (10), Architecture (1), Business Administration/Management (26), Communication, Journalism, Fine Arts (8), Dentistry (4), Divinity (3), Education (22), Engineering (9), International Affairs (1), Law (14), Medicine (4), Nursing (19), Pharmacy (2).

If Jesuit colleges and universities responded with alacrity to the desire for professional education from the rising Catholic middle class, the same cannot

be said about their efforts in **graduate education** in the arts and sciences. In the first place, it was often the case that few or even none of the Jesuits who were the majority of the faculty at many of our institutions in the first half of the twentieth century had Ph.D.'s themselves: completion of the long course in Jesuit studies, it was thought, should fit a man to

teach anything! Moreover, there was often a decided lack of sympathy in Jesuit circles for what we would consider the very essence of a research university.

Fr. Gerald McKeivitt, S.J. famously quotes a Jesuit administrator at Santa Clara in 1930: "Research cannot be the primary object of a Catholic graduate school, because it is at war with the whole Catholic life of the mind." In his landmark essay in *Thought*, "American Catholics and the Intellectual life" (1955), Msgr. John Tracy Ellis noted the failure of Catholics to exercise intellectual leadership and influence and attributed this deficiency to the very proliferation of professional studies in Catholic universities to the detriment of serious intellectual work. Moreover, where they existed, graduate programs were

The failure to exercise intellectual leadership was attributed to the proliferation of professional studies.

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underfunded and inadequately staffed with professors who had the credentials to carry them on. The result, according to Ellis, was “a perpetuation of mediocrity and the draining away from each other of the strength that is necessary if really superior achievements are to be obtained.”

Clearly, there has been much progress made by Jesuit universities in establishing credible and professional graduate programs in the arts and sciences that are turning out superbly trained teachers and scholars. But it is not clear that many of these programs can claim the intellectual leadership and influence that Msgr. Ellis hoped for from Catholic universities. Much as it pains me to cite *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, it is rare for Ph.D. programs at Jesuit universities to break into the top fifty and there are none in the top twenty-five. Georgetown's history program is as high as we rank at 32. The story with our professional schools is predictably different. There, there has been better success, especially in law (with three schools, Georgetown, BC and Fordham, ranked in the top 27); an education school (BC's) at 18; business schools at 22 (Georgetown) and 34 (BC); a medical school (Georgetown) at 40 and Public Policy (Georgetown again) at 14. So while we are certainly in a position to hold up our heads and while our programs produce well-trained scholars and professionals (who often have great influence in their localities), leadership and influence in graduate and professional education on the national level (with a few exceptions) eludes us.

Given this rapid and high-altitude review of the history of Jesuit graduate and professional education, what can we say about the challenges that face us in the future? Certainly one of the most important questions that arises, especially in light of our investment in professional education at almost every one of our schools, has to do with the fit between professional education and issues of mission and identity that have become so important a part of our thinking about undergraduate education. Is it the case, as Fr. Al Panuska implies, that there is little that is unique in form about Jesuit or Catholic graduate and professional studies since they developed alongside their counterparts in American higher education? Certainly, we share with all educators the goal of producing practitioners whose competence is not a matter of religious commitment (when I had surgery several years ago, I jokingly requested a surgeon without too strong a belief in the afterlife!).

Well-publicized moral lapses across the professions in recent years have focused everyone's attention on ethical practice, and our institutions have taken naturally to this emphasis, but so, too, has every other professional school.

But is competent and ethical practice the most we can expect from the graduates of our professional schools, and if it is, why, according to the principle of the *magis*, are we engaged in professional education when state and secular institutions can do it equally well or even better?

There have been, in recent years, a number of explicit efforts to connect religion and professional practice in our schools: one thinks immediately of the Institute for Religion, Law and Lawyer's Work at Fordham. And clearly, the emphasis on certain areas of practice is a clear reflection of Jesuit mission: Georgetown Law Center's strong clinical programs, for example. In recent years, I have been suggesting to our own professional schools at Fairfield that reflection on the relationship between the professions and professional life and the notion of the common good is an appropriate focus for professional schools at a Jesuit university as well as an emphasis that is not replicated at secular institutions.

The question of what we should or should not be doing in terms of graduate education in the arts and sciences is a complicated one. There is, of course, the prior question of whether we should be doing anything at all if we cannot do it better than others. Does the world really need another Ph.D. program in English from a Jesuit university? Theology and to a lesser extent philosophy are obvious candidates for graduate programs of real excellence: one thinks of Boston College's present status as the premier center for theological reflection, with its already distinguished theology department now that Weston has reaffiliated with BC in the School of Theology and Ministry. Other institutions have created niche programs that play to their strengths and offer opportunity for real distinction: Medieval Studies at Fordham and some of the area studies programs in Georgetown's School of Foreign Service to cite examples that are familiar to me.

These examples show the need for strategic thinking in relation to graduate and professional education and, dare I say, a certain discipline and asceticism with regard to new programs. I would suggest that this is one of those areas where it is not worth doing it at all if you cannot do it well. ■

Is competent and ethical practice the most we can expect?