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## Are We Fulfilling the Promise of a Jesuit Education? A Group of Educators' Reflective Examen

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## Are We Fulfilling the Promise of a Jesuit Education? A Group of Educators' Reflective Examen

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### Abstract

Higher education is often faced with external pressures that can guide the practice and offerings of colleges and universities. Graduate professional education in the health professions is especially prone to accreditation standards and its associated professional movements. At a Jesuit university, these external pressures, along with public pressure for job-ready graduates, must be intertwined with the history and the promise of a Jesuit education — that of transformation. As educators at a Jesuit university, our roles involve more than offering this kind of education. Our responsibility is to revisit what this promise means as a way of examining our practice. This article shares the reflective practice of five colleagues working in different roles at a Jesuit university seeking answers to questions of whether they are delivering on the promise of Jesuit education. The article includes a guiding set of questions, a short reflection on each author's experience, and a review of the external and internal influences on their programs, providing a guide for a type of practice Examen that can be used by any faculty or staff member.

### Introduction

Almost two years ago, a conversation began between two of the authors exploring how we could enhance the ability of our students to become reflective thinkers. Those conversations and work led us to a space of trying to overlay Jesuit principles and even the Spiritual Exercises onto the work of Donald Schön's *The Reflective*

*Practitioner*.<sup>1</sup> The intent of the initial conversation was, and remains, to produce a worthwhile and useful article for students and faculty colleagues to use as a guide for teaching and deepening reflection. As both of those authors taught in the health professions college, the focus was originally on the faculty and students in that college. Those discussions led to posing questions that relate back to the Jesuit principles that built our

institution. This resulted in inviting a Jesuit colleague to both listen to our ideas and better ground our work. The Ignatian value of finding God in all things repeatedly surfaced, which further led to recognizing where God was missing in our experiences and conversation about reflection. During conversation, many questions grew larger and became deeper and more meaningful. Fully entrenched and taken with those musings, those two colleagues shared their conversations with their peers as a way to both seek out information from other colleagues but also to better inform and frame their thinking. Over time, the pair grew into a quintet, and the five of us began meeting regularly, sharing our experiences from the different places of our work. As a result, the focus of the paper changed due to our experience of meeting in community. We have reflected on and wrestled with the tensions that are currently present in remaining true to our Jesuit tradition and how we structure and administer our graduate professional education programs in the health professions. These discussions have led to rediscovering and reconnecting with the roots and the intents of Jesuit education. This journey has also led us to remembering and putting back together things we had already known, providing us with a useful way to examine our own experiences in search of alignment of philosophy and action. Finally, we were led to try and understand the type of transformation that Jesuit education promises.

The primary purpose of this paper is to share our journey and how it changed over time, in the hope that the reader may find space for a similar experience. This paper shares the experiences that led us to asking questions that continue to promote conflicts or disunity between our own minds and hearts. We began our conversations as a way to contribute knowledge. That knowledge informed our practice in ways that we shared with our peers, which led to the creation of our de facto learning community. This community, in turn, deepened our knowledge of Jesuit education. The secondary purpose of this paper is to pose questions that can be used to examine one's own experiences in Jesuit higher education. We welcome readers into what we explored to further their own understanding of Jesuit education and what makes it distinctly different from an education at another institution, framing questions

that arise as readers enter the reflective process. Consider it a written version of a classroom fishbowl exercise, seeing what colleagues ponder and where intellectual curiosity goes. We hope to share enough about our process so that readers may find the space — physically, intellectually, and emotionally — to have similar meaningful conversations in their own settings and contexts.

### **How Did We Become a Group?**

In the beginning of these conversations about deepening reflection and with the intention of writing a publishable article, a slightly different path was pursued each time there was a meeting. The lack of clarity about exactly what we were trying to accomplish and the openness to exploration were key ingredients to our group forming. Amongst the first two people in the conversation, there was always a feeling that our educational offerings could be more personal, deeper, and more transformative. The desire was to improve our education and help our faculty find tools to do so. We were convinced that there were answers to the “how” already in the DNA of Jesuit education. After months of draft writings and new directions that started and stalled due to the constraints of being an associate dean and the director of the teaching and learning center, we needed more brains and perspectives. We were excited and interested in our work and had been talking to our peers about our ideas, and we found three peers who related to the idea that what we offered educationally could be improved. We invited those colleagues to meet and hear what we were thinking and exploring. As it turns out, we recognize in hindsight that each member of our five-person group had an overlapping experience with at least one other member of the group. For example, two had both been on the same service trip or had been in the classroom together. There was a safe space created by these shared experiences. This safety fostered an openness and welcome feeling while also allowing us to challenge and learn from each other. This allowed our authentic selves to come forward despite us working in different areas. We trusted each other. Little did we know how deep and how meaningful our conversations and meetings would become.

There are important logistics that need be shared about our experience. We met consistently about

every six weeks working around very different schedules. We usually met over a meal. We always scheduled two hours so that we could revisit our work and catch up with each other. We always intended on writing something for publication. We always decided on what we needed to explore in advance but were open to new ideas grounded in the experience with each other. We always assigned work at the end of each meeting, and we maintained these norms throughout. We shared our work via Dropbox. We mostly met in the Jesuit residence at our university. This is particularly important as it gave a weight and meaning to our work not only by the physical meetings in the presence and feeling of something bigger and holy, but also because we were often encouraged by the members of our Jesuit community and their guests as they saw us meeting. Our work naturally had us intersecting with each other despite each of us working in single-person offices. Finally, while we had consistency of meeting and work getting done, it must be stated that this was informal and that we enjoyed the honesty with one another and shared in each other's successes and struggles. All but one of the authors' roles have changed during the time writing. It was, at all times, both professional and personal.

### Questions Guiding Our Discussions

The original ideas of the two founding group members were challenged early and often. Questions were asked for which we had no answers. Questions were foundational to guiding our work. We wrote them, we revised them, and we found new ones. And that process was repeated. Often. What is a Jesuit education? What does it mean to be Jesuit educated? What does a Jesuit education stand for? What does a Jesuit education promise a student? How can we best fulfill that promise? As we gathered, these were the questions we were seeking answers. From these questions, many others arose. Some we found answers to and others were more perplexing and complicated, always returning to the same main questions.

In asking the questions above, we came to realize that those questions were often too complex and were actually many other questions wrapped together. What follows below are some of the

questions we found useful as smaller component questions of those larger ones. They are shared here to provide an overview and a starting point, subject to adaptation to one's discipline or subject specialty, to considering what Jesuit education is and what it means. These questions are also shared here as a means of reading the following section — the personal experiences — and understanding the origin of these questions. The questions below are divided into categories of context, experience, and reflection as a way of categorizing in line with Jesuit pedagogy but also as a way of analyzing the experiences shared in the paper.

#### Context:

1. What do we individually and collectively understand about the distinction of Jesuit education?
2. Can we offer a Jesuit education without God as part of the conversation?
3. How do we stay true to our Jesuit roots, remembering and examining the history, but also be grounded in the context of today's society?
4. Does the mission inform our actions as faculty, staff, and students at a Jesuit institution?
5. As colleges and universities become increasingly driven by financial constraints and market realities, how can and should Jesuit institutions use their values as a framework for decision making?

#### Experience:

1. How inclusive is the mission for every student who crosses our threshold of the university?
2. How are faculty equipped and ready for the challenge of teaching at a Jesuit institution, especially given that many do not have Jesuit and/or Catholic roots?
3. Can we and do we already assume or pre-determine that students have some of the qualities defined by the Jesuit values because they often want to use their gifts to help others as they enter the healthcare professions?
4. Do the external pressures for the health care professions undermine the students' Jesuit education by focusing on content

and the technical aspects of their training that skillfully prepares them for their profession?

5. How can we better help students understand the importance of more value-focused courses as opposed to courses that are focused on developing professional knowledge? How do we create a curriculum that makes these more central to a student's education?
6. Is a single experience, such as service learning, enough to bring students to full transformation?

Reflection:

1. As you read this article and consider these questions, do you feel: anxious, guilty, encouraged, hopeful, prideful, hopeless, overwhelmed, defeated, under-informed, and so forth?
2. How comfortable are we in producing programs that are inherently different than similar programs at other institutions, even if this means going beyond accreditation standards?
3. Would we be willing to risk losing some applicants, students, faculty, and staff by articulating and activating our mission and identity more clearly?
4. How able and willing are we to use God language to articulate our mission in our classes and curricula?
5. How willing are we to open a conversation about these issues among faculty and staff members?

The preceding questions are useful as a framework for examining the personal experiences shared in the following section. As we mentioned earlier, we had a safe space in part because we shared our experiences with each other. We all committed to recording these experiences as part of our written work and as part of the reflective process, and we did so early in our gathering. These experiences, shared and recorded, were the foundation of moving us from writing a more traditional scholarly article to developing a comfort in writing and sharing a praxis-type of article. This happened after sending our writing to colleagues for early reviews, when the narratives grabbed their attention. They were also useful lenses to revisit our questions.

## Personal Experiences

Even though all of us at Regis University are bound by the same Jesuit mission, there is never a single uniform experience of our university. As authors in different roles, we have all experienced Jesuit education differently. As we began to discuss and seek to answer what a Jesuit education is/was, we shared our own experiences with one another. These individual experiences are included below. To provide the immediacy these observations deserve, they are offered in the first person. As with our students, our own experiences guide our learning. Keep the aforementioned questions in mind as you read these short case experiences.

### *James*

It was a long day that consisted of excursions, learning of new cultural customs and traditions, and provision of clinical and educational services to the people of Ethiopia. The Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions (RHCHP) at Regis University has been sending groups of faculty and staff to the African nation of Ethiopia for almost a decade. The trip has evolved over time. For the School of Physical Therapy it not only provides an opportunity of service for students and faculty, but our doctoral-trained faculty are educating and preparing masters-level trained physiotherapy faculty at a doctoral level at Addis Ababa University, to offer a doctorate of physical therapy (DPT) academic program. This will be the first of its kind in the country, a huge step towards advancing physiotherapy nationally and continent-wide.

Like many other service trips I had participated in during my tenure, on most days the group came together to reflect on every encounter, emotion, and opportunity that had presented itself throughout the day and prepare for whatever the next day might bring. I felt especially led to use the Examen, facilitating and guiding the group to sense moments of physical, mental, and spiritual desolation and consolation encountered and their connection to God. This was a prayerful tool introduced by St. Ignatius for Jesuits to use to reflect on the day's events, detecting God's presence and discerning God's will. I purposefully

instructed the group to define God as they wished, being culturally and religiously sensitive towards all. After our time of focus and reflection I had a faculty member approach me to share how uncomfortable he was engaging in the exercise and its implications and reference to God. I knew at this moment that either the exercise did exactly what it was intended to do and the individual reflected on a spiritual level or the mere reference of God was too much to fathom for an individual who had developed an agnostic worldview. Either way I walked away knowing that we, and I, needed to do better at articulating the Jesuit tradition and emphasizing that spiritual growth and intelligence are just as important as emotional, cultural, and academic intelligence. It also was apparent how God needed to be continued as an item in the equation to unlocking one's heart and promoting unity between one's mind and heart.

*Sue*

Whether one works at a private or public university, a question that often comes to mind is how to develop existing programs and what new programs can be added to fill a need that is often industry driven. Within a Jesuit Catholic university, what drives the selection of new programs to add to existing health professions education? In most cases, triggers that prompt decisions about growth are based on community or professional needs, complementary professional programs, and finances. In each case, university administrators can, and very well should, consider the roots of Jesuit education in their decision making.

During my time in administration, we have considered a number of additional programs based on requests from the community. At Regis, RHCHP includes the following academic programs: schools of nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy, and academic division units for counseling, marriage and family therapy, and health services education. Recently, Regis has been approached by health care providers in the area to consider adding medical technology as a degree and to consider a pathway for health navigators. A decision was made to not support and start the medical technology program based on the fact that the annual salary for graduates was potentially lower than the yearly tuition for the program. The

current standard for health navigators is at associate degree level or on-the-job training. Although an argument was considered that a bachelor's degree would assist people in this profession to gain skills, the cost to the individual students seemed excessive for the amount of education needed, and Regis is not accredited to provide academic programs at the associate degree level. This was a decision made with the Jesuit principles in mind.

We have also added programs based on community need that have had unintended consequences related to Jesuit education. An accelerated nursing program was added to provide an opportunity for students with a baccalaureate degree to complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (BSN) in one year or less. This competitive, intensive program meets a community need of providing BSN-trained nurses into the workforce. However, in order to meet the nursing accreditation curricular requirements, schedules are packed tight and there is little time to address the values that differentiate a Catholic, Jesuit education from its secular counterparts, and little time to foster the development of a student's relationship to God.

In other cases, pragmatic decisions have been made to not move forward with new academic programs. Particularly, an administrative decision has been made to not add any programs that require clinical internships, due to the scarcity of internship sites. One example has been nutrition, where the accreditation body has also enforced a moratorium on any new didactic-only programs, requiring that only programs that provide internship experiences with didactic training may be accredited. Internships are scarce resources, and sites are either not available or require financial compensation, making the cost-benefit ratio unfavorable.

In both private and public universities, as well as for-profit and not-for-profit models, finances are a strong driver of decisions related to program growth. With a tuition-based budget, any additional revenue needed for operations will primarily come from increasing numbers of students who pay tuition. In our programs that have a strong focus on the development of students' self-reflection and development, adding

more students to each program seems reasonable. The prevailing attitude in professional circles is that adding more students to strong programs is preferable to opening new programs, as more students will benefit from proven student outcomes.

It seems reasonable that decisions about new programs in Jesuit institutions can be informed by Jesuit history and perspective. Perhaps all decisions should ask how to use *magis* as a criterion for decision making — what is the greater good in this instance?

*Ken*

I had a unique institutional role in that I was both an administrator and a faculty member serving the whole institution. As the director of our teaching and learning center, I had the privilege and opportunity to be invited into many different classrooms and other learning experiences and offered research-based advice on how to make student learning better. With faculty status but no real attachment to any of the five independent colleges on our campus, I had an opportunity to teach in several colleges in a role similar to that of an adjunct or affiliate faculty member. I taught on an overload contract and was usually contacted by departments or schools when they needed or wanted me to teach. This unique vantage point allowed me to see how schools and departments communicate what is important for given courses and student learning as well as how those schools and departments check in to improve student learning.

In the three years I was in this position, I slowly grew the teaching and learning center into spaces designed to help faculty improve student learning as it relates to the Jesuit mission. Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) and a three-year new faculty orientation designed and offered in partnership with our Vice President for Mission are two very distinct locales where this work is realized. In this time and work with faculty, the pride in our Jesuit mission and the belief in the promises of this work are always palpable. Answering the question of whether we are living that mission and holding our students accountable for an increasing ability to fulfill that mission are almost always part of those conversations. In my experience, faculty

deeply desire to offer a distinctively Jesuit education for our students, but they are often caught in other frenetic conversations such as external accreditation, new ventures, pleasing students, and test pass rates. In these spaces, I have often seen the ideals of offering a Jesuit education taking a back seat to the reality of operations and what needs to be accomplished. It has even resulted in tears when faculty members realize dissonance when ideals are not enacted (e.g., faculty realizing that the traditions of our programs and accreditors' dictates for content left no room to incorporate the Jesuit values as they saw them).

When I was invited into classrooms to observe and help faculty figure out how to improve student learning, I got to see a multitude of teaching techniques and strategies. It gave me opportunities to interact with students and ask them questions about the course and the teacher and to consult with faculty groups who are striving to improve their curricula. It was in these meetings when asking faculty and administrators what they want from their programs that I heard that they deeply desire to offer a kind of world-impacting, person-changing Jesuit education. It was the place where I got to hear the fear they have with offering something different than other institutions and the explanation that this is hard to measure. While there are most certainly exceptions to this, I have encountered that the Jesuit learning outcomes are often met with a single student experience, and they are not developed as we would a more common academic skill.

In my own classes, lessons on Jesuit values are often met with students explaining that they have not heard of them or have not used them specifically during their coursework. It is in these times when I see how the students' experience of their education has these values around but not necessarily an apparent and present component of their learning.

*Cheryl*

Experiential education as philosophy “in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute

to their communities” has greatly influenced my professional career in both human services and education.<sup>2</sup> I believe the indoor and outdoor classroom is the obvious environment for the development of one’s capacity as a citizen of the world. The scaffolding of a real-world, educative curriculum with direct, hands-on learning creates a level of understanding that truly unites theory with practical application. Parker Palmer describes the experiential classroom as a “community of knowers” for a common outcome or good.<sup>3</sup> My career has revolved around creating an environment for clients and learners to be their “best them,” especially when out of comfort and in the “stretch zone” that marks true awareness and consciousness. The learning environment I provide challenges the client/learner to look within and become intentional about who they want to be in their own lives and in the world.

As the Director of Service Learning in RHCHP at Regis University, I have a unique opportunity to bridge multiple core philosophies of my life and career. I provide real-world learning opportunities for students to practically apply the social justice theories of service learning while engaging in their own journey towards critical consciousness as a healthcare professional and citizen of the world. I provide theoretical content, practical application, and critical reflection that ultimately transform students into aware, self-efficacious practitioners with the ability to socially-emotionally connect with clients and patients. Ultimately, we want our students to feel morally courageous enough to impact and improve healthcare in the twenty-first century, making healthcare more accessible and healing for all citizens. As the director, I am called to ask: “How is service learning different at a Jesuit university?” “How are service learning social justice theory and Ignatian pedagogy aligned and how are they different?” “How can service learning serve as the connector between graduate professional and Jesuit educations?”

Service learning emphasizes student critical thinking and actively promotes empowerment of community organizations and individuals. In RHCHP, service learning is an opportunity for students to critically analyze and understand social challenges while providing necessary health-related education, prevention, civic engagement, and leadership to/with community partners. A

student’s understanding of the larger systems that influence organizations, clients/patients, and practitioners creates their wherewithal to advocate for the more universal good. A Jesuit education supports a student’s journey towards awareness of self, others, socio-political issues, and one’s ability to make change and create justice through integration of and reflection on *magis, cura personalis*, and the question “how ought we to live?” The Regis University mission guides students in service learning to embrace “men and women for others” through the lens of one’s own journey towards transformation and critical consciousness.

The question remains, “Are we fulfilling our promise to offer our graduate professional students the best Jesuit education we can?” Most RHCHP students are not from the Catholic faith and may not have come to Regis University for a Jesuit education. Introducing Jesuit concepts and values grounded in God often feels like a departure from the professional hands-on skills that are required for practice. Faculty may not be comfortable engaging in discussion of Jesuit values. Service learning has become the experiential vehicle for the delivery of a Jesuit education. When leading service learning, many students question why they are engaging in service learning and question its connection to their ultimate goal of becoming a healthcare provider. As such, it becomes imperative to meet students where they are in terms of understanding Jesuit values, remind them of why they chose to enter a healthcare-related service industry, and create a safe environment for a self-reflective journey.

Service learning’s ultimate goal is to graduate students who have the ability to improve the delivery of social-emotional and socio-empathetic healthcare, creating a more just and compassionate healthcare industry where patients and clients are seen as whole persons, changing systems to be more inclusive, integrative, and just. This goal is met by providing real-world, experiential opportunities for students to understand those who are different than them, realize their own biases, and use their privilege for the greater good. It is also an opportunity to encourage students to examine these experiences in light of their own spiritual journeys. Meeting students where they are requires acceptance that



they will embrace Ignatian values and teachings in a way that morally and ethically works for their personal, professional, and spiritual lives. At the core of all faith traditions is the understanding that we are global citizens, part of a larger spiritual power and world outside of ourselves. Connecting graduate professional healthcare students to the reality of their profession of service while engaging them in their own enlightenment is both the blessing and the challenge. It is one that is worth taking.

*Fr. Dirk*

I am teaching a course entitled “Faith, Spirituality, and Culture in Health Care” to the third-year pharmacy class at Regis University. I taught the same course last spring. The course is required. Originally, I inherited the syllabus from an adjunct professor who had found herself unable to continue teaching. There was little time to prepare the course, and circumstances prevented my talking with the woman who had taught the course before me. Instead, I made minor changes to the syllabus, with the idea of adjusting assignments and content based upon my classroom experience and student feedback.

The Regis Pharmacy program prepares students for professional careers as pharmacists in a variety of healthcare settings. Students come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Some come with undergraduate degrees, while others have completed only the prerequisites required for the program. Students are typically in their late twenties or early thirties, but there are always a few older students in the midst of career changes.

Most of my students in both years have been Caucasian, although a sizeable minority were of Asian descent. A small handful in each year have been African-American. Although many of the students in either year have volunteered that they were reared as Christians, fewer than ten (in classes of 80 and 60, respectively) still practice. Of those who identified as Roman Catholic, just two in each year attend mass with any regularity. The single Buddhist in this year’s class practices his faith. Of three Muslims, two practice. About half of the students claimed to be “spiritual but not religious,” although this claim has proved to be empty of any real meaning. Just one student in

either year — an exceptionally bright and articulate young man — has admitted to being an atheist.

The Regis University website explains how a Jesuit education differs from the norm:

Regis University’s Jesuit education provides an opportunity to explore the question “How ought we to live?” through service learning, academic excellence and spiritual development. Your college experience will challenge you to be more, do more and learn more. Through the cultivation of leadership in service to others, you will be engaged in an academic environment that calls you to strive for excellence and seek God in all things.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of their program, the students had been briefly introduced in a fifteen-minute segment of a packed orientation schedule to what are often called, with some license, Jesuit values. These include the following, sometimes described as characteristic of a Jesuit education.<sup>5</sup> Some of them apply more appropriately to persons, and some apply to institutions or programs:

- Contemplatives in Action
- Men and Women For and With Others
- Unity of Mind and Heart
- *Cura Personalis*
- Finding God in All Things
- *Magis*

Which values are included, and how they are worded, varies from institution to institution. Regis University in Denver, Colorado, has enshrined all six of the above values in the concrete pavement outside one of the academic buildings.

Students are given a cursory introduction to the idea of Ignatian discernment, centering upon the Examen, and are encouraged — without anything by way of instruction or support — to put the Examen into practice in their own lives. No provision is made for following up with students or for tracking a given student’s progress.

I enjoyed my students and enjoyed working with them. I also found that, as a group, they were not

particularly well prepared for the course or for the issues I was asking them to wrestle with. Moreover, they seemed to have forgotten whatever they might have learned about Jesuit spirituality. Focused on pharmacy, they wondered why they were required to study issues of faith, culture, and spirituality, and many of them clearly saw my course material as less important than pharmacy. They accepted the conventional wisdom regarding the supposed gulf between faith and science — and came down, for the most part, firmly on the side of science. None of them had developed habits of discernment. When quizzed, none was able to explain discernment with any kind of precision — many made what were apparently uneducated guesses at the meaning of the term. Few of my students had a prayer life. Those who did had brought it with them to the program.

On one memorable morning we were discussing Flannery O'Connor's story "The Displaced Person." I had assigned the story as a means of opening a discussion of race and culture in the United States. The events in Ferguson, Missouri (on August 9, 2014, an unarmed 18-year-old black man was shot and killed by a 28-year-old white police officer in the mostly black St. Louis suburb of Ferguson) had occurred several weeks prior to this, and pieces about Ferguson and about the larger issue of race in America were still appearing daily in local newspapers. In the midst of the discussion, a young woman — herself an American of Middle Eastern ancestry — raised her hand to observe, pointedly, that while race might be an issue for older Americans, it was not an issue for her generation. She went on to ask why — except perhaps as a matter of historical interest — the students were being asked to read a story about an issue that was no longer relevant.

Almost immediately one of the three African-American students in the class raised his hand. He said that he had come to Regis from the Deep South, and that Denver was the first place someone had used the N-word to refer to him — and that his verbal assailant was a young adult. He concluded his story by saying, "racism is not dead."

Jesuit values presume that the spiritual lives of the university's employees and students will find

expression in each person's unique answer to the question, "How ought I to live?" The evidence suggests that our graduate and professional students have not been incorporated into the University's mission.

### Important and Necessary Context

Hopefully, the range of our five separate experiences makes it apparent how we came to actively wrestle with all the questions in the opening section. The questions and experiences led us down multiple paths as a way to better understand what we were doing as educators at a Jesuit university. As we began to dig into the literature on these topics and questions, we found support for what we were experiencing in some places. We share some here with you as examples of where we went exploring. It should be noted that there was much more explored. Our conversation also led to us digging into Jesuit education, its beginnings, and the Jesuit values in particular. That work was done early when we were still focused on a more traditional scholarly article. We have decided to separate that writing into its own piece and publish it in a future edition of *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*. It was extremely important for our conversations.

In our review of the literature, one author in particular, Elizabeth Kinsella, has written about her experience as a graduate health professional student. She writes that, while we may believe that our health care programs are focused on developing thoughtful and caring professionals, the truth may be quite different from the student perspective.<sup>6</sup> In her 2010 essay on the art of reflective practice in health and social care, Kinsella shares her experience as a young occupational therapist. From those experiences, she shares that she thought her system to be focused on the technical approaches, efficiencies, and outcomes, with little attention paid to reflection, compassion, care, or relational practices.<sup>7</sup>

As we sought to understand how our experiences have come to be possible, we needed to better understand more of the contextual nuance that is a part of higher education in modern times. We worked from current times to the past. We focused on developing better understandings of

the external pressures currently on graduate professional education and where they come from. We also looked at the most current information about the greater higher education landscape and how ideas of formation and transformation are framed. We finally turned to our own history of Jesuit education, how this type of education began, what intentions it set forth, and the values that framed its character. The next section shares what we discovered on our journey.

### **External Pressures on Graduate Professional Education**

Ideally, colleges and universities could design curricula according to their own outcomes and values in much the same way that the Jesuits began their own schools. In reality, the larger landscape of higher education heavily influences what type of and how education is offered. This section will contextualize the position of graduate professional education by highlighting some of the external influences that put pressure on graduate professional programs in the health professions. External accrediting bodies, professional organizations, responses to public healthcare needs, and student desires often have a large part in determining curriculum, content, and sometimes even the delivery method, speed at which degree programs are offered, and the number of students enrolled. In addition to the influences of higher education in general, graduate education in the American Jesuit schools is situated within two different contexts in higher education — both *graduate* and *professional* education. If we want to examine Jesuit professional graduate education, these contexts also need to be identified and their influences explained.

Doctoral education is a part of the American graduate education system with more depth within a given discipline than a Master's degree and a greater research emphasis. It is mainly intended and designed to create researchers and scholars for the academy. Professional education, on the other hand, is mainly focused on gaining skills for practicing in a given profession. It is designed and “occurs within the context of societal demands and needs as well as the inter-professional work environment.” Doctoral-level professional education represents a “complementary and

alternative approach to the highest level [Ph.D.] of educational preparation.”<sup>8</sup>

A trend towards graduate programs in the health professions has been seen over the last twenty years. Graduate programs in nursing have tripled the number of doctoral programs between 1986 and 2006 and more than quadrupled the number of master's level programs in the same time. The requirement of doctoral, entry-level for professional practice degrees are relatively new models in the fields of physical therapy (late 1990s), pharmacy (2000), and nursing (DNP approved in 2004). These professional level doctorates in the health care professions grew out of frustrations with current practice, specifically interactions with physicians and parity with other disciplines.<sup>9</sup>

In these professional graduate degrees, the professional organizations determine the requirements needed for professional doctoral programs to be accredited and retain oversight of the requirements. And those requirements are driven by many deciding factors — the changing landscape and working environments of the health care system and the demands of patients.

It is not only the overall educational system and the professional accrediting bodies that influence graduate professional education. There have been large increases in the number of students enrolled in graduate professional degrees in the United States because of the financial benefit for the institutions. The professional degree programs tend to attract highly motivated students who are committed for the entire course of study as much as three years, the retention rates are high and as a result, the revenue prospects are relatively stable. All these factors encourage institutions to add the professional degree programs. And, as the number of students and the number of programs increase across the country, the competition to enroll and retain students in these programs is a tangible factor that creates pressure upon the education offered in these Jesuit graduate professional programs.

Our students come to us with a set of experiences that can influence our programs as well. As students decide which graduate and professional education programs to attend, many are trying to

find a program that can help fulfill a life-long career dream while being in service to others. But they differ from typical undergraduate students in that they have life experiences and family situations of young adults. Often their educational decisions are driven by the need for the best education for the money, and students are focused on completing the programs so they can enter a wage-earning professional role. This mindset can often lead to the students focusing only on educating their minds and not caring for the whole person and not educating the heart, soul, and spirit. This general lack of interest along with the way the programs are rigidly structured does not leave time to focus on development of the heart, soul, and spirit, therefore eliminating an association with God.

Complicating this professional degree focus is a rise in accelerated professional programs. These programs are specifically designed to prepare students for practice faster than their traditional counterparts and to attract students to a shorter and less costly option. It should be noted that employers seeking more advanced education, training, and increased credentials while minimizing the loss of workforce are strong proponents of accelerated programs as are colleges and universities looking to save financial resources. For example, in pharmacy education there are currently over 130 accredited Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) programs in the United States, and fourteen of these are accelerated three-year programs.<sup>10</sup> In the nursing profession, accelerated baccalaureate nursing degree programs have become popular programs allowing students who have graduated with a bachelor's or graduate degree in a non-nursing discipline and who have met pre-requisites of the program to participate in a one-year accelerated program. These students receive a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and become a licensed registered nurse (RN). Currently, there are accelerated BSN programs available in 46 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In 2013, there were 293 programs.<sup>11</sup> Employers often incentivize employees, both prospective and current, to enroll in and complete these programs with promises for a position at their institution, a raise in pay, and job stability. These programs have proven to be successful in graduating students who are not only ready to take their professional board

examinations but pass these easily. Whether these programs produce professionals who can think critically is another matter.

The challenge with all professional programs, but specifically the accelerated programs, is the prescribed nature of the curriculum, which limits flexibility in program content. The challenge is already apparent in trying to cover the material that is required or needed in order to maintain accreditation. Students are often in class up to 30 hours/week, with additional study time required each evening. The doctoral programs range from 110-150 credit hours, forcing students to take 15-18 credit hours each term in order to finish in three to four years. Clinical requirements range from 20 to 40 weeks of clinical experiences under the supervision of licensed professionals. The focus on professional learning leaves little room to infuse learning of the Jesuit values and their relationship to God.

Even when the intent is to develop the student as a whole person, students pressure institutions to focus on professional knowledge. When students begin their education at higher institutes of learning, they immediately prioritize their work towards those courses that tend to provide direct-applied knowledge in the primary field of study, perceiving ethics, psychosocial aspects or law as less important than their professional skills. Students often do not understand the rationale for inclusion of these courses in the curriculum.

For academicians, the mindset is that we train students for the careers of the future and not for careers that are of the past and present. As a Jesuit-trained professional, the hope is that they are able to pursue these ever-evolving careers knowing who they are and their connection with God. Students are able to connect with patients as a whole person, treating and caring for the patient with the hopes of them achieving the best health possible.

### **Context of Current Higher Education and Personal Formation**

Not only is it important to understand how graduate professional education is influenced by external forces, it is also necessary to understand the context of a student's current day educational

experiences as well as how our own positions in higher education are often contextualized. The conditioning effect of one's educational experiences greatly impacts students' expectations, satisfaction, and comfort long before they become our graduate students. For the sake of space, this next section focuses on student formation and presents a continuum of current ways in which student formation can be presented in colleges and universities in the United States. One would not have to look so hard to find that many, if not most, institutions have components of their institutional mission related to students' personal development and formation. One also could likely see that these statements are often written with language that is reminiscent of the transformative promise of Jesuit education. Below are just a few examples of some common similarities.

#### *Critical Thinking*

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) gathered faculty experts from over 100 colleges and universities around the United States from 2007 to 2009 to develop and test a collection of meta rubrics designed to assist faculty and institutions with assessing students' development of what AAC&U called its liberal arts essential outcomes. One of these essential outcomes is critical thinking, defined as "a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion."<sup>12</sup> The rubric they designed went on to look at the students' perspectives, the influence of the students' context and their assumptions, and how these components lead a student to make a decision for the situation at hand. Critical thinking has become a standard buzzword in college education, and at face value, seems to be a substitute for sound reasoning. While it speaks to how students might consider evidence as they make decisions, it has many varied definitions across most campuses. Consider how the same words — *critical thinking* — might differ from a course in the sciences to another course in the humanities. Additionally, the skill of critical thinking is often expected as an outcome but rarely specifically taught in ways that are apparent such that students can know when and where they are doing it, and therefore transfer that skill to different contexts. Students in all the health care

professions need critical thinking skills, but by definition, this is primarily a cognitive exercise focused on finding a suitable answer to a problem, and does not require an understanding or belief in Jesuit values in order to perform.

#### *Reflective Thinking*

Grounded in the early work of John Dewey and his definition of reflective thought, reflective thinking reviews a current situation in light of previous knowledge in order to determine whether new perspectives are needed.<sup>13</sup> While it is often difficult to differentiate critical thinking from reflective thinking, some might say that critical thinking is the science of thinking whereas reflective thinking may be more of an art.<sup>14</sup> The work of Dewey was expanded by Donald Schön in 1983 in *The Reflective Practitioner*. Schön described how professionals practice, arguing that technical knowledge and skill was never sufficient for effective practice but rather, effective practice was best done by those that could think reflectively and adjust their practice in the moment. This intersection and combination of practice and active reflective thinking makes what Kinsella calls professional knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

In order to develop a habit of reflection, Schön suggests that the student be guided by the master in an apprenticeship setting, which is what we call clinical education.<sup>16</sup> However, the most obvious and oft-used tool for encouraging reflection is a written reflection paper about a specific experience. But the difference between writing a reflection paper (all too often, simply a matter of describing experiences and the feelings that arose as a result) and reflective thinking is often a great one.

#### *Critical Consciousness*

Critical consciousness was defined by Paulo Freire as the ability of individuals to assess their own identities related to the sociopolitical realities that surround them and to critically examine how those identities have been informed by and support privilege and oppression.<sup>17</sup> Critical thinking rests with an individual and their own examination of their own and other's contexts. Reflective thinking requires a judgment about one's critical thinking in order to determine

appropriate actions in a given situation. Critical consciousness builds on both of these and moves thinking and being from resting with the individual and their own actions further outward to intentionally include others and social issues, bringing a justice component with it. Cipolle writes about developing students' critical consciousness as the key for transformation in terms of service learning pedagogy.<sup>18</sup> She describes critical consciousness as having four essential elements: 1) a deeper awareness of self, 2) recognition of others' struggles, 3) identifying social injustices, and 4) potential to make change. The development of critical consciousness requires moral courage, defined as the ability to address ethical and moral issues and challenges in the workplace and take action when doing the right thing, "the more universal good".<sup>19</sup>

### *Self-Actualization*

Formation in education also includes self-actualization as a goal. From the work of Maslow and his hierarchical theory of needs, self-actualization, or the desire for self-fulfillment, can occur when one's physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs have been met.<sup>20</sup> A self-actualizing person needs to be and do that for which they are called. A self-actualizing person realizes that their journey is a continuous process and one that calls for constant improvement.

### **Finishing Thoughts**

Hopefully, the connections between the questions shared early in the article are quite obvious as you moved from personal reflections on experiences to the current contexts of higher education and then to the roots of Jesuit education and a contextual revisiting of the Jesuit values. While the primary purpose of this paper was to share our experiences and reflections, you should notice that we did not provide answers to the questions we raised earlier. We are sharing our critical examinations of our own experiences and a way of proceeding that we have found useful and hopeful in our own practices. We are sharing with the reader what we explored and the order of our explorations so that the reader may explore their own perspectives on Jesuit education and answer if, in their experience, they are fulfilling the

promise of Jesuit education in their own courses and programs.

Finding out where we are — as ourselves, as an institution, as a Jesuit institution, in higher education — is important if we all want to shape and find meaning in our work. On our campus, any discussions about faculty working for and with our students usually evolve into a need for faculty and staff to have the same conversations and experiences first. Any gathering of faculty and staff should consider this need. In addition, consideration of what faculty and staff need to be successful owners of their work at a Jesuit university is necessary. Our process took a long time on the calendar, although the conversations refreshed us such that it did not seem to last too long. Our process was informal and provided the time and space to grow and deepen in an organic fashion. We believe that a more formal process may undermine the work of our faculty and staff. So, an additional question to be considered is, how do we create the spaces for this? Our advice at this point is to look at the web of relationships that already exists. Look for shared experiences of two people and invite others outside in so that a safe space where trust is present can be created.

Finally, as you read, you may think some of what we shared to be critical of Jesuit education and even education in the graduate professional programs. On the contrary, we all deeply care about educating our students and have deep emotional commitments to Jesuit education. We genuinely want Jesuit education to be a distinct model of personal education and transformation. This process has been akin to a professional Examen, allowing us to recall our experiences and make sense of them. What each of us participates in daily led us to many questions. We developed a very large set of our own questions building from the shared perspectives. At times, we became lost in questions and sharing those experiences. It was, and continues to be, a fascinating and rewarding growth experience. We should mention that, while our journeys began and continue personally, the value of community in these discussions in seeing different perspectives and hearing other's experiences was invaluable. There is strength in knowing that your experiences are shared by others. Growing these conversations to include an increasing and more diverse set of colleagues will

better allow our institutions to deeply consider whether and how well we are delivering on our promises of a transformational Jesuit education. We hope that you can use this approach as a way of analyzing your own experiences and deepening your understandings of the promises of a Jesuit education. HJE

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Association for Experiential Education (AEE), "What Is Experiential Education?," accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.aee.org/what-is-ee>.

<sup>3</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Regis University, "Jesuit Education," accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.regis.edu/About-Regis-University/Our-Jesuit-Education-and-Heritage/Jesuit-Education.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> Boston College Office of Marketing Communications, "A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education," Boston College Division of University Mission and Ministry (October 2014), accessed August 22, 2016, [http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/m\\_ission/pdf/UMMSC\\_Digital\\_Assiets/BC\\_Pocket%20Guide%202014\\_WEB%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/m_ission/pdf/UMMSC_Digital_Assiets/BC_Pocket%20Guide%202014_WEB%20FINAL.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Kinsella, "The Art of Reflective Practice in Health and Social Care: Reflections on the Legacy of Donald Schön," *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (September 2010): 567.

<sup>7</sup> Kinsella, "The Art of Reflective Practice," 566.

<sup>8</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), "The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice," (2006), 3, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/dnp/Essentials.pdf>

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<sup>9</sup> D.J. Brown-Benedict, "The Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree: Lessons from the History of the Professional Doctorate in Other Health Disciplines," *Journal of Nursing Education* 47, no. 10 (October 2008): 448-457.

<sup>10</sup> PharmD Programs website, "Accelerated Pharmacy Schools," accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.pharmdprograms.org/accelerated-pharmacy-schools/>.

<sup>11</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), "Accelerated Entry-Level Baccalaureate and Master's Degrees in Nursing," last updated March 26, 2015, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/fact-sheets/accelerated-programs>.

<sup>12</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), "Critical Thinking Value Rubric" (2010), accessed August 22, 2016, <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/critical-thinking>.

<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think: A Reinstatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Boston: DC Heath and Company, 1933), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Kinsella, "The Art of Reflective Practice," 569.

<sup>15</sup> Kinsella, "The Art of Reflective Practice," 567.

<sup>16</sup> Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

<sup>17</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 35.

<sup>18</sup> Susan B. Cipolle, *Service Learning and Social Justice: Engaging Students in Social Change* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2010).

<sup>19</sup> John S. Murray, "Moral Courage in Healthcare: Acting Ethically Even in the Presence of Risk," *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* 15, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>20</sup> A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943), 370-396.