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John P. Pelissero

Loyola University Chicago, jpeliss@luc.edu

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Hiring Faculty for the Mission of Private Universities — Conversations

By John P. Pelissero, PhD

Editor's Note: This piece has been substantially revised since it was originally published in August 2019.

Another cycle of faculty recruitment is about to commence. As the former Provost and Chief Academic Officer at [Loyola University Chicago](#), I have confronted many questions from deans and faculty members about what it means to “hire for mission.” This is an important question; after all, typically the mission is what distinguishes a Jesuit, Catholic university from public universities, as well as other nonprofit institutions of higher education. To maintain a distinctive reputation, private institutions—from the Ivy League universities to religiously founded universities to small liberal arts colleges—must nurture their missions in intentional ways. This focus includes offering the best academic programs, presenting innovative modes of learning, choosing excellent leaders, hiring student-focused staff, and recruiting outstanding faculty who will deliver the core academic programs that align with its mission.

In the search for faculty members at religiously-founded institutions, such as our Jesuit colleges and universities, many might assume that “mission-hires” have something to do with recruitment of individuals who will work in academic programs that are related to religious studies, such as the theology department, pastoral studies programs, or a center focused on preserving the legacy of the founders and their contributions to education and society. Some believe that mission hiring pertains to recruitment of campus staff who provide religious services and attend to the spiritual development of students. I have found that many faculty do not accept the view that hiring for the distinctive mission of a private, Catholic and Jesuit university should be a priority when searching for the best faculty member.

Quite often, this view evolves from a narrow perspective of why we are recruiting a faculty member. The most common—and quite important—goal is to hire the best faculty member for an academic program who can teach and publish research in an academic discipline. That is the primary objective for faculty search committees in the typical tenure-stream faculty hiring process. Yet, deans and other senior academic leaders often want faculty members who will: (1) contribute to educating students with competence in a field of study, and (2) embrace the university’s distinctive mission to develop students with a breadth of learning and core values that make them better individuals who will contribute to the good of their workplaces, families, communities, and society.

These two perspectives are not incompatible when hiring faculty for mission. I believe that we can attend to the goals of educating students with the knowledge and skills expected in a discipline and of developing socially responsible value systems in our graduates. I embrace the possibility that faculty can be recruited to serve multiple goals and achieve the mission for which a Jesuit university was founded.

I developed a mission-hiring philosophy involving a set of interconnected goals, and I asked faculty search committees to reflect on these when exploring how to “hire for

mission.” The key points of my philosophy can be summarized as follows:

- *When we recruit and hire new faculty members with the expertise and competence to contribute to teaching and learning in our academic programs, we are hiring for mission.*
- *When we seek the best teachers and researchers to promote intellectual inquiry and advance knowledge in the disciplines and professions, we are hiring for mission.*
- *When we actively search for new faculty who respect and are intellectually interested in the dynamic between faith and reason, we are hiring for mission.*
- *When we pursue individuals to join our faculty who are committed to broader issues of civic engagement, equity, justice, care for the planet, and the common good of society, we are hiring for mission.*
- *When we conduct an actively inclusive recruitment process that enhances the diversity of the faculty ranks and of the university, we are hiring for mission.*
- *When we recruit individuals who are willing to offer students a transformative education and embrace a role in the academic and personal development of our students, we are hiring for mission.*
- *And, when we support all faculty, especially new faculty members, in their professional development as scholars, teachers, and mentors, we are investing in our faculty and advancing the university’s mission.*

At the heart of this philosophy are the goals that make Catholic and Jesuit education so distinct. These values reinforce the Jesuit commitment to care for the whole person; to pursue excellence and promote justice; to the service of faith and finding God and the good in all things; and to producing graduates who will become women and men for others. As deans, chairs, and faculty embraced these goals to hire for mission, I witnessed my own Jesuit university evolve in positive ways that promoted its mission and attended to the goals of its founders. I believe the reputation of the university and its distinctive niche in the higher education marketplace are stronger because of hiring faculty for mission.

I share these thoughts as search committees across the country commence the important work of recruiting new faculty members and hiring for the future of their universities and our shared mission and identity.

[John P. Pelissero](#) is the former provost/chief academic officer and currently a professor of political science at [Loyola University Chicago](#).