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A Balancing Act

By Sarah Leary Gatti

When I was in the third grade I saw the most amazing thing; two jugglers on unicycles throwing knives back and forth. I was astounded, there were so many variables. They had to be aware of themselves, their partner, the crowd watching, and the knives being shared between them. I watched them in a state of awe over this astonishing balancing act. They never faltered, until one juggler got two many knives. The rhythm was ruined, they no longer could share, and he lost his balance and the act came to an abrupt close.

I have found myself in a similar emotional state here at my Jesuit University; however, this time it is not because I am watching two people throwing knives but because of something far greater, and much more tenuous. I feel that as an institution we are in a juggling act with the world. We of course exist in the world, but I have found that much of the Ignatian pedagogy, which is the foundation of our schools, seem to rightfully challenge the world around us. To exemplify personally, I have often felt tossed between what society says I should do, and what my education has called me to do. I feel my individual struggle plays out on an institutional level. How do we navi-

gate what the world demands of us with what our faith requires of us?

Personally I feel my Jesuit education has given me the tools to pilot through the many complications of this question, and for that I am so grateful. I wonder however, if institutionally we are successfully remaining committed to our Jesuit ideals while attempting to be competitive in the world around us. Jesuit institutions of higher education have a unique and powerful opportunity to model how any institutions can live out our mission in the world today. To be more concrete, we have been granted a space in which we get to tackle issues that occur in all sorts of institutions around the world from a foundation of faith.

For example at my institution we sub-contract our food and cleaning services. This helps keep operation costs low so that more students can afford to come here. At the same time those employees who cook and clean no longer have access to the financial benefits of being a University employee - mainly a tuition break for their children.

Also, in these difficult economic times we are forced to make very complicated economic decisions. In this process, how are we remaining true to our Jesuit identity, reflecting on our action, trying our best to care for the whole person, and being just in severance packages or other fiscal decisions? Another example, perhaps less complex, is that of free t-shirts. In a culture that desires and

demands material, we often succumb and use material goods to draw people to events. That alone is cause for reflection, but beyond that where are these T-shirts made? What are those companies' labor policies? So often we talk about the dignity of human persons and then turn around and support institutions which deny people dignity.

Finally, an ecologically note, how are we creating sustainable communities? We have the rich opportunity to test drive ecological solutions with in our ready-made University communities. Are we capitalizing on this? I suppose one could ask to what degree is a Jesuit University called to address these questions and others like them.

To answer this I have to return to the personal. As a student, I am constantly asked how do I bring about the greater glory of God. As an institution, I believe we must be asking the same thing. How can we structurally model an institution that brings about the greater glory of God? And perhaps, it also comes back to my two jugglers; we as an institution have to be aware of ourselves, our juggling partners, those watching, and the issues being shared between us. It is in this balance, this give and take, that people are moved to a place of wonder, which is where God resides. ■

Sarah Gatti is a senior at Fairfield University.