

# Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

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## Letters to the Editors

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To the Editor:

In "'Branding' is the Problem, Not the Solution" (Spring 2004), John Hollwitz suggests that "branding" Jesuit education is paradoxical, since it is part of the mission of Jesuit education to produce men and women who do not respond to branding. But as the very title of his article implies, "branding" is widespread. Speaking the "vernacular" of a group is an effective way to communicate with its members, and branding is (sadly) the vernacular of many young people. One might even suggest that those young people most easily manipulated by branding are precisely the ones we most want to attract to our schools, for they are the ones most in need of our "brand" of education.

Besides, the report from the JAA Branding Task Force indicates that the branding of Jesuit education already takes place. Should not Jesuit colleges and universities seek greater control over this process?

Christopher L. Constas  
Arts and Sciences Honors Program  
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To the Editor:

I enjoyed the different perspectives on branding and marketing of Jesuit education discussed by Gene Laczniaik, John Hollwitz, and Pat Bourgeois in the spring 2004 edition. As someone with peripheral ties to several Jesuit education ministries, I am a little dismayed by Hollwitz's belief that "branding" and "marketing" are inherently anti-intellectual, morally vacuous, and compromise the identity and integrity of Jesuit education. Further, I don't think Laczniaik views Jesuit education as a cold commodity and students as faceless customers, concerns expressed by Bourgeois.

Indeed, Laczniaik describes Jesuit higher education as a values driven, high-quality academic experience that deserves greater recognition in the U.S. Such opinions seem neither morally vacuous nor conspicuously commercial.

Granted corporate America uses branding and marketing techniques to sell a lot of unnecessary junk, a practice that can, as Hollwitz says, be both vacuous and manipulative. However, when you cut through all the nonsense and manipulation, all branding and marketing really do is help get people's attention, at which point one still has a choice to communicate vacuous garbage or something of worth. Hollwitz seems to feel that because so many people communicate garbage, branding is an inherently unworthy pursuit, while Bourgeois seems to be saying, if we brand and market, let's do so with dignity.

Clearly branding strategies work, and marketing is engrained in our culture, why else would otherwise reasonable people think they need a Hummer? Therefore, it seems smart, maybe even wise, to meet the purveyors of vacuous information on the same playing field and outplay them, both in terms of ingenuity and purpose. When Ronald McDonald (whom Hollwitz references) gets our attention in the shadow of the golden arches, he tempts kids with trinkets and parents with convenience and gets them to come eat a lot of unhealthy food.

Presumably, should Jesuit colleges and universities get the public's attention, they would use the moment to talk about that special (dare I say) product we know as Jesuit education and how it nurtures the spirit, mind, and soul. And in cutting through some of the semantics, if we can say a person is a product of a Jesuit education, why can't we consider Jesuit education a

product, at least for the purposes of attracting students?

Hollwitz also asserted that Ignatius would disapprove of branding. Ordinarily I would not rely on presumed opinions of the deceased in advancing my own view. However, since the precedent has been set, I think it's reasonable to counter that Ignatius might indeed approve of branding because he was a strong proponent of using our creativity and imagination for the greater good. It might even be fair to say that not only would Ignatius approve of our educational institutions coming together to recognize their strength in numbers and tradition, he would also urge them to spread the good news of Jesuit education while accepting branding and marketing simply as modern tools to help spread the word.

Moreover, he would likely be disappointed if, after 450 years of understanding the product, we couldn't come up with a better logo than a couple of golden arches.

Phil Nero  
Communications Director  
Wisconsin Province

To the Editor:

I read with interest your spring 2004 issue focusing on marketing and mission. Like many other Jesuit universities, Loyola University New Orleans has conducted extensive research that indicates a lack of understanding of the value of Jesuit education or the inability to articulate it amongst our various constituents. This problem extends from current students, faculty, and staff to prospective students, alumni, donors, and prospective donors. Needless to say, this is disheartening to those of us who are most deeply involved in Jesuit education

and believe in its unique qualities and strengths.

At Loyola, we are in our third year of implementing an integrated marketing communications program to address these concerns. We hope to facilitate perception shifts by crafting consistent messages to position our institution to achieve our strategic goal of enhanced national reputation. Informal observation on campus and in our alumni community indicates that we are making strides; formal research next year will make it possible to more accurately measure results.

As a member of the JAA Executive Committee and through serving on the branding subcommittee, I have worked with Jim Purcell from Santa Clara and others and wholeheartedly agree that branding for mission is essential. Although "branding" may not be the most attractive terminology, "positioning," as part of strategic marketing, is crucial to effective communication of the distinctive qualities of Jesuit higher education to our various audiences.

We need not reduce the enterprise of education to a business in order to market, promote, and advertise its strengths and benefits. Strong and effective communications, repeating consistent messages, will ultimately result in better understanding of the "qualitatively committed" education Pat Bourgeois praises in his article. Many who oppose the "branding" of Jesuit education are in reality opposing the business model they find implicit in the word. Perhaps "positioning" is a more appropriate term referring to a marketing initiative to increase the public's awareness of the positive nature and value of the Jesuit mission.

Positioning is a problem or challenge all of us in higher education are currently encountering, but at the same time it is also an incred-

ible opportunity. Even as the 28 Jesuit institutions in the U.S. maintain their individual attributes and identities, it is a fact that we share the commonality of academic excellence and values-based liberal arts education of the whole person in the Jesuit tradition. We can capitalize on the strength of numbers. Individually we are strong institutions; collectively, how much stronger could we be?

Julia McSherry  
Assistant Vice President  
Marketing and Communications  
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To the Editor:

At dinner after a recent business meeting in Cleveland, table discussion turned to sports, and to the 2004 NCAA Basketball Tournament. A company president asked, "What kind of school is Gonzaga?" A member of the company's Board of Directors responded, "A Jesuit school, like John Carroll." "Oh!" replied the president. "A good school." Understanding the known

quality of a local Jesuit institution helped this individual understand an important characteristic of an unknown Jesuit university thousands of miles away.

This brief exchange helps illustrate an inconsistently recognized and often misunderstood point: a university's Jesuit character is a "brand" that helps it "operationalize" its mission, and better communicate its value to the community it seeks to serve.

Ohio State University and John Carroll University are markedly different institutions sharing two characteristics: both are Ohio universities and both offer business degrees that are accredited by the AACSB-International. These two characteristics are sufficient to sustain both institutions' participation in the Ohio MBA Network, an association of Ohio-based, AACSB-International MBA programs benefiting members by sponsoring joint advertisements, a web page, brochures, information sessions, and workshops promoting AACSB-MBA programs throughout the region.

If two such different institutions can be so cooperative, surely Jesuit



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institutions can do as much, and derive even greater value! Eight years ago, AJCU business schools formed the Jesuit Education in Business Network [JEBNET] to provide an operational structure for Jesuit MBA programs to coordinate transfer agreements, support a Beijing International MBA Program, and share best practices. As worthwhile as this collaboration has been, JEBNET has yet to realize the benefits in joint advertising and promotions enjoyed by the more widely disparate members of the Ohio MBA Network. Jesuit schools would do well to jointly celebrate our most powerful common characteristic: we're all Jesuit.

We need not pervert our core values by celebrating who we are and the value we bring to the society we serve. Inherent in promoting "the Jesuit brand" is helping internal and external stakeholders understand what "Jesuit" means. Professor Hollwitz raises valid issues of concern. These, in large measure, outline the challenge associated with defining ourselves to ourselves, and then to the society we seek to serve.

If "branding" were simply the development of an advertising slogan or symbol to "sell" our schools, then I would share many of his concerns. If, however, "branding" includes clearly defining and communicating the characteristics of a Jesuit institution, then we enhance our opportunities to form men and women in service to others by doing so effectively. It is with this in mind that I encourage further AJCU efforts in this direction.

James Daley  
Dean, Helzberg School of  
Management  
Rockhurst University

To the Editor:

In the Spring, 2004, issue of *Conversations* John Hollwitz argues that branding is anti-intellectual, morally vacuous and manipulative, among other evils. Any effort to establish and promote a Jesuit brand would be a disgrace to the Jesuit mission in higher education. Before any decision is made to explore how Jesuit schools acting in concert might implement branding, public discussions about the propriety of branding given our heritage and mission are required. His assumption as to the outcome of these discussions is clear – such conversations will put an end to any movement of this sort.

Hollwitz suggests that we begin the discussions by asking what Ignatius might say about branding. He certainly would be appalled, would he not? The answer may not be as clear as Hollwitz assumes.

Ignatius had a very practical side to his plan to save souls. Although his sights were always set on the greater glory of God and the universal good, he also attended to mundane yet critical realities of organizing and sustaining the Society. Of course he certainly did not address the subject of branding as we know it today, but he came close to doing so in the final paragraph of Part IV of the Constitutions, the Part that deals with Jesuit-sponsored colleges.

Whether the rector and the chancellor and the beadles and also the doctors and masters ought to have insignia in order to be recognized in the university, or at least during public acts, and what sort these insignia ought to be, will be left to the consideration of him who is General at the time when the University is accepted. After considering the circumstances, he will order, either himself or through someone else, what he judges to be

for the greater Glory of God our Savior and for the universal good. This is the only end sought in this matter and in all others.

[Clarification M]. However, what seems best for each place in regard to these insignia will be clearly stated in the rules of each university.

(Part IV, Chapter 17, p.345 of the Constitutions, translated by George Ganss, S.J. in *Saint Ignatius' Idea of a Jesuit University* (1956))

I infer from this short paragraph that insignia, we might say brand symbol today, can be used as the General or the appropriate local official sees fit so long as it is for the greater Glory of God, which could include promoting Jesuit education. If so, is it not reasonable to suggest that Ignatius might indeed side with those supporting discussions that could lead to developing and implementing a plan for Jesuit branding?

David R. Buckholdt  
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