

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 1

Article 2

4-1-1992

Who Are These People and What Are They Doing and Why?

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Padberg, S.J., John W. (1992) "Who Are These People and What Are They Doing and Why?," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol1/iss1/2>

Who Are These People and What Are They Doing and Why?

John W. Padberg SJ

Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, Missouri

All of the thousands of us men and women who are part of the American Jesuit colleges and universities are involved in an extraordinary enterprise. Nowhere else in the world is there today or, at any time in the 450-year-old history of the Jesuits, has there been such a group of higher education institutions. This first issue of *Conversations* is meant to begin exactly that, a conversation with you, its readers, about that educational enterprise in which we participate.

What

To do so most successfully we might start by looking at the overall context of Jesuit education. In the United States the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities span the continent. You will find more details about them in the article "Complex Simplicity," in this same issue of *Conversations*.

It is important to know how broad, how widespread is the scope of that conversation, how farflung and diverse beyond the United States is this work in which we participate. Statistics give us a place from which to start our conversations. We in Jesuit colleges and universities are a part of a group of 177 such institutions throughout the world. They in turn are part of a total network of 665 Jesuit schools, including 356 secondary or high schools, and 132 specialized and even primary schools. The sum of all these institutions engages the efforts of about 70,000 teachers. Somewhat more than ninety percent of them (63,800) are laymen and laywomen and members of other religious orders, and 6,200 are members of the Society of Jesus. All in all, these Jesuit schools educate about one and one-half million students. Then add to that total almost another five hundred education centers and non-traditional schools in Latin America and Spain with nearly a half-million students and approximately 14,000 teachers. Six hundred members of the Society of Jesus administer and



The National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education

teach in those institutions in cooperation with other religious congregations. So, to add up all of it briefly and then go on: a total of 6,800 Jesuits and almost 80,000 other persons educate almost 1,900,000 students in about 1,300 Jesuit institutions in 65 countries. It is perfectly obvious that "Jesuit schools" or "Jesuit education" are possible only in the partnership of laymen and laywomen and Jesuits and members of other religious orders, who make up the faculty and staff and administration of these institutions.

Who – At Present

Turn now from quantity to quality when we consider the people who are the personnel of the Jesuit institutions. They, the thousands of intelligent, committed, hardworking women and men are the truly most important factor in maintaining the existence, the identity and the excellence of those schools.

This publication, *Conversations*, the first of them from a new National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education, comes from and is addressed to that personnel of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities of the United States. It is personally addressed to each man and woman who makes American Jesuit higher education the flourishing enterprise that it is. The venture is one of the results of the national meeting on Jesuit higher education which took place in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1989. That assembly was jointly sponsored by the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities and by the Society of Jesus itself in the United States. Its participants, laymen and laywomen, Jesuits and members of other religious congregations, faculty members and administrators and personnel from every facet of this enterprise, together took stock of the present situation of a work now two hundred years old in this country and looked to its future for the years to come. As one of the results of that meeting, those twenty-eight colleges and universities and the ten "provinces" or geographical and administrative areas of the Society of Jesus in the United States are jointly sponsoring this National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education and this journal, *Conversations*.

Eleven men and women who themselves are engaged in the work of Jesuit higher education make up the membership of this Seminar. They come from the various segments of that work and will usually serve a three year term on the Seminar. At present five are faculty members, one is a former president of a Jesuit university, two are administrators, one is the religious superior of the Jesuit community at a university, one is the chairman of the Seminar and director of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, another is the vice president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. You will find the names and the current responsibilities of all eleven members at the

inside of the front cover of this issue of *Conversations*. They meet on three long weekends a year for sessions of free and frank discussion on any and every facet of Jesuit higher education, its opportunities, problems, incoherences, distinctiveness, failures, successes. Twice a year all the faculty members and administrators and professional personnel of those twenty-eight schools will receive, personally addressed as is this present issue, a copy of *Conversations*, one of the results of the deliberations of the Seminar. The Seminar members hope you will engage in this ongoing conversation, with them, among yourselves, and across and beyond disciplinary and professional and institutional boundaries.

All of those involved in Jesuit education have their own personal experiences of that enterprise. All of those experiences contribute to its variety and richness and distinctiveness. Indeed, Jesuit education began with experience and at its best it returns to the bedrock of experience when it thinks about itself.

Who – In The Past

Seven university students, united in an experience of understanding and affection, agreed in 1534 to spend their lives together in the service of others as a way of their wholeheartedly serving God. They were all to become graduates of the University of Paris, arguably the best such institution in the world in the 1500s. They ranged in age from one in his early forties to five in their twenties and one who was nineteen. Their leader, a Spanish Basque, was Ignatius of Loyola. In 1540, this group, by now ten "friends in the Lord" as they termed themselves, became a religious order in the Catholic Church. They called that order the Society of Jesus because they wanted to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their model and their master. Originally their service of others consisted especially in preaching, in teaching the rudiments of the Christian faith to children and the unlettered, in working in hospitals and prisons and among the poor and destitute, in conversing familiarly with others about the things of God, especially about God's love for each and every one of us, in assisting men and women to make the Spiritual Exercises, that program of prayer and meditation and discernment whereby a person might seek the inner freedom to choose the ways to best love and serve God and other men and women individually and societally.

Very quickly those first Jesuits experienced the lasting good that formal education in well-established schools could bring to individuals and to society. In 1547-48 they established in Messina in Sicily the first Jesuit school set up specifically for lay students. When Ignatius Loyola sent the first group of ten Jesuits from a still very small organization to found that school, he con-

fidently told them, "If we live ten years, we shall see great things in the Society of Jesus." Nine years later, when he died in 1556, there were forty Jesuit colleges spread throughout Europe and already in parts of the new world, in Asia and in Africa. The fuller story of Jesuit education could be the subject of a later issue of *Conversations*. It is enough in this brief overview to note that by 1600, a little more than fifty years after the founding of that first school, there were almost two hundred and fifty Jesuit schools all over the world, from Cuzco in Peru to Cracow in Poland, from Milan in Italy to Goa in India. Shortly before the French Revolution there were more than 700 such Jesuit schools for lay students and 175 seminaries or houses of study for those preparing for ministry in the church. In 1773, when several of the European absolutist rulers threatened schism in the church unless the pope abolished the Society of Jesus, all of those schools were destroyed in the temporary suppression of the Jesuits. They began all over again at the restoration in 1814 after the French Revolution.

The story of the American Jesuit colleges and universities, and how they became what is briefly described in the essay "Simple Complexity" in this issue, demands its own story. It may, perhaps, be the subject of an essay in a later issue of *Conversations*. In any case, on that subject, as on others, we hope to give suggestions for further reading for all who are interested.

Why

But why are there Jesuit institutions of higher education? Each of the twenty-eight colleges or universities in the United States has prepared its own mission statement, of course, responding to its own particular circumstances. In all likelihood, however, all of those institutions would find familiar and congenial one of the very earliest statements of purpose for Jesuit education. It was written a little more than four hundred years ago by Diego Ledesma, among the most experienced practitioners and first theorists of that enterprise. Ledesma said that there were four reasons for which Jesuits conducted schools. First, "they supply people with many advantages for practical living; secondly, they contribute to the right government of public affairs and to the proper making of laws; third, they give ornament, splendor and perfection to the rational nature of man; and fourth . . . , they guide man most truly and easily to the achievement of his last end."¹ To put those four reasons in more contemporary terms: These schools help their students, first, to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary for a productive career. Second, they help foster social and political responsibility. Third, they contribute to the development of the totally human person in the humanities and the sciences and to the abil-

Published by the Publications Office of the Society of Jesus, 1992

ment. And lastly, they point explicitly to a vision and a destiny for humankind that goes beyond the simply human, to a destiny to be sons and daughters of God.

Each of those reasons becomes concrete and particular in the particular American Jesuit university and college. Each of them, too, may well be the subject of future issues of *Conversations* and surely the subject of your conversations at your school. What do you think of these reasons for Jesuit higher education? How would you express a rationale for such schools, for your school?

The American Jesuit colleges and universities of which we are all a part are in the twentieth century much more complicated as institutions than their earlier counterparts. But in all their variety of locale and history and programs they still draw their character now and for the future from the men and women who make up their ongoing personnel. We all are that body of men and women who have shaped and who continue to shape Jesuit education. Our variety, too, might be the subject of a later issue of *Conversations*. Personal, day by day, engagement in that enterprise will determine what Jesuit education will be in the future. The Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education hopes to foster among ourselves in partnership the kind of conversations that will broaden our knowledge, diversify our viewpoints, enhance our insights and deepen our convictions about who we are and what we are doing in this most extraordinary enterprise, and why we are engaged in it.

For a long period in the history of Jesuit colleges and universities the answer to the first question in the title of this essay, "Who Are These People and What Are They Doing and Why?" may have been "The Jesuits." Now the answer is, quite simply, "All of us." And what we are doing and why depends on all of us too.

¹ Diego Ledesma SJ, *De Ratione et Ordine Studiorum in Collegiis Romani in Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Jesu*, Madrid, 1901, p. 345, as quoted in Allan P. Farrell SJ, *The Jesuit Code of Liberal Education*, Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938, p. 171

Jesuit education
began with experience,
and at its best
it returns to the
bedrock of experience
when it thinks
about itself.
