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Animating the Mission in the First-Year Incentive Program

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discussed, the required course material, and handing in written reflections are emotional and usually bring up personal experiences.

As a former student of Clampet-Lundquist's, I remember how classes were taught in circle, with the concepts of "peace-making circles" at the center of the class proceedings, which include a talking stick to ensure respect and turn-taking. Students sit in alternating seats allowing them to easily interact with those who are different from them. In reality, as all the students soon realize, the people sitting side by side have a

great deal in common. Outside students see how easily they could have in the past or could in the future end up in the inside students' seats.

Universities tend to be places of privilege, including race, socio-economic status, education, gender, age, and any number of other factors. Inside-Out classes give university students the unique opportunity to assess their own privilege and the impact of that privilege on the course of their lives. This ongoing assessment throughout the 14-week course and presumably through the rest of their lives allows stu-

dents to become self-aware and understanding of those who seem different.

One day of class is dedicated to a facility tour for the outside students. That day, the students do not meet together but separately. The inner tension and anxiety experienced by the students as they walk through the facility is palpable. In later reflections, students explain their disgust and sadness as they walked through the various "blocks" as if on tour at a zoo. Even the heavy doors closing and opening, enclosing the students in various spaces, created bodily reac-

tions and the feeling of being closed in. Nobody could imagine living in such a place.

Once the fear, skepticism, and awkwardness are defeated, empathy flows through the circle. By the time closing ceremonies arrive, all the students are fighting back tears and wishing they could hug each other tight without breaking prison regulations.

Kathleen Shull is a 2014 graduate of Saint Joseph's University; while a student there she worked in the office of media technology and was a peer educator and a resident assistant.

Animating the Mission in the First-Year Incentive Program

By John Kerrigan

Each fall, Rockhurst University provisionally admits 25 to 35 students into its First-Year Incentive Program (FIP). At a tuition-driven institution like ours, in which enrollment is crucial, this small set of students is invited to participate in FIP based on substantive evidence of their ability to succeed, even if they do not meet the university's full admissions criteria. Once accepted, the students are offered additional support to assist them in succeeding at the university. Selected faculty and staff work together to offer a comprehensive support network that integrates advising, teaching, and tutoring. Though I strive to reflect on the Jesuit mission in each course I offer, teaching composition has afforded particularly rich opportunities to engage with our Jesuit mission.

My initial decision to teach FIP courses stirred some anxi-

eties about the possibly "remedial" nature of such teaching and about the ethics and efficacy of offering a separate section of a course populated exclusively with provisionally admitted students. Having taught in FIP now for four consecutive fall semesters, I still occasionally find myself wrestling with such concerns, but I now see a bigger picture: the First-Year Incentive Program opens access to Jesuit education for many students – first generation college students from a diverse array of backgrounds – who would not otherwise be able to participate, much less to thrive, in it.

In my writing courses, I seek to help students reflect on values that have roots in Ignatian pedagogy and spirituality yet are vital to their success as college students in a Jesuit context. In a writing course framed by various readings on the theme of "success,"

students are introduced to and prompted to think about past experiences with learned helplessness. Developing self-awareness about how to combat affective challenges (in writing and in other situations) may help them succeed in college. Thinking about implications of learned helplessness as a challenge of contemporary culture subsequently helps them (as it would help anyone) to reframe how they think about success, to open them to a wider world in which empathy and possibility-seeking are vital.

My English colleagues and I have come to understand that reflection is the cornerstone of effective Ignatian pedagogy. Students learn most when teachers construct conditions which prompt reflection on one's life and its intersection with concerns of the wider world. In a Jesuit context, such reflection is a habit best nurtured by academic hospitality:

an environment characterized by radical openness – in the classroom, a willingness to listen, to learn, to make mistakes (See Bennett/Dreyer in *The Jesuit Education Reader*).

Indeed, a hallmark of Rockhurst's First-Year Incentive Program has been its capacity to allow us to aspire so significantly toward the ideal of *cura personalis*: with class sizes of 12-16 students and with linked, upper-class, trained writing tutors who attend every class with the students, faculty are able to offer a personalized pedagogy and maintain rigorous expectations within an academic environment of significant and interconnected supportiveness.

As we seek to animate the mission in those we teach, let us not overlook the local and mundane: how we perceive our students and our work with them, as the gifts they are, and how they perceive themselves as writers and people is subtly, crucially mission work.

John Kerrigan, associate professor of English and chair of the humanities division at Rockhurst University, participated in Cohort Five of the Ignatian Colleagues Program from 2012 to 2014.