

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 47 *The Spiritual Exercises as Foundation for
Jesuit Higher Education*

Article 25

March 2015

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Recommended Citation

DeFeo, Joseph (2015) "Talking Back: Ignatian Colleagues Advancing Partners in Mission for the Future of Jesuit Higher Education," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 47, Article 25.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol47/iss1/25>

TALKING BACK

Ignatian Colleagues

Advancing Partners in Mission for the Future of Jesuit Higher Education

By Joseph DeFeo

As Jesuit colleges and universities seek to integrate mission into the life of their campuses, many are ramping up their university leaders' knowledge of mission related areas including their personal encounter with Ignatian spirituality. The Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP) was designed to offer time, space, and a supportive community for participants to delve deeper into Jesuit and Catholic history, spirituality, and pedagogy in order to advance the future of Jesuit higher education.

Conceived through a collaborative effort among presidents, provincials, mission officers, and rectors from the Heartland Delta region, the 18-month program engages senior administrators and faculty from Jesuit colleges throughout the United States in a curriculum of online workshops, a silent retreat, an immersion experience, a mission-cen-

tered project, and a capstone experience. Ignatian colleagues keep a journal of their experiences and post online summaries of their reflection essays. Sharing an Ignatian reverence for human, spiritual freedom, ICP avoids anything like indoctrination and welcomes diverse participants. Now under the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), ICP is currently housed on the campus of Fairfield University.

The high quality of the program since its inception six years ago owes much to the leadership of executive director Edward Peck, Ph.D. (John Carroll University). Additionally, collaborative efforts and significant dedication to fostering mission between Peck and other senior leaders across many Jesuit campuses have made ICP a great success. Mission and identity officers, campus presidents, theologians, spiritual directors, senior administrators and other experts have served as workshop presenters and leadership team members for the program.

Key companions to Ignatian Colleagues are their campus coordinators. Coordinators meet monthly with current members to help them reflect on and integrate their experience. They also act as a sounding board as participants plan their final projects. Additionally, coordinators bring together current and former ICP members to connect with one another and to discuss how they can further the Jesuit and Catholic mission on their own campus and beyond.

Joseph DeFeo is the new executive director of the Ignatian Colleagues Program. Special thanks to Thomas Kelly, professor of theology at Creighton University and ICP immersion coordinator, for contributing to this article. For more information on the Ignatian Colleagues Program and to view mission project outlines see www.ignatiancolleagues.org.

Online Learning

A series of six online workshops provides a foundation for learning about and reflecting on key Jesuit and Catholic concepts. Developed by theologians, Jesuits, and staff, each workshop contains approximately 10-12 hours of material including articles, videos, and reflection essay prompts. Some workshop topics include Ignatius as a spiritual administrator, Ignatian humanism and pedagogy, faith and justice, secularity, Jesuit education, Catholicity, and discernment.

Teleconference conversations guided by a facilitator invite colleagues to dig deeply into the material, listen to experts, and engage in conversation in light of current issues facing campuses. Topics have included how Jesuit and/or Catholic our schools are or “should be” and a case study about the Mass of the Holy Spirit with the goal of remaining welcoming to persons of other or of no faith perspectives. Conversations like these help participants consider alternatives and integrate mission in ways that fit their campus culture.

Silent Retreat

An in depth experience of Ignatian spirituality is foundational for helping colleagues better understand the spirituality that animates the Jesuit educational system for which they (and all) are responsible. The Magis retreat is an eight-day silent retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Each day, talks are given on a particular Ignatian theme and participants are accompanied by a spiritual companion to discuss their ongoing experience. While initially some colleagues have concerns about remaining silent for an entire week, attendees are often pleasantly surprised at the many gifts received through this experience.

One retreatant has commented:

The Magis retreat was a welcomed gift that allowed me to

step back and enter deeply into silence and prayer to remember and renew my commitment to the work that I do [at SU]. There was something about being on retreat with those who share the commitment to Jesuit Higher Education and who come with such openness to the experience that made the retreat especially meaningful. It was a grace-filled week of rest and re-centering punctuated by surprises, like a tornado siren in the middle of Mass and a doe and her fawn in the morning fog. (Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University)

If colleagues are unable to attend the Magis retreat they attend other retreats such as the Ignatian Leadership for Mission coordinated through the Jesuit Collaborative or other retreats available on their campus. Colleagues of all faith and spiritual backgrounds are invited to participate in one of these retreat opportunities.

Immersion

One of the goals of this program is to help foster a well-educated solidarity and an appreciation of the Jesuit commitment to a faith that does justice. Ignatian Colleagues travel to countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic and to our own border to encounter the marginalized, to listen and learn from those who live there. The ICP immersion is not intended to “save,” “help” or “fix” anything but rather to encounter and to learn, to hold a posture of being learners who know very little about where they are or about the reality faced by the people who live there.

After direct contact with and listening to the poor and to experts on the social, economic, and political history of a given context, time is set aside for processing and ultimately reflecting on questions such as:

- What does this have to do with us as administrators and faculty at Jesuit universities and colleges?
- What does this encounter demand from me as an administrator or faculty member at my institution?
- How far do we extend our responsibility to others outside of our comfort zone?

What many often realize is that all are in solidarity with someone or some group. As one participant wrote:

Our immersion trip to El Salvador has had a profound impact on my faith and understanding of the Ignatian mission to serve “wherever the need is greatest.” What stands out for me now is how we, as leaders committed to a faith that does justice, will answer the call of those who asked us to share their stories. (Jeremy Langford, Chicago-Detroit Province office)

Thus a “well-educated” solidarity becomes a possibility when participants choose to learn about a place, encounter the people there, and recognize a call to walk with them on their journey through how they walk their own.

Final Project and Capstone

One of the outcomes of the ICP is for participants to design, implement, and evaluate a strategically significant work-related project that advances the mission of their institution in light of what they appropriate through the program. Mission projects have engaged undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators and are as diverse as the participants.

ICP projects integrate mission in areas such as faculty, staff, board of trustees, student development, student conduct, employee orientation, strategic planning, marketing, and course redesigns to include Ignatian pedagogy,

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social analysis, catholic social teaching, diversity, and/or reflection. Additionally, several projects have integrated mission into our graduate and professional schools.

The capstone experience brings the cohort together one final time where they share their projects and explore how to foster the Ignatian heritage on their own campuses. A missioning ceremony signifies the successful completion of the program.

Outcomes & Looking Ahead

The outcomes for ICP are both personal and institutional. For some, their experience have been transformative, as noted by one participant:

I came to the experience ready to engage on an intellectual level, but it wasn't until I opened my heart that I became a learner. In doing so I made

myself vulnerable to the experience, my colleagues and the Nicaraguan people. From that vulnerability came strength – strength in character, strength in conviction, strength to use my voice for justice and strength to be a woman in service with and for others. (Tanya Winegard, Creighton University)

In addition to assessing the program to learn which experiences are most powerful for participants, the program seeks to understand more about the long-lasting and sustaining influence of participants and their mission projects related to integrating mission across our universities.

Six years of the Ignatian Colleagues Program have produced over 300 participants throughout most of our campuses. Each year, participating universities find a growing number of senior administrators, faculty, and staff who are well grounded in our Ignatian heritage and are ready to

engage decision making and strategic planning in ways that authentically reflect our Jesuit and Catholic sensibilities. As Jesuit schools respond to Jesuit Superior General Fr. Adolfo Nicolás's call to better utilize our Jesuit network, perhaps one of the best contributions of ICP is the many long-lasting professional and personal relationships formed among participants. These relationships cross titles, roles, responsibilities, and campuses. The more these multicampus relationships are formed, the more colleagues at each school are aware of, think, and act in ways that go beyond any one campus and foster in all a deeper identity as an association of Jesuit colleges and universities.

Moving forward, ICP hopes to assist campuses, individually and collectively, in taking advantage of this rich resource of Ignatian Colleague Program alumni/ae and leveraging one of Jesuit higher education's strongest value propositions. ■

Alpha Sigma Nu

Alpha Sigma Nu is the honor society of the Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, Canada, and Korea. For 35 years, Alpha Sigma Nu has designated awards for outstanding books published by members of the Jesuit higher education community. The awards in 2014 were for works in the category "the humanities." This year's winners were announced in October.

For theology: *Icons of Hope: The "Last Things" in Catholic Imagination* by John E. Thiel, Fairfield University. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

For philosophy/ethics: *The Ethics of Interrogation: Professional Responsibility in an Age of Terror* by Paul Lauritzen, John Carroll University (Georgetown University Press, 2013)

For literature/fine arts: *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* by Min Hyoung Song, Boston College. (Duke University Press, 2013)

For history: *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff and Their Quest for Freedom in the Atlantic World* by Nathaniel Millett, Saint Louis University (University Press of Florida, 2013)

The category for the 2015 awards will be "the sciences." The honor society is celebrating its centennial throughout 2015. Information on the awards and on other topics is available on their website: www.alphasigmanu.org.