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An Apple Is Not A Tomato

By Kaellen Hessel

The core of common studies is the reason I'm attending a Jesuit university.

I remember sitting with my mother at our computer, researching schools and trying to find the one that screamed Kaellen. After following numerous dead ends, my mother – who graduated from Creighton University – told me about how all Jesuit schools required students to take core classes from many different disciplines. At that point, I thought I wanted to study film but I wasn't dead set on the idea. A strong liberal arts background sounded like a good back-up plan.

A quick Google search later, we found Marquette University.

The core of common studies is something that I continue to hold dear, no matter how dorky that might sound. I've always wanted to learn a little bit about everything. It seems the core was made for me. What could be better than having the opportunity to learn about everything under the sun built into my schedule?

Cura personalis is the goal of many of my fellow students and me. We're still trying to figure out who we are and who God is calling us to be. In order to do that, we need to explore all our options. A Jesuit education isn't just about making us marketable for life after college, it's about making us whole and complete people, fully in touch with ourselves, our communities and our creator.

But what about art?

Nevertheless, one thing the core curriculum fails to do is nurture students' creative sides. Creativity is essential to humankind, making life more enjoyable and beautiful. It's what makes the world interesting and exciting. When creativity exists life is wonderfully unpredictable and surprising. Art captures the beauty of God's creation and forces its viewers to look at the world in a way they hadn't before.

I'm told that art is important to Jesuits as they try to find God in all things, but I haven't seen this on Marquette's campus. It certainly isn't part of the curriculum here and I fear the same is true at other Jesuit institutions.

Universities don't want their graduates to become poor, starving artists when they could become CEO's or politicians. Graduates with thousands of dollars in debt and few job prospects don't look good to prospective students, so the arts get cut out of the budget.

The most common mistake people make when drawing a still-life is drawing what they think they see, instead of reality. An apple may look red at first glance but upon further study, it's fire engine red, scarlet and pink with white specks throughout and hints of yellow and green near the stem.

When trying to get every little detail correct, students are forced to scrutinize something they eat daily without really looking at. They realize the world isn't as simple as it seemed.



When the work is complete, they also experience a sense of pride for not only the wonderful drawing they have created but the fact they were actually able to do it. Art is difficult, especially for those who don't think of themselves as artists. It takes patience, precision, focus and attention to detail. It even teaches artists how to overcome difficulties and persevere. There's nothing more frustrating than spending hours drawing an apple and having it look more like a tomato.

Art teaches students to put aside what they think they see when they look at the world, and focus on what's really going on. It also proves misconceptions wrong. Students who originally thought they weren't blessed with a creativity gene would realize that with practice they too could create beauty. Lessons like these can be applied to life out of the studio.

In Pope John Paul II's letter to artists, he writes that not everyone is called to be an artist, but that God has entrusted men and women with "crafting their own life," making it a "work of art, a masterpiece." Although art may not be the vocation of many students, it is still part of their calling.

If as Christians we are supposed to strive to be more like God, shouldn't we also embrace his creative side?

Kaellen Hessel is a recent graduate of Marquette University.