Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 35 Article 13

4-1-2009

Graduate Education in Nursing: "Service" is not Enough

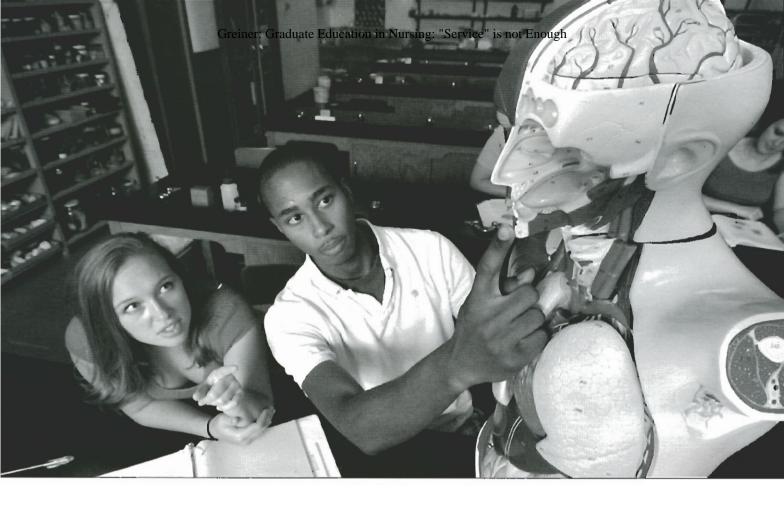
Philip A. Greiner

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

Recommended Citation

Greiner, Philip A. (2009) "Graduate Education in Nursing: "Service" is not Enough," Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education: Vol. 35, Article 13.

 $Available\ at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol35/iss1/13$



Graduate Education in Nursing: "Service" is not Enough

By Philip A. Greiner

Philip A. Greiner is associate dean for public health and entrepreneurial initiatives at Fairfield University. he education of nurses has been viewed as central to the mission of a Jesuit university for many years. However, a service mandate alone does not fully address the mission of a Jesuit university or imbue students with a sense of Jesuit identity.

This statement is particularly true at the graduate level, where achieving integration of mission and identity meets challenges including limited time on campus, part-time study, goal-directed programs, and off business hours class times. These challenges present a dilemma. How do faculty, administrators, and staff convey the essential characteristics of Jesuit thought and teachings through their behavior, processes, courses, and programs?

Schools of Nursing are positioned to address mission and identity. Graduate courses in nursing address social justice issues such as access to care, distributive justice in healthcare resources allocation, and service delivery to special populations to meet educational standards and maintain accreditation. Nursing programs can link these issues to the nature of a Jesuit university. I will argue that the inherent dilemma, as well as the challenges, needs to be owned by the entire university as well as by the School of Nursing, as emphasized in the following three examples.

Limited time on campus. The concept of the Jesuit university as a living and learning community must be extended to graduate education. At its most basic level, this concept can be enacted through the scholarship of teaching and learning. Faculty can incorporate reflective writing, journaling, service-learning activities, and spirituality discussions into courses, while making it explicit that these approaches embody Jesuit ideals. The school can work to create opportunities for students to interact with others in the school (faculty, undergraduate students, administrators), as well as faculty within the larger university, that may attract graduate students to campus beyond the scheduled courses. The university can address the living and learning community concept by adopting an operational mentality that is welcoming to students taking evening and weekend courses. For example, graduate students should have access to food facilities, exercise facilities, and other key university services anytime that classes are being held. Some services should be available 24/7 online. Special events should be held that will gather graduate students across disciplines.

Limited exposure to the richness of a Catholic and Jesuit campus. Graduate students are goal-directed and have brief encounters with the components that we value as part of a Jesuit university. Graduate students can be exposed to some aspects of this richness by incorporating small group work into the learning process and

encouraging students to meet on-campus, outside of the School. Again, faculty can invite priests and other key people on campus to participate in formal and informal course-related sessions to expose students to other expressions of Catholic and Jesuit identity. Classroom buildings can have designated space for meditation and prayer. Campus Ministry should have staff available by phone, e-mail, or in-person at these sites, perhaps on a rotating basis. Clergy could visit graduate classes to welcome students to campus and to let them know of clergy availability.

Reflection on the human experience. Understanding the human experience involves a level of engagement with those in need that extends beyond the healthcare arena. The World Health Organization's Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts (2nd ed. 2003) provides a strong basis for approaching social justice issues that is consistent with Jesuit ideals. These social determinants will play a pivotal role in the upcoming Healthy People 2020 health objectives for the U.S., creating opportunity for nursing faculty to focus graduate students on the linkages between health, social justice, the Jesuit university, and service to others through higher level interventions. The evolving role of the Clinical Nurse Leader as the corporate glue that optimizes care for patients provides an opportunity to clearly demonstrate the benefits of this reflection in nursing practice.

The key question remains, however: Does the uni-

versity offer the same level of services and support to adult learners, both undergraduate and graduate, that are provided for full-time undergraduate students? Posed in a different way, "How does the university address development of the whole adult learner?" This is a shared responsibility across the Jesuit university.



Top left, students in an anatomy class at Spring Hill, while left, a Regis University student puts her young patient at ease.

Photo left, by Josh Hardin, Regis University.