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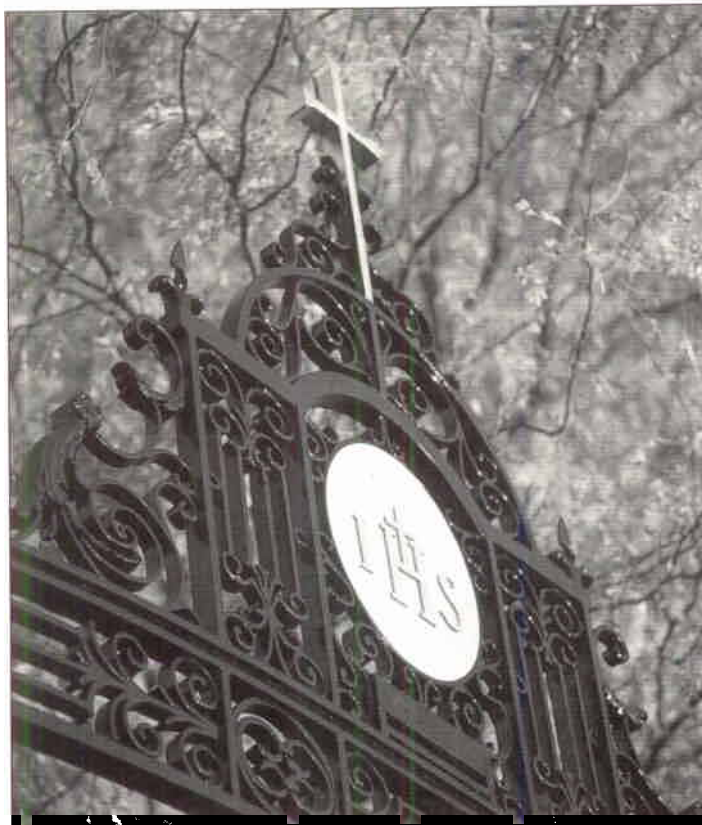
MARKETING FOR MISSION CAN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION BE "BRANDED"?

How the Laczniak proposal might be transformed

By Pat Bourgeois

Colleges and universities find it necessary to market themselves in the most effective professional way. Jesuit institutions are no exception. In an effort to promote the cause of "brand marketing" of Jesuit education, Gene R. Laczniak, in his article "Developing the Brand Equity of Jesuit Higher Education," has spelled out rather well some of the unique characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education. It is clear that this attempt to market the uniqueness of Jesuit education is well attuned to the Jesuit spirit and philosophy of education. Laczniak has provided a well-thought-out marketing strategy that could greatly profit all 28 Jesuit Universities and Colleges. But there is an element of this marketing strategy that is extremely problematic.

The serious flaw in this attempt at "brand equity" marketing of Jesuit education is that it first falsifies Jesuit education by reducing it to a product of a business that can be marketed in a brand equity approach. A wholesome presentation of the uniqueness of Jesuit education is immediately followed by reducing it to a business that yields a product or commodity, with students as consumers or customers who are to be trained, and who are considered to be a "student



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market for university higher education." In this context we learn that "developing strong brand equity for its projects is a strategic priority for most business corporations." I am suggesting that it is necessary to release the positive dimensions of Jesuit education from the narrow philosophy of education too typical of business schools, which reduces the education process in general to a business model.

Any reduction of education and the learning process to the product of a business and to job-training misses the essential commitment to liberal education that defines this Jesuit mission, a mission of which Laczniak is quite aware and which he expresses well. The education process of cultivating a reflective and intellectual life cannot be reduced to a business enterprise without missing the essence of the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic life that is being cultivated.

This reduction to a product of a business completely ignores the whole person and the living values that are cen-

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tral to it, and especially the critical reflective and philosophical attitude at the heart of this Jesuit educational process. Education is not a business and students are not merely being job-trained. This business orientation misses the very essence of any liberal education, and thus loses the uniqueness of what is supposedly being marketed. Such a business

*Jesuit education is not
mere job training*

philosophy of education entails the limited business perspective and point of view as though it were the only attitude, reduces the students to customers, which is a narrowing reduction of who they are.

Such overextension of the business perspective of education misses the very sense of a real liberal education, and requires such a liberal and critical attitude to put it in its partial perspective. The critical attitude must bend back reflectively, question and critique all perspectives, even its own. No orientation, perspective, or value is excluded from such a critical attitude in a liberal approach. The business model, however, takes itself as the all-pervasive attitude, thus setting itself up as a philosophy, and hence falsifies itself. Those who consider students as customers have sold students short, making them buyers of a product instead of persons in a full growth process. Liberal education requires that students join an active and living intellectual, moral, and aesthetic life of a community of learned and mature individuals that fosters the growth of the student by their very participation in this community life. They cannot be reduced to customers buying a product for this to take place.

Thus, while paying respect to the uniqueness of Jesuit education in one statement, the thesis of this article cancels it in the development of a marketing strategy that contradicts the very life it is trying to market. The contradiction, as stated above, rests in the reduction of Jesuit education to mere job training in

a business undertaking, something that Jesuit education, properly understood, explicitly aims to surpass. Thus the conundrum: to market Jesuit education by brand equity, as a very effective marketing technique, requires that we reduce Jesuit education to something it is not, i.e., a business with a product or commodity produced for customers as consumers. There is another aspect of this reduction that needs to be considered.

One must further question the reduction of Jesuit education to a measurable quantity that can then be promoted as a brand with equity. The non-quantifiable value of Jesuit education is precisely its cultivation of critical reflection in students, who are focused upon as whole persons who are encouraged and helped to critically reflect upon and to think through all value orientations. Certainly those who promote outcome assessments want to measure such education in terms of its outcomes. Yet the very reduction to quantitative analysis already loses the fundamental, concrete, qualitative dimension of this enterprise. One still, even in the 21st century, must remind such quantifiers that objectivity in knowledge is not necessarily limited just to that which is reducible to quantity. That prejudice belongs to a worldview that has limited itself to a second level of reflection that is abstract at the expense of concrete, lived experience; that it cannot do full justice to the concrete and lived realm; and that it is an abstraction and hence a limited view of that lived phenomenon.

The very idea of Jesuit education arose to counter such myopic education aims of merely job training, so that the poor and disadvantaged in the early Jesuit universities could truly get the elite and genteel liberal education that too often was reserved for the wealthy students of means. The poor simply had to fall back on job training to make a living and support themselves and their families. The rich, on the other hand, could be educated in a process of growth that put critical reflection, value ori-

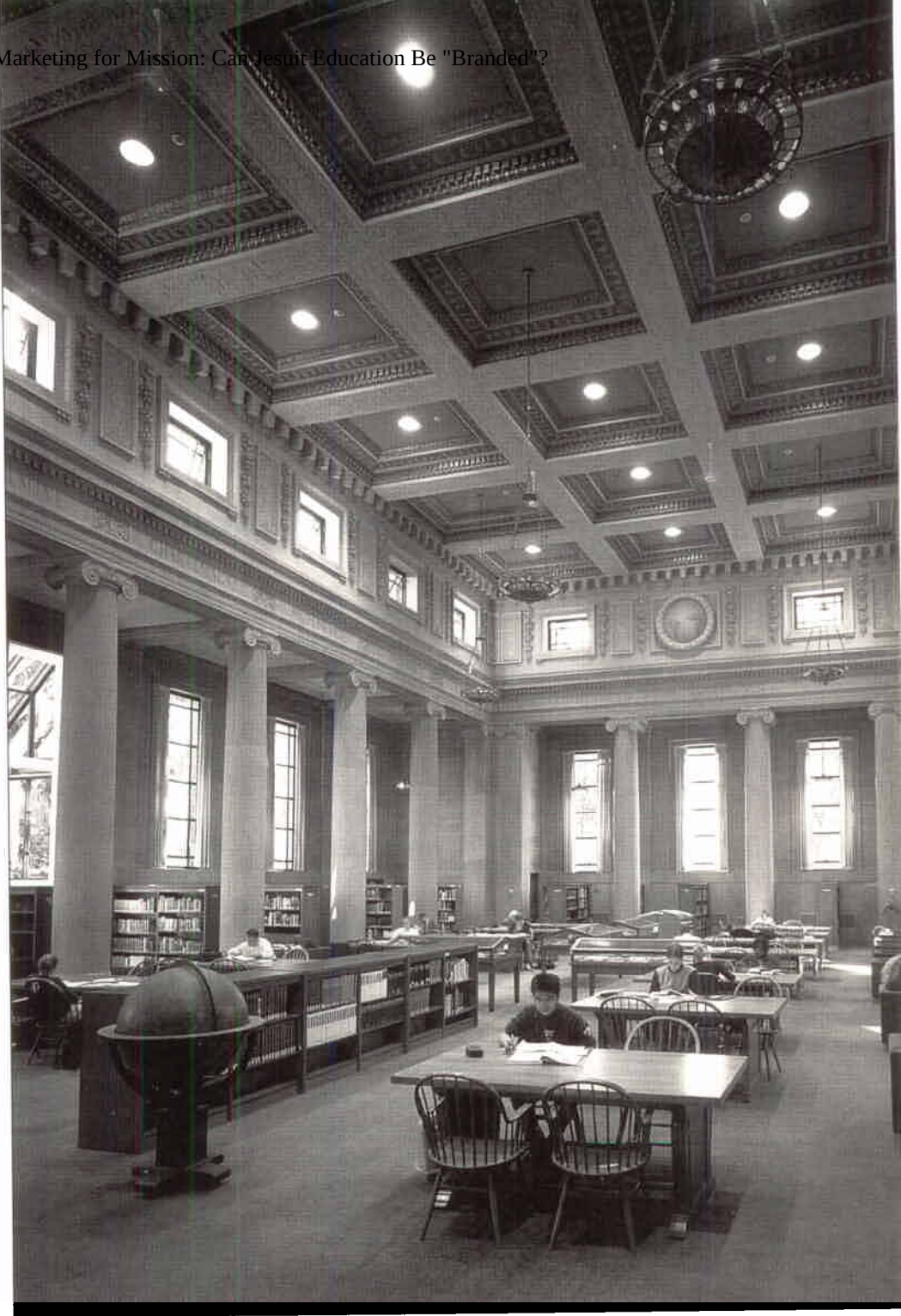


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ented questioning, etc. at the core of the process, thus enjoying the most elevated education possible. A certain amount of wealth was presupposed to make possible the leisure that was the basis of such cultivation of the reflective intelligence. Jesuit institutions made this available to the poor who supposedly could not afford the luxury of such a liberal education.

One must ask what precisely is going on in such attempts to quantify and measure the brand equity of Jesuit education. Can such commitments be undertaken by specialists in marketing without jeopardizing the very quintessence of Jesuit education? Can the Jesuit commitment to liberal education as such be marketed adequately by a "brand equity" concept without losing the very uniqueness that it is being marketed? If it is necessary to reduce the whole enterprise of education to a business in order to market, promote, and advertise such education, then there is something disastrously wrong with the marketing science. If that is the case, then the promotion of Jesuit education should not be put in the hands of professional business people.

I am convinced, however, that many professional business marketers are more open-minded, sagacious, and educated than that. Perhaps Laczniak can be convinced to open up his brand marketing model somewhat, so that it attempts to market the Jesuit education as it is, and as such, without the reductions mentioned above. If that is the case, then he might take up the project of marketing Jesuit education precisely for what it is as one of the most qualitatively committed educational possibilities of the past four centuries. It is unique in its commitment to the centrality of philosophy as critical reflection on all value orientations and in its aim to cultivate the growth of the whole person in the full gamut of life, and thus is not limited to merely cultivating the abstract intelligence. Laczniak certainly understands clearly these dimensions of Jesuit education in spite of his tendency to reduction.



Note the "major forces driving brand equity: product features, price, market awareness, market perceptions and expenditures to build and support those brands."

First, there are "product features," which term assumes our willingness to reduce Jesuit education to a product with the features of a product. Such a product has a price that has as such a value, which can be increased by simply building up positive perceptions of it. It should be clear by now that such

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aspects as “market awareness” do not necessitate the reduction to a product of a business, and can get beyond such narrowing. For something other than a product of a business can be marketed.

Jesuit education gives liberal education, which once belonged exclusively to the elite, to the poor

How to do justice to the product which is marketed

Perhaps the recent craze of branding and brand equity in marketing should be applied to marketing Jesuit education only if the model of such marketing is revamped so that it can do justice to the uniqueness of that which is marketed. If it is possible to brand Jesuit education, the goals of branding for a business must be revamped and the entire model must be transformed so that it focuses clearly on the entity that is being branded. This model cannot be allowed to falsify the entity being branded. Rather, the entity itself, in this case of such uniqueness, must dictate the essential nature of the model so that the entity itself is not reduced in the marketing process. We must explore this branding process of marketing to see if such a revamping is even possible. My working hypothesis is that this can be done.

The transformation must focus on the goal of marketing Jesuit liberal education. This goal is not to provide a product or commodity that enhances profits, builds profit in any way, or increases shareholder value for a company. The goal of such branding must conform to the full concrete reality that is being branded, without the reductions mentioned above. In this case, the goal must then deal with the liberal education of the student considered as a person with a full gamut of commitments, with a view toward a full human, professional, and Christian life. The goal of such marketing, then, is to draw students to this unique educational process, and to motivate parents or guardians to pay the price. The

goal is less focused on product and profit, and more explicitly on increasing awareness of the real qualitative value and advantage of Jesuit education, and consequent willingness to pay for the opportunity to participate in this unique process. The process of Jesuit education is taken in a holistic way without reduction or quantification, and is considered in its qualitative dimension, all rooted in the concrete manifestation of the education process.

Laczniak's four steps

Let us now review the four steps of implementing such a marketing campaign proposed by Laczniak, with a view toward transforming them so that they are properly attuned to the concrete lived reality of Jesuit education that does not reduce it to some product or commodity of a business.

Step one calls for the support of a leader, a president of a Jesuit university, who will have to embrace and support an implementation plan and which may also include the aid of a qualified management consultant. The transformation of this step requires first that this president, and any others in the leadership in this marketing plan, be instructed in this plan, not as a reductionistic marketing scheme, but, rather as one that recognizes and takes into account all that has been said above regarding such reduction.

The consultant chosen must not be prone to such reductions. This is one of the most difficult elements of the transformation of this marketing strate-



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gy. Any presentation to the AJCU presidents' meeting must proceed from this transformation at the top of the plan. It should also take into account that not all Jesuit presidents will understand the essential nature of Jesuit education. Nor should it be assumed that they will readily understand the inadequacy and contradiction of strict brand equity marketing of Jesuit education. Those of us who have spent many years in Jesuit education have come to realize the confusion in the minds of many Jesuits about their own commitments to higher education, which reaches even to the top administrative positions of their institutions. The presidents, and not only the marketers, need to be educated regarding the real meaning of Jesuit education before such a strategy, properly understood, will profit the institutions precisely as Jesuit.

Transformation of **step two** presupposes the revamping of the previous step. For the working support system of the AJCU, already in place, cannot support the strategy of reducing their education commitments, and should not get caught up in the business lingo of increasing brand equity in a strictly quantitative way. Increase in fundraising capability for all Jesuit universities, collectively and individually, should be based on the outcome of such marketing as increased appreciation of the value of this education process. Of course, Laczniaak is correct in his assessment of the problems from too typical objections that will need to be overcome. He has dealt with this element rather well.

The transformation of the **third step** of an integrated marketing communications campaign (IMCC) is entirely based on the above two points: the avoidance of all tendencies to reduce Jesuit education to what it is not and rather to focus on it as it is. These negative and positive phases of the transformation have emerged as the basis of the required transformation permeating the whole process. In this context, the objective involves dramatically increasing the awareness and appreciation of Jesuit higher education precisely as such instead of increasing its brand equity, unless branding is expanded and uprooted from its context of the product of a business. Any such advertising, PR component, websites, in this campaign must take into account the caveats I have developed and address Jesuit education as it is. If all the above are taken into account, the **forth step** of the process, a possible role, let us say, of a basketball tournament in order to publicize Jesuit education, could fall into place.

In spite of his tendencies to reduce Jesuit education to what it is not, as mentioned, Laczniaak does understand Jesuit education for what it is in his fundamental points of departure for the application of branding: "As suggested previously, 'Jesuit' ought to suggest quality private education in the Catholic tradition, designed for the development of the whole person, rooted in liberal arts, and delivered with a moral/ethical foundation that prepares the student for life-long learning and a service orientation informed by a desire for social justice."

What he needs to keep in mind is his own remarks in his conclusion: that this campaign can be understood as the "modern day equivalent of traveling out into the world to proclaim the good news. It reflects the Jesuit ideal of helping society realize God in all things by communicating the educational values they espouse." Another thing must be safeguarded in this undertaking: such a campaign should not concentrate on "enhancing Jesuit brand equity...for each of their institutions;" rather, it must get the message out regarding the nature and quality of this education. The attempt should not be to increase the equity, but, rather, as good marketing should do, to increase the public's awareness of the positive nature and value of this education process. This is its value. It is consistent with the Jesuit values inculcated in the very education process that is being marketed.

This marketing can lead to a willingness on the part of many to pay well for such a unique education. To concentrate only on perception, to increase the equity value in the way most marketers understand it, is to run the risk of creating a false view, which contradicts the critical reflective attitude at the heart of liberal education, which is precisely what is being marketed. Avoiding such contradiction, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding is precisely what we are trying to accomplish in marketing the essential Jesuit commitment to higher education. If these caveats that I have presented are taken into account in a revamping of Laczniaak's model, I believe that his strategy then would be an excellent model that Jesuit presidents and the AJCU should seriously consider.

*Some Jesuit presidents
don't understand
jesuit education*