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A Personal Perspective on Hiring for Mission

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ways and with different levels of commitment and enthusiasm. I can illustrate this point by referring again to the survey responses I received. I found that the responses to my survey from the summer of 1996 might be sorted into three broad categories: Some of the universities, notably the larger ones with doctoral programs, see the policy of hiring for mission being introduced in varying ways in the colleges and schools. In some of the other universities, probably the largest number, the policy is implemented across the university, but it is a relatively new and developing program. In another group of the schools the policy of hiring for mission is well established, and features a sophisticated variety of materials and practices. I'll illustrate by using one example from each group: Boston College will represent the first, the University of Scranton the second, and Gonzaga University the third.

Boston College is one of the largest of the Jesuit universities in this country, in terms of enrollment, with a variety of colleges and schools, and a range of doctoral programs. William B. Neenan, S.J., the academic vice president and dean of faculties, tells me that the practice of hiring for mission varies across the schools and colleges. The dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, he reports, has taken the lead by mailing out a brochure to all prospective faculty. This brochure, titled "An Introduction to Boston College," provides a good deal of historical information about the university and about the Jesuit order. It narrates some characteristics of Jesuit education, and speaks of the work of the Jesuit Institute at Boston College.

Fr. Neenan points out that a special impetus was given to the issue of hiring for mission at Boston College by a recent document of the University Academic Planning Council called "Advancing the Legacy: the New Millennium" (May, 1996). That document calls for an emphasis on "the distinctive Jesuit tradition of liberal education and of intellectual engagement between religious faith and contemporary culture." It notes that "in hiring decisions it will be appropriate and desirable to recognize the importance of having represented in disciplines throughout the University faculty whose interests include research and teaching that contributes to the dialogue between religious belief and their disciplines." It suggests that Boston College "attract and develop a significant number of faculty, administrators and staff . . . interested in connecting religious faith and contemporary culture."

In the development of this report, Fr. Neenan tells me, a variety of positions were argued, including the

A Personal Perspective on Hiring for Mission

JOSEPH A. PANUSKA, S.J.

I have seen multiple approaches to hiring for Jesuit institutions throughout my life in the Society of Jesus and as an educator. I have worked at the Emory University School of Medicine, taught and served as rector at Georgetown, served as provincial of the Maryland province, as academic vice president at Boston College, and, most recently, as president of the University of Scranton. My experience has taught me that the questions surrounding the issue of hiring for mission are never easy ones.

As a post-doctoral fellow at Emory in 1963, I was invited to remain on the medical school faculty as an instructor. This ecumenical, Methodist university hired me for my academic ability, of course, but I certainly saw my mission there as not solely scientific, but pastoral as well. I am certain, too, that, at least within my department, the pastoral element of my contribution was recognized. The pastoral work went on primarily by example, although it could have developed into other more direct ministries.

My provincial had other plans. Georgetown was beginning a graduate program and the Maryland provincial wanted a fourth Jesuit in the biology department. At that time, hiring laypersons to bolster Jesuit identity was not yet a significant issue, as we were still relying primarily upon Jesuits to carry our Ignatian identity as an institution. When I was rector at Georgetown in the early 1970s, we were not nearly as active in recruiting Jesuits as most university-affiliated Jesuit communities are today. Jesuit numbers were relatively high. Besides, Georgetown itself was a very attractive institution with a strong Jesuit character, and it sold itself easily to members of the order.

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During my time as provincial, from 1973-79, seeking out qualified lay people who could also work to strengthen the Jesuit identity of the universities was not a special priority. My interest during that period was to assist in the placement of Jesuits in a way that was compatible with the mission of the institution, and that focus was primarily academic except for campus ministers and religious superiors. In those discernments, my belief was that individuals should be assigned to those works about which they could generate the kind of personal enthusiasm that makes significant achievement possible. If that potential was compatible with an institution's need, the match would be ideal.

Even as late as my tenure at Boston College, from 1979-82, hiring laypersons for mission was not yet a major concern. Boston College's very strong Ignatian presence, combined with the fact that the university was, to a significant extent, ecumenical, tended to relegate these sorts of concerns to relatively low priority.

One can ponder whether our position today in many institutions would be stronger if hiring for mission had been more explicit and more energetically pursued in the days when the issue did not seem so pressing. I would point out, however, that, although none of these institutions was consciously engaged in "hiring for mission," many outstanding people—people with academic qualifications second to none *and* with the readiness, willingness, and ability to contribute to our shared Ignatian mission—were hired. These people have contributed enormously to the mission.

The importance of hiring faculty and staff for mission at the University of Scranton did not become apparent until at least a few years into my term as president. Now, of course, it is a high priority. Why is it now a priority for Scranton and for other Jesuit institutions? A large part of the reason is the recent growth and change of our colleges and universities. Scranton, like many other universities of its size and kind throughout the United States, added signifi-

cantly to its faculty and staff throughout the 1980s. During this same period, the number of available Jesuits decreased considerably. With so many new faces and with fewer Jesuits—formerly and erroneously seen as the embodiment of Ignatian identity—institutions could no longer take for granted that everyone understood and embraced the mission or that mission was the responsibility of Jesuits alone.

These pressures are not altogether unhealthy. They are forcing us to regroup and follow the pattern of the Spiritual Exercises by beginning to ask ourselves who we are and what we want to be.

Are we bold enough to incorporate a clear commitment to mission in our advertising and in our selection of candidates? Legally we have much more freedom than we exercise or perhaps want to exercise. The limits are within our institutions and in ourselves. Have we been incorporated too thoroughly into our American culture? Is it time to reassess the procedures through which we make hiring decisions?

Then what is the challenge now? I think that the key is the spirit of the entire community. It is not presidents, vice presidents, and deans who control hiring; it is the institutional community itself. Most faculty and staff reviews are not carried out by administrators (who usually only get involved in the final steps when choices have already been narrowed significantly or settled), and it will always be very difficult for the leadership to reverse a decision of a search committee or department. If support of mission is to become a serious part of the hiring process, it must become the goal of the university community itself. To encourage that development, we in leadership positions probably need to make much more explicit the need for compatibility and support from a candidate, and we have to be willing to lose some otherwise good candidates for lack of a better motivational fit. In the end, however, the work will be done, not through a single mechanism, but through the *esprit* of the institution as a whole.