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# What We Did Last Summer — Intellectually

By Constance Mui and John Sebastian

**L**aunching the pilot program for the Jesuit Summer Institute for Advanced Study (JSIAS) was a joint venture of member institutions of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and Honors Programs. In the Summer of 2009, students from 15 Jesuit colleges and universities traveled to our city to immerse themselves in New Orleans.

Loosely modeled after the Erasmus Institute at the University of Notre Dame, the Institute serves as a domestic immersion program that combines a rigorous academic seminar and active engagement with the world, all in the Ignatian spirit of reflection and individual formation. The pilot JSIAS at Loyola was entitled, “After the Deluge: Crisis and Culture in New Orleans.” During the two-week program (May 31-June 12, 2009), JSIAS fellows had the opportunity to participate in a seminar convened by two Loyola faculty, meet with experts and activists, attend cultural events, sample local cuisine, and explore post-Katrina New Orleans. They examined the moral dimension of our city’s unique and persistent challenges, especially those that have led New Orleans through its many crises and rebirths.

The program included a service day in which fellows participated in the city’s rebuilding efforts, and there was also time set aside for Ignatian spiritual exercises and reflections. All told, whereas the Erasmus Institute is devoted primarily to Catholic intellectual life, our Institute aims at developing fellows as whole persons—intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

Undergraduates from all of the 28 AJCU institutions were invited to apply for the program. Participating colleges and universities agreed to sponsor their students by contributing \$1,500 for each fellow to assist in defraying the costs of airfare, meals, and fieldtrips while also providing each student with a modest stipend. We had 28 women and men at Loyola for the JSIAS, representing 15 Jesuit institutions: Boston College, Canisius College,

Creighton University, Fordham University, College of Holy Cross, John Carroll University, Le Moyne College, Loyola University Maryland, Loyola Marymount University, Loyola University Chicago, Loyola University New Orleans, Regis University, Rockhurst University, University of Scranton, and Xavier University.

What about next year?

Although we had originally planned to limit the Institute to 20, we were overwhelmed by the 70 we received and expanded our list. At the conclusion, students presented writings, reports, poems, and artwork to capture their experience. They also discussed how the visit changed their perceptions of the city, what lessons they would take back, and how they would put what they had learned to use in their home cities. Many were led to question their long-held beliefs and assumptions.

In some ways, our timing could not have been worse. Perhaps our biggest challenge was finding funding for the program given the economic climate following the financial meltdown in late 2008. Many of our sister Jesuit institutions faced severe budget cuts, and they were in no position to sponsor a student, even at the reduced rate of \$1,500 (We had previously planned to ask for \$5000 each.) Several institutions had to withdraw. While the JSIAS was initially conceived as an annual program to be hosted on a different campus each year, the relentlessly bleak economic outlook continues to threaten the long-term success of the Institute. As successful as our pilot program was, the future of the JSIAS remains uncertain. At the last AJCU Honors Conference, held at Marquette University in early 2010, it was decided that an AJCU school would host the program every two years. ■

*Constance Mui and John Sebastian are co-directors of the Loyola University New Orleans honors program.*