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ALPHA SIGMA NU

Scholarship, Loyalty, Service: What do they mean?

By Joan Van Hise

My father, a proud graduate of a Jesuit high school and college, wore his Alpha Sigma Nu tie bar every day of his working life. Recently, an Alpha Sigma Nu newsletter listed the three core principles of Jesuit education and Alpha Sigma Nu: scholarship, loyalty, and service. My father clearly connected with the first two, but the third, service, seems to be a more modern interpretation of what it means to be “Jesuit educated.”

How has what we mean by the phrase Jesuit-educated changed since my father’s Jesuit days?

My Jesuit journey has been different from that of my father – and the journey on which today’s students have embarked.

All the males in my father’s family went to Jesuit high schools and colleges. At that time there were numerous Jesuits on campus - in the classrooms, even on every floor in the dorms. My father’s high school and college experiences were separated by WWII. When he started college, he was one of many war-weary veterans in his early 20’s who also happened to be a college freshman.

He mixed cocktails in his room every night before dinner — a clear violation of the dorm’s no alcohol rule. And each night the Jesuit prefect who lived on the floor would come knocking when he heard the cocktail shaker saying, “Bill, you’re not allowed to have a drink before dinner – unless you make one for me too.” In a truly Ignatian manner, that young prefect recognized the importance of adapting to the circumstances of his students. So my image of Jesuit education was one that inspired loyalty and adapted well to changing times. When an older sibling attended a Jesuit high school, academic excellence was emphasized in the brand description.

I started at a small Jesuit college where I was taught by professors who challenged me intellectu-

ally in stimulating classes. Unfortunately, the world outside the classroom was homogenous, closed-minded and overwhelmingly anti-intellectual. After one semester, I transferred to another Jesuit college, one that was diverse, open, and accepting. But was this change more as a result of the external environs – a large urban area rather than a small city in a largely rural area? And, while I did receive an excellent education, I managed to complete my B.S. completely untouched by the Jesuit charism. No *cura personalis*, men and women for others, finding God in all things, *magis*; no mention of Ignatian spirituality or the Spiritual Exercises.

Perhaps it was because I was in the business school and so many of the faculty worked full-time outside of school to support their families. But not one class ever addressed any aspect of anything uniquely Jesuit. The business school essentially operated separately from the rest of the University, and in that, modeled for us how we should separately compartmentalize faith and reason.

At the university commencement exercises, many of the graduates from the business school waved dollar bills as the Archbishop of Sao Paulo spoke of our

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responsibility to help the poor. It was the first time the message had been shared with most of the graduates on the commencement field. Unfortunately, the opportunity to share that message had passed; it was too little, too late for most of us. And so I became a Jesuit graduate, with little new insight into what it meant to be Jesuit-educated, except, perhaps, that lay faculty could also contribute to a Jesuit education.

For most of the faculty, their relationships with students started and ended at the classroom door.

In three years of public accounting following college I learned that ethics were negotiable to many. I left the business world and retreated to the safety of my Jesuit cocoon for a master's degree. Here I benefited more from individual interaction with the faculty; but was that only because I was a graduate student? I am still not sure. The phrase *cura personalis* had come into vogue – and was tossed into the school's extensive promotional literature, along with the brand "Jesuit" with abandon. I was nearing completion of another Jesuit degree, and no closer to learning what it meant to be Jesuit-educated.

Before I finished my MBA, I was offered the opportunity to join the faculty at the school at which I was studying. Did the Jesuit character of the university and my own experience as a Jesuit-educated student inform my teaching there? I practiced *cura personalis* with aplomb, I emphasized ethics in all of my classes, and did my part to support academic excellence. I also got to know my former professors in a different way, as colleagues. They were good and caring men – yes, men (I was only the third female on the business faculty!) – and wonderful colleagues. But, for most of them, their relationships with their students started and ended at the classroom door.

When I left the faculty six years later to concentrate on my doctorate and raising my growing family, I still had not been touched by much that I could identify as uniquely Jesuit. Yet, for some reason, I felt an affinity to the Jesuits – loyalty I guess. When I discussed job placement with my dissertation committee some years later, I insisted that I would only teach at a Jesuit university. I'm not sure why. After finishing the PhD, I was home with my kids when my next opportunity came knocking; it seems the Jesuits weren't finished with me yet.

Perhaps I happened back into Jesuit education at just the right moment in time in 1997, but I soon noticed that my concept of being Jesuit-educated was being enlarged. There was more to Jesuit education than *cura personalis* and academic excellence; a Jesuit education should address "the service of the faith which absolutely demands the promotion of justice." So the focus had changed: scholarship, loyalty — and service too.

As the integral links between faith, reason, and justice became more apparent to me, the topical

content of my courses expanded. I started weaving in the concepts of Catholic social teaching. I incorporated more examples of accounting in not-for-profit organizations, and encouraged my business students to consider non-traditional career paths, including a service year after graduation.

Teaching ethics through a living and learning residential college that focused on the exploration of vocation, I had my first formal introduction to the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm. With guidance from symposia and thoughtful colleagues, I began to adopt an Ignatian approach in more of my classes. "Who am I?" "Whose am I?" and "Who am I called to be?" became common questions in my classes, and in my discussions with students in the office. I experienced the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and learned of the powerful connections between the Exercises and Ignatian pedagogy. Reflections became required assignments in many of my classes. In short, I, the teacher, joined my students in learning.

What does it mean to be Jesuit-educated today? You might wonder that I haven't yet figured it out. The mission statement of Alpha Sigma Nu states "Our mission is to understand, appreciate and promote the ideals of Jesuit education — opening minds, doors and hearts to a lifelong journey in wisdom, faith and service." As one on that lifelong journey, I have come to see the phrase "Jesuit-educated" in a new light.

In our 24/7 world we realize that students typically spend more than 90 percent of their hours each week outside the classroom. That's a lot of time! But I am not troubled by this – as the Jesuits following WWII adapted for the returning veterans, we are learning to adapt to this new reality by creating intentional living and learning communities for our students.

You may have heard that the "golden days" of Catholic Jesuit education are behind us. These sages speak of the golden days when Jesuits accounted for the majority of the faculty on campus. My local paper recently ran an article on how the shortage of priests is affecting . One Jesuit was quoted as saying "Without Jesuits, how can you call yourself Jesuit?"

I must respectfully disagree with those who feel our best days have passed. The presence of an Alpha Sigma Nu chapter on a campus is evidence that the values of scholarship, loyalty and service are cherished. The challenge is to make them operative through intellectual engagement enlivened by the quest for justice and faith. ■

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