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### Forum: Blind to Suffering: The James Carney, S.J. Story

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# BLIND TO SUFFERING: THE JAMES CARNEY, S.J., STORY

*“In light of Father Nicolás’ talk,  
how would you re-imagine one aspect of  
Jesuit higher education?”*

**Gail Presbey**

I will focus my remarks on the need for emphasizing and strengthening our education regarding different cultures of the world, confident that there is a strong link between this kind of education and concern for injustice and poverty. Our insularity and parochialism blind us to the extent of suffering in the world. And our neglect of differences makes us support over-simple “solutions” to poverty and injustice.

Fr. Nicolás ties my two topics together when he explains that our “shallow, self-absorbed perceptions of reality make it almost impossible to feel compassion for the suffering of others.” That’s why we have to help our students and ourselves to broaden horizons.

I was particularly struck by Fr. Nicolás’ emphasis on the importance of learning about other cultures. It can begin with learning the classic texts of other cultures beyond those of Greece and Rome. He also asserted that every culture needs to give voice to their its own history and not just rest with European interpretations of everyone’s history. In Japan he learned that the human person is a deep “mystery” and there is no shortcut to understanding humanity. He now emphasizes that the Jesuits should not force all people into a stifling uniformity, but instead appreciate differences; he credits Dalit Jesuits in India with bringing him to this insight.

Already many Jesuit universities bring their students to other countries so that they will be able to heighten their awareness of people’s situations and struggles and therefore engage their concern. He and others at the conference urged that many more students experience

these fresh perspectives. When I think of my own field, philosophy, I think of the work of Claude Sumner, S.J., who lived in Ethiopia for 45 years, writing and compiling a multi-volume series on its written and oral philosophy. Why not share these insights? There is need for curricular reform, both at the institutional level and that of individual faculty members re-thinking their fields.

“International studies” or “multi-cultural studies” should not just be optional for the few interested, but part of all students’ curricula.

When students hear the testimony of their teachers or other students who have gone abroad, survived and thrived, it can help to motivate them to venture out. Whether it’s a week-long service immersion, a week-

ly service learning experience, or a semester or year-long study abroad, these are the experiences that often lead to the deep transformation we hope our students achieve. When one comes back home, one’s surroundings are seen in a different light.

This point is illustrated in the life and autobiography of James Carney, who made the decision to join the Jesuits while he was a student at University of Detroit Mercy. He became a missionary and worked with the poor and landless in Honduras, identifying with their

immersion in a different culture and a different economic context.

## ***First, in the classroom***

What changes or new emphases in education could give form to the Superior General’s wishes? The first place students can be exposed to a range of ideas and experiences is in our classrooms. I advocate the use of texts by which students can hear the history of people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as Native American and African American peoples, and women.

There are many resources for



James Carney, S.J.

plight and becoming very close to many campesinos there. On brief breaks from his work with the poor, James Carney, S.J., would come back to North America and wonder with amazement at the preoccupation with consumer goods that he saw. Students can come back with similar critiques of their own lives. Study abroad programs such as *Casa de la Solidaridad* in El Salvador must be popularized and participation increased, so that our students can have life-changing experiences.

What about the ways in which suffering abroad is induced and/or increased by economic, military and political policies originating in our own country? This is a message that students are bound to hear if in their classrooms and their experience abroad they listen to

the voices of people writing their own history from their own perspectives. It's an essential part of a learning experience that calls into question the uniformly complimentary versions previously learned of America's history. Encountering a diverse student body within the classrooms of Jesuit universities, venturing outside of those classrooms into their urban contexts, and studying at Jesuit institutions abroad are important stepping-stones to personal growth. As individuals and institutions I want to encourage us to foster this growth more fully ■.

*Gail Presbey is in the philosophy department University of Detroit Mercy. Learn more about Fr. Carney at <http://liberalarts.udmercy.edu/clasa>*

## TEACHING THE FUTURE RICH

*How to Best Give Money*

**Francis J. Butler**

I have found Father Adolfo Nicolás's talk in Mexico City last spring a rich and inspiring framework for forecasting where Jesuit institutions may be placing emphasis in the time ahead..

While celebrating the progress of Jesuit higher education, Fr. Nicolás has encouraged Jesuit educators to go deeper in the way students are taught on Jesuit campuses; he has asked for more cooperation among Jesuit institutions of higher learning on vexing questions facing the globe, like environmental degradation; and he has invited universities to think more purposely about Jesuit higher education as a point of dialogue in the often conflictive zone between faith and culture.

Fr. Nicolás' masterful reflections go to the core mission of what Jesuit universities do as teaching, research and service institutions. But his observations also provide Jesuit educational leaders with an extraordinary take-home assignment. I am delighted that *Conversations* has

asked a number of us in the extended Jesuit family to think about how Jesuit higher education might be reinvented from our personal vantage point. As the father of three Jesuit university alums, I can't resist taking up this pleasurable assignment by first imagining a Jesuit university free of tuition!

However, as a trustee of a Jesuit university, and as someone whose professional life is in the philanthropic world, I appreciate the financial realities of running a first-rate school. So I will move on and re-imagine Jesuit higher education from my experience these past three decades of working with Catholics of considerable wealth.

I will begin by saying that Jesuit institutions do a good job these days of transforming students into reflective, service-oriented adults. They graduate with degrees that, as recent history has shown, put them often on a trajectory of leadership. Yet, it's true also that numbers of graduates are leaving Jesuit campuses unready for the balanced use of wealth or its sometimes disordered impact on their lives, families, and work.

**Just ten years** after graduation, students from universities like Georgetown, Santa Clara, and Fairfield for example, can expect to be earning six-figure annual salaries, and they will be in positions with supersonic upward mobility. For many, if not most, coping constructively with growing wealth and influence presents an array of challenges—how to use this wealth as good stewards—responsibly, justly, and in a way that contributes to the common good. That's where the reinvented Jesuit institutions of higher learning may have their most serious impact. Through more course work and