

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 40 *Re-creating Jesuit Higher Education: The General's Challenge*

Article 35

9-1-2011

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Recommended Citation

Adhikary, Shriya (2011) "We Used to be the Best," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 40, Article 35.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol40/iss1/35>

We Used to be the Best

By Shriya Adhikary

The world is changing. An obvious fact, yes, but I state it here to point out how we are failing to change with it. By “we,” I mean the U.S. and its universities and colleges in general. While students in other nations continue to surpass us academically in almost all major fields of study, we seem to

be committed to cocooning ourselves from the world around us.

The force of globalization, with its movement of people, ideas, cultures, and technologies has taken the rest of the world by storm, but left us relatively unchanged in its wake. Every grade school child in almost any part of the world could tell you who the president of the United States is, but you would be hard-pressed to find many college-educated individuals in the U.S. who could name the head of state of other nations.

So what? you might say. The U.S. populace has not only progressed, but made remarkable advances in key areas, and still remains the world’s foremost superpower to date – what do we care about the rest of the world?

However, that is exactly the kind of approach to learning and education that sets us back from achieving our true potential and would harm us indefinitely in the close future. As illustrated by recent events, and exemplified most recently with the alarming escalation of gas prices, the outcomes of events that occur in what we perceive as distant parts of the world can hit quite close to home. Furthermore, while students elsewhere cultivate a deep-seated interest in American culture and politics, the interest is rarely symmetrical from our side. Granted, the indelible imprint Westernization has created is far deeper and extensive than any effect that has reached our shores. However, in today’s complexly interdependent world, it is not only reasonable, but of utmost importance that we teach current and future generations about the implications and consequences of our interactions with the rest of the world and emphasize the necessity of learning about others.

We cannot do so without revamping our education system to reflect these changes.

Jesuit institutions underscore the significance of creating men and women who serve others and can act as agents of change. In that sense, we are already far ahead of the game.

At Wheeling Jesuit University, students volunteer their time and serve the surrounding communities on a daily basis. We are cultivated and nurtured on the idea that we all must work together and care for one another to create a better world. However, rarely do we extend these values beyond our immediate communities. As the world becomes more and more integrated, we must encourage students to take a deeper interest in events at large, and expand their horizons beyond what their eyes perceive.

What do we know about Iran?

Today, it is not enough to simply compete against other graduates from the region, or even the nation – we face competition from all over the world. Today, it is not enough to simply know that Iran is a nation in the Middle East – it’s vital that we understand its people, culture and way of life. And we must educate our students to not just learn about people who are different, but encourage in them a capacity for compassion, because today, our successes and our failures are all irrevocably intertwined.

To accommodate for the rapidly changing global environment, universities need to first modify their classes to introduce more of an international theme to all fields of study. There needs to be a

much greater focus on current events and an increase in discussion and debate about the issues that truly matter to a worldly student of the twenty-first century. A true understanding of the way states and people interact in the fluctuating era of globalization is the only way our generation will be able to participate in the arena of the future. Broader cross-culture communication and study, diversity among student populations, a wider range of experience among faculty, more study abroad programs, and up-to-date use of technology and available resources are swiftly becoming essential criteria for a top-notch education, an epithet that Jesuit universities across the nation have always been proud of upholding.

The world is changing. We used to be the best, but the rest of the world is catching up to us while we remain content and confident of our superiority. The challenge for our generation will not be how to get to the top of the world; it will be to learn how to share it with others. ■

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