

September 2017

An Historical Moment: Seattle University: 125 Year History of Excellence

Tracy DeCroce

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

DeCroce, Tracy (2017) "An Historical Moment: Seattle University: 125 Year History of Excellence," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 52 , Article 14.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol52/iss1/14>

AN HISTORICAL MOMENT

Seattle University

125 Year History of Excellence

By Tracy DeCroce



With origins as a small Catholic college on the hill, Seattle University's 125-year history reflects the grit of the American West, a committed Catholic community, and the dogged determination of those who built today's thriving urban university.

Parish School on the Frontier

Seattle University began humbly in 1891 as a primary school in a rented church serving 90 children. Holy Names sisters and a few Jesuits provided the faculty. At the time, the City of Seattle was just 40 years old, and the closest Jesuit outpost was in Yakima, a difficult

journey across the Cascade Mountains. Inaugural President Victor Garrand, S.J., designed the first campus building, which was constructed by German and Irish immigrant parishioners who volunteered their labor.

Initially, its coursework did not even constitute a complete high school curriculum. It would be nearly a decade, in 1909, before Seattle College would produce its first three baccalaureates.

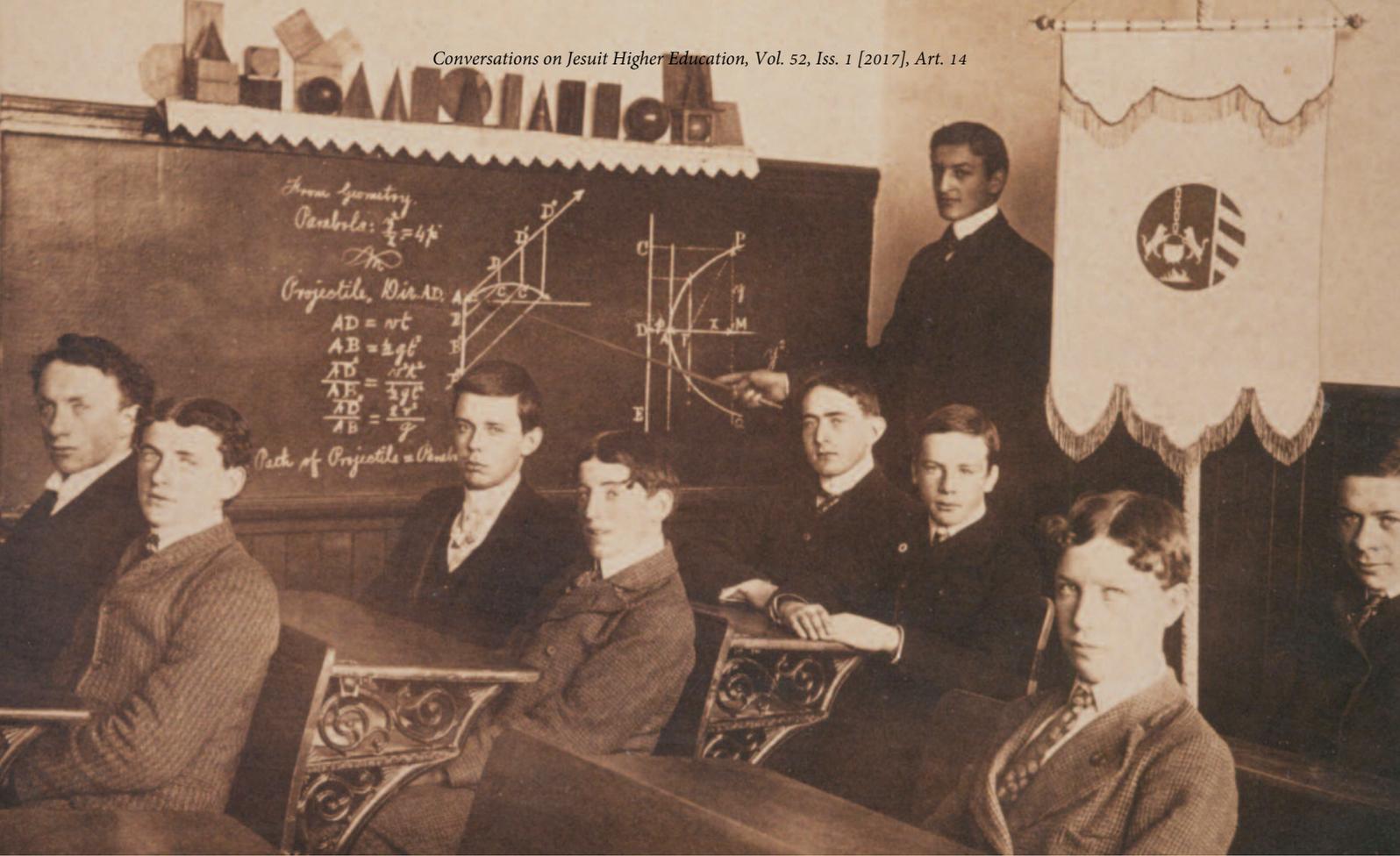
A Distinctive College Identity

With the onset of World War I, Seattle College struggled to stay viable as its less than two dozen students dropped out to work in the defense industry or to enlist. To survive, the college left its postage-stamp campus in 1919, taking advantage of a donor's purchase of a former academy to serve as the school's new home.

In 1931, Seattle College returned to its original home, which had suffered from years of neglect. Undeterred, the five "re-founding" Jesuits and others



The "Fighting 50th" nursing cadets training in Colorado in 1941 before deploying to England.



A humanities class in 1902 when Seattle University was a combined college and preparatory high school.

restored the original Garrand Building. The college reopened with 46 students.

Becoming a University

Seattle College was one of the first Jesuit colleges to admit women. Many of its students were nuns who taught at local schools. The move boosted enrollment to 500 students by 1935.

By 1941, Seattle College was the state's third largest institution of higher education.

World War II triggered an active campus response. Engineering and science students helped build war planes for The Boeing Company and pre-med and nursing students, dubbed the "Fighting 50th," staffed a medical center in Normandy. After the war, college enrollment doubled thanks to veterans attending college through the G.I. Bill.

In 1948, Seattle College became Seattle University, the largest Catholic institution of higher education in the West.

A Modern Campus

In the past 40 years, Seattle University has modernized its urban campus so that today it serves 7,400 undergraduate and graduate students with nine schools and colleges. It has a strong interfaith, ecumenical commitment to welcome all students. New campus jewels include the revered Chapel of St. Ignatius and the Lee Center for the

Arts. A planned Center for Science and Innovation is the latest university commitment to serving a diverse student body in what is today a thriving, globally interconnected region.

Tracy DeCroce works to tell the Seattle University story in many outlets including the university's magazine and website and digital and print media. She has worked as a journalist and fundraiser and has been a writer and editor for the non-profit sector and for the pharmaceutical industry.



Top left: The Garrand Building, Seattle University's first building, circa 1907.

Left: The Chapel of St. Ignatius, opened in 1997. All photos courtesy of Seattle University.