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RICHARD H. PASSON

The Survey

In the summer of 1996, the chief academic officers of twenty-six of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities responded to a brief survey that I devised concerning whether they were involved, and to what extent, in a practice that has come to be called “hiring for mission.” It seems to me significant that all twenty-six respondents answered “yes” to the first question, which was, “In your hiring practices for new faculty do you include in any way a knowledge of and commitment to the university’s mission?” All of these Jesuit schools, therefore, are now engaged in some way in hiring for mission. I must note immediately that the extent to which each of the universities is involved varies considerably, from a practice which takes place in some of the divisions of the institution, to a complex and coordinated effort involving the entire university. I will explore this range of practices in more detail below. The variety of the practices notwithstanding, this development is remarkable, since as recently as ten years ago nobody was talking about hiring for mission.

The Concept

What is this “hiring for mission”? And why would all—or practically all—of the Jesuit universities seem to be engaging in it? Let’s start with the term: Hiring for mission means that in some way a university informs faculty candidates (and perhaps staff and administrative candidates as well) about the institution’s mission, and then makes commitment to the mission one of the relevant issues in the hiring process. It would seem, then, that almost all of the Jesuit universities believe that the faculty they hire should know about their institutional mission and be in a position to contribute to the accomplishment of that mission in some way.

From one point of view this does not seem to be such a radical idea. After all, any corporation demands that the people it hires know what the corporation is

Richard H. Passon is provost and academic vice president at the University of Scranton. He is a former member of the National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education (1994-97).
trying to accomplish and accept, actively, that their fundamental task—whatever their job description—is to advance the corporate goal. But colleges and universities, of course, are very different in some respects from corporations. A professor is expected to do his or her own academic, disciplinary, scholarly thing, subject to evaluation by scholarly peers, and peer review (especially in the form of refereed publication) is the standard index of accomplishment. All universities are, after all, in the same business (more or less), and distinguished faculty—if they are truly distinguished—can do their thing almost anywhere. That’s what academic freedom is all about, isn’t it? The fact, therefore, that all Jesuit universities are in some way adding knowledge of and commitment to mission into the faculty hiring equation seems to be a fundamental change in the way we’re doing business. Why has this change begun to occur? What, exactly, is going on?

Rationale and History

The basic issue here, as I see it, has to do with retaining the university’s Jesuit identity. Forty years ago the question of Jesuit identity was hardly a major issue. Most Jesuit colleges and universities then had relatively large proportions of their faculty and administration staffed by Jesuits. Jesuit identity was a matter of Jesuit presence, and the number of Jesuits present was sufficient. Moreover, into the sixties, the leadership and governance of Jesuit universities was in the hands of Jesuits. The trustees were all members of the Society of Jesus, and the presidents were also the rectors of the communities. The majority of the major administrators were Jesuits, and a large number of the departmental chairpersons were members of the Society as well. All this began to change through the 1960s. (In a sidebar to this article, Joseph A. Panuska, S.J., president of the University of Scranton, provides a personal account of this movement from the point of view of a member of the Society active in a variety of leadership positions from the 1960s to the present.) The number of lay men and women on the faculty began to increase as the universities grew in enrollment and as the number of available Jesuits began to decrease. More and more leadership positions through the sixties and seventies were occupied by members of the laity, including such key positions as dean of arts and sciences and chief academic officer, which to this time had been reserved for members of the Society. When I became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Creighton in 1973, I was the first layperson in that position. But as I attended, first, the annual deans’ conferences of the AJCU, and, later, the academic vice presidents’ conferences, the proportion of my colleagues around the table who were Jesuits grew smaller and smaller. In the fall of 1996 there were seven Jesuit academic vice presidents and six Jesuit deans of arts and science in the twenty-eight institutions.

Further, by the end of the 1960s the process of expanding the boards of trustees at Jesuit universities had been initiated by Paul Reinert, S.J., the then president of Saint Louis University. This process involved the addition of laypersons (who became a majority), the separate incorporation of the Jesuit community at the institution, and the separation of the positions of rector and president. Though the pattern varied a bit from place to place, the phenomenon extended itself through all the institutions of higher education rather rapidly. Practically all of the boards of Jesuit universities now are independent, formally separated from the legal control of the Church and of the Society of Jesus.

Through the seventies and into the eighties, therefore, concern for the maintenance of the Catholic tradition and Ignatian identity of the Jesuit universities grew at an increasingly rapid pace. As Thomas Buckley, S.J., explains it in an article tracing the history of Western Conversations, “further strategies had to be developed to extend to the (increasingly lay) academic community (at Jesuit universities) the vision and values that have historically embodied Jesuit higher education” (see In Deed, below). He continues, “in a multitude of ways (e.g. conferences, lecture series, library exhibits, internal publications, spiritual and academic retreats, and the establishment of committees and/or offices for mission and identity), each Jesuit college or university has attempted to explain its mission to the faculty, staff, and administrators from diverse religious and academic backgrounds who have joined its ranks in the past quarter century.” Fr. Buckley sees as especially significant the national meeting on “Collaboration in Mission” held in May, 1988, at Creighton University. To that meeting he traces the origins of Western Conversations, regional meetings of faculty from Jesuit universities in the west which have fostered continuing discussions of Ignatian mission and identity.

Though I attended the Creighton meeting myself, and found it thoroughly enjoyable, I think that another national meeting, held just a year later, had even greater symbolic importance and practical significance. Assembly ‘89, held in June 1989 at Georgetown University,
was to my mind the catalyst of our current concern for Jesuit identity and mission. According to Vincent O’Keefe, S.J., the general coordinator of the event, Assembly ’89 can be traced to a joint meeting in February, 1984, of the Jesuit Conference Board (hereafter JC, the U.S. Jesuit provincials’ organization) and the board of directors of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (hereafter AJCU, the organization of the presidents of the twenty-eight Jesuit institutions of higher education in the United States). That meeting created an ad hoc committee, with representatives from the JC, the AJCU, and HERO (the Higher Education Rectors’ Organization) to report on issues concerning higher education. In 1985, in response to the report of the ad hoc committee, the JC Board set up a task force to continue the discussion. The task force recommended, in 1986, three strategies for action: local meetings of Jesuits in higher education, a publication dealing with topics pertinent to higher education, and a National Assembly of Jesuits in Higher Education, originally planned for 1988 but postponed to 1989 to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Jesuit higher education in the United States.

Because the presidents, provincials, and rectors had their own opportunities to meet on a regular basis, the Assembly would bring together representatives, lay as well as Jesuit, of the faculties from all twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities, to discuss matters of common interest, but especially the central question of the Jesuit tradition. The (then) new General of the Society, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, was present, and addressed the entire assembly. From the many papers and workshops during the assembly one common theme emerged—the need to involve all the members of each university community in reflecting upon, articulating, and carrying forward the university’s Ignatian identity and mission.

Assembly ’89, the planning that preceded it, and the many local efforts which had already been under way, resulted in a number of actions—national, regional, and local. For one thing, the National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education and this publication, Conversations, were established to promote a continuing dialogue about the Catholic and Jesuit identity of all the institutions. The National Seminar has been meeting on a different Jesuit campus three times a year for the past seven years, not only to engage in the deliberations out of which this magazine emerges, but also to talk with members of each campus community. The meetings of the Seminar, and the appearances of Con-
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A REAL JESUIT UNIVERSITY, then, should express its Ignatian identity as clearly as possible in its mission statement and should realize its identity in putting the mission statement into effect.

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other campuses has been to set the policy that a certain “critical mass” of the faculty and staff would have to be Catholics. As far as I know, this approach has not been formally implemented at any of the Jesuit universities in the United States, though one of the leading Catholic universities, Notre Dame, has utilized this “critical mass” approach in a recent institutional plan.

It is in the context of these competing approaches to the question of identity, I think, that we have to understand the current nationwide emphasis on an applicant’s knowledge of and commitment to mission as potentially key factors in a hiring decision. A good mission statement is supposed to set out as clearly as possible the ways in which a university identifies itself as unique and the directions which the university will follow to realize that identity in the things it does. Good planning follows from a university’s mission, as does successful marketing, effective governance, prudent decision making, and useful evaluation. A real Jesuit university, then, should express its Ignatian identity as clearly as possible in its mission statement and should realize its identity in putting the mission statement into effect. Since the operations of a university are conducted by the faculty, staff, and administrators, their work should find its fundamental direction in the university’s mission. Hence the conclusion that faculty and staff recruitment policies should be influenced, at least in part, by “hiring for mission.”

Caveats and Concerns

Though practically all Jesuit universities are doing something along this line, one should not conclude that the practice is universally embraced. Indeed, there have been a number of concerns and caveats expressed, and there is active doubt about hiring for mission by many people on Jesuit campuses. For one thing, hiring for mission seems to some people to be hiring for ideology in disguise. This addition to faculty and staff recruiting practices, some fear, is in effect a litmus test of belief which will be used to squelch ideological and religious diversity. What sounds like a good idea, therefore, is instead a covert threat to academic freedom, the very thing that makes universities what they are. It has also been argued that this part of a hiring policy, especially with respect to faculty, can have a negative effect when one is trying to seek out candidates of high quality and with credentials from the best graduate schools. And such a diminution in qualified faculty and staff could lead Jesuit universities to lose the academic credibility for which they have fought for decades.

On the other hand, there are those who contend that hiring for mission policies have not really been effective, since candidates for faculty positions will feign an interest in Ignatian identity just to get the job. Others point out that enthusiasm for mission issues is not generally shared by all those who participate in the hiring process, and that there are many people at the departmental level who undercut hiring for mission policies by dismissing the importance of identity questions in the presence of candidates.

There are, of course, responses to all of these negative arguments, and examples of positive experiences to balance the negative experiences that have been reported. For example, on the question of academic freedom, one might note that much depends on what the individual university’s mission statement says, and how it expresses that community’s way of balancing tradition and identity with freedom and difference. This issue exists in church-related universities quite apart from the question of a hiring-for-mission practice. Further, with respect to the question of quality, one might argue that generalized concepts of quality in faculty hiring are not in accordance with sound professional practice. Successful hiring requires that a university be clear about the kind of students it serves, the programs it offers, and the specific expectations it has for faculty research and service. There is also the question of fairness to the candidate, who has the right to know the kind of environment in which she or he is going to be working.

Finally, a good number of my colleagues around the country who have responsibility for faculty hiring, while they do not downplay the difficulties, report positive experiences—both in terms of the real interest in mission questions by departments and in terms of the ways in which good faculty candidates are attracted to institutions that are clear about their identity. (See pp. 20 ff. of this issue for a case study of some recent hires at Saint Joseph’s University.)

Some Examples

Every Jesuit institution has its own history on the issue of hiring for mission; each is at a somewhat different stage of development with the task. The practice may be widespread, but it has taken hold in a variety of
ways and with different levels of commitment and enthusiasm. I can illustrate this point by referring again to the survey responses I received. I found that the responses to my survey from the summer of 1996 might be sorted into three broad categories: Some of the universities, notably the larger ones with doctoral programs, see the policy of hiring for mission being introduced in varying ways in the colleges and schools. In some of the other universities, probably the largest number, the policy is implemented across the university, but it is a relatively new and developing program. In another group of the schools the policy of hiring for mission is well established, and features a sophisticated variety of materials and practices. I'll illustrate by using one example from each group: Boston College will represent the first, the University of Scranton the second, and Gonzaga University the third.

Boston College is one of the largest of the Jesuit universities in this country, in terms of enrollment, with a variety of colleges and schools, and a range of doctoral programs. William B. Neenan, S.J., the academic vice president and dean of faculties, tells me that the practice of hiring for mission varies across the schools and colleges. The dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, he reports, has taken the lead by mailing out a brochure to all prospective faculty. This brochure, titled "An Introduction to Boston College," provides a good deal of historical information about the university and about the Jesuit order. It narrates some characteristics of Jesuit education, and speaks of the work of the Jesuit Institute at Boston College.

Fr. Neenan points out that a special impetus was given to the issue of hiring for mission at Boston College by a recent document of the University Academic Planning Council called "Advancing the Legacy: the New Millennium" (May, 1996). That document calls for an emphasis on "the distinctive Jesuit tradition of liberal education and of intellectual engagement between religious faith and contemporary culture." It notes that "in hiring decisions it will be appropriate and desirable to recognize the importance of having represented in disciplines throughout the University faculty whose interests include research and teaching that contributes to the dialogue between religious belief and their disciplines." It suggests that Boston College "attract and develop a significant number of faculty, administrators and staff...interested in connecting religious faith and contemporary culture."

In the development of this report, Fr. Neenan tells me, a variety of positions were argued, including the

A Personal Perspective on Hiring for Mission

JOSEPH A. PANUSKA, S.J.

I have seen multiple approaches to hiring for Jesuit institutions throughout my life in the Society of Jesus and as an educator. I have worked at the Emory University School of Medicine, taught and served as rector at Georgetown, served as provincial of the Maryland province, as academic vice president at Boston College, and, most recently, as president of the University of Scranton. My experience has taught me that the questions surrounding the issue of hiring for mission are never easy ones.

As a post-doctoral fellow at Emory in 1963, I was invited to remain on the medical school faculty as an instructor. This ecumenical, Methodist university hired me for my academic ability, of course, but I certainly saw my mission there as not solely scientific, but pastoral as well. I am certain, too, that, at least within my department, the pastoral element of my contribution was recognized. The pastoral work went on primarily by example, although it could have developed into other more direct ministries.

My provincial had other plans. Georgetown was beginning a graduate program and the Maryland provincial wanted a fourth Jesuit in the biology department. At that time, hiring laypersons to bolster Jesuit identity was not yet a significant issue, as we were still relying primarily upon Jesuits to carry our Ignatian identity as an institution. When I was rector at Georgetown in the early 1970s, we were not nearly as active in recruiting Jesuits as most university-affiliated Jesuit communities are today. Jesuit numbers were relatively high. Besides, Georgetown itself was a very attractive institution with a strong Jesuit character, and it sold itself easily to members of the order.

Joseph A. Panusha, S.J., is president of the University of Scranton.
During my time as provincial, from 1973-79, seeking out qualified lay people who could also work to strengthen the Jesuit identity of the universities was not a special priority. My interest during that period was to assist in the placement of Jesuits in a way that was compatible with the mission of the institution, and that focus was primarily academic except for campus ministers and religious superiors. In those discernments, my belief was that individuals should be assigned to those works about which they could generate the kind of personal enthusiasm that makes significant achievement possible. If that potential was compatible with an institution’s need, the match would be ideal.

Even as late as my tenure at Boston College, from 1979-82, hiring laypersons for mission was not yet a major concern. Boston College’s very strong Ignatian presence, combined with the fact that the university was, to a significant extent, ecumenical, tended to relegate these sorts of concerns to relatively low priority.

One can ponder whether our position today in many institutions would be stronger if hiring for mission had been more explicit and more energetically pursued in the days when the issue did not seem so pressing. I would point out, however, that, although none of these institutions was consciously engaged in “hiring for mission,” many outstanding people—people with academic qualifications second to none and with the readiness, willingness, and ability to contribute to our shared Ignatian mission—were hired. These people have contributed enormously to the mission.

The importance of hiring faculty and staff for mission at the University of Scranton did not become apparent until at least a few years into my term as president. Now, of course, it is a high priority. Why is it now a priority for Scranton and for other Jesuit institutions? A large part of the reason is the recent growth and change of our colleges and universities. Scranton, like many other universities of its size and kind throughout the United States, added significantly to its faculty and staff throughout the 1980s. During this same period, the number of available Jesuits decreased considerably. With so many new faces and with fewer Jesuits—formerly and erroneously seen as the embodiment of Ignatian identity—institutions could no longer take for granted that everyone understood and embraced the mission or that mission was the responsibility of Jesuits alone.

These pressures are not altogether unhealthy. They are forcing us to regroup and follow the pattern of the Spiritual Exercises by beginning to ask ourselves who we are and what we want to be.

Are we bold enough to incorporate a clear commitment to mission in our advertising and in our selection of candidates? Legally we have much more freedom than we exercise or perhaps want to exercise. The limits are within our institutions and in ourselves. Have we been incorporated too thoroughly into our American culture? Is it time to reassess the procedures through which we make hiring decisions?

Then what is the challenge now? I think that the key is the spirit of the entire community. It is not presidents, vice presidents, and deans who control hiring; it is the institutional community itself. Most faculty and staff reviews are not carried out by administrators (who usually only get involved in the final steps when choices have already been narrowed significantly or settled), and it will always be very difficult for the leadership to reverse a decision of a search committee or department. If support of mission is to become a serious part of the hiring process, it must become the goal of the university community itself. To encourage that development, we in leadership positions probably need to make much more explicit the need for compatibility and support from a candidate, and we have to be willing to lose some otherwise good candidates for lack of a better motivational fit. In the end, however, the work will be done, not through a single mechanism, but through the esprit of the institution as a whole.
possibility of establishing a policy of maintaining some critical mass of Catholics; but this position did not have enough advocates. He reports that the matter of hiring for mission as it might be implemented in the various colleges continues to be discussed.

The University of Scranton is a small comprehensive university enrolling about five thousand students in five colleges and schools. It is similar in size and complexity to many of the Jesuit universities in the United States. For a number of years I gave a copy of the mission statement to all of the faculty candidates when I interviewed them and talked a bit about it and the Jesuit tradition. Recently, however, we’ve adopted a practice that requires all departments to send a copy of the mission statement to the finalists who are interviewed, with a letter from me explaining the importance of the mission. A discussion of that statement is supposed to be part of the interview process at the departmental, college, and university level. I have concluded that most candidates are happy to hear about the university’s mission, and they have little difficulty discussing their reaction to it and their potential contribution to the mission if hired. Not all departments implement the policy equally well, but the practice is beginning to take hold. We considered but did not implement one variation of this practice—to send candidates a copy of the mission statement and ask them to write about their response and potential contribution.

Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington is a bit larger than Scranton, with a somewhat more complex organization which includes a law school and an engineering school. According to Patrick Ford, S.J., the academic vice president, Gonzaga has been working at hiring for mission for some time. About three years ago the Entrance Committee of their Council for Partnership and Mission began to develop a comprehensive approach, developing rather detailed materials, forms, and procedural guidelines to assist with the hiring for mission of faculty and all other employees as well. Victoria Loveland, the EEO-Affirmative Action officer, succeeded Peter Ely, S.J., as chair of that group.

The result of their work is a rather impressive packet of materials related to “mission-centered hiring.” It includes a statement on “Developing Mission-Centered Hiring,” a brochure written by Fr. Ely titled The Memory of Justice: The Idea of a Jesuit University, another brochure on “Mission Centered Hiring: A Guide for Interviewers and Search Committees,” a copy of Gonzaga’s Mission Statement, a paper on “Six Mission Values: Some Reflection on Their Meaning,” another on “The Ten Key Points of the Mission Statement,” and, finally, a statement on “Selected Interview Questions and Rationale.” None of the other Jesuit universities, according to the results of my survey, has developed a range of material this detailed and elaborate. Others had their own variations on the “Idea of a Jesuit University”—I recommend Loyola University of Chicago’s and John Carroll’s particularly. Other universities had guidelines for the practice, in at least an outline form. But none had developed an analysis of “mission values” and “key points of the mission statement.” And none had provided detailed guides for interviewers and search committees.

Gonzaga has piloted the materials, which they regard as still in draft form, and they are now in the process of assessing them, using focus groups for feedback. The reactions to date have been generally positive, though there are still concerns about the idea itself, and still different points of view expressed on how it should be implemented.

Conclusions

Gonzaga would seem to have advanced the idea of hiring for mission as far as any of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities, but even there the issue is in a developmental stage. Indeed, the most accurate way of describing hiring for mission across the Jesuit schools is that it is a work in progress.

This should not be surprising. The concept is new, and change happens very slowly in colleges and universities, whose members are liberal about many things, but not about their own working environments. In addition, as I have noted above, there are concerns that have been raised on every one of the Jesuit campuses in one form or another.

On the other hand, I am convinced that this is a fundamentally sound way of proceeding; it makes a lot of sense to me. For one thing, successful hiring, especially for faculty, needs to start with as much clarity about the job description as possible. Departments need to be clear about the role a potential new member will play, the courses she or he will teach, the expectations for research which the department has for the new member, the kinds of service she or he will need to contribute. These things require clarity about the institutional culture in which the new person will work, at the departmental, college, and university level. If the university’s mission is not having a clear impact on that culture, then it should. If the department hasn’t
considered the matter, then it needs to—quite apart from hiring.

I have little sympathy with the argument that adding considerations of university identity and mission to the hiring equation will have a chilling effect on academic quality. To accept that argument is to accept Shaw's cliché that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms. If we haven't settled that issue on our various campuses, then we should. It may be that this idea has not been easy to implement because it has forced our institutions to face certain fundamental issues which have been side-stepped, especially at the departmental level. In my view that's a persuasive argument in favor of the practice. Hiring for mission has raised our level of discomfort sufficiently to convince me, for one, that we must be on to something good.

I am, therefore, optimistic about the future of this strategy. The fact that it has been so universally embraced says something, I believe. We simply need to take the time to understand it completely, to involve the entire academic community in pursuing it, and to learn how to do it well. Hiring for mission is not, in my view, a passing fad; I think it's here to stay.

Postscript: Orientation

One other relevant issue was revealed by the surveys. It would appear that, whatever is being done about Ignatian identity and mission prior to hiring, most of the Jesuit universities have invested serious time, effort, and resources into well-developed orientation programs for new faculty and staff. Many of the respondents to the survey felt that such programs were an integral part of their "hiring for mission" policy, and most concluded that an orientation program for new faculty and staff was essential. In most cases these programs were more than one-shot sessions at the end of the summer. They continued through the fall semester and, in some instances, through the entire first academic year. It seems to me that there has been a greater investment in orienting new faculty and staff to the identity and mission of most of the universities than to including a consideration of mission in the hiring process. This topic deserves additional investigation.