

## **COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULAR REVIEW TALK**

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**October 6, 2004**

On behalf of all us at Saint Joseph's University, I want to commend and thank our colleagues for the Interim Report of the Comprehensive Curricular Review Committee of Saint Joseph's University and to thank them for the invitation to respond. The report is well documented, thoughtful, provocative, and the process was inclusive. In particular, I'm grateful to the committee for its consultation with so many of our colleagues, including the University Jesuits. This Interim Report will be immensely helpful to the review process, since it sets the context, states the issues, and provides a roadmap for curricular changes. So thank you to Catherine Murray, Todd Moody, Peter Norberg, Patrick Samway, Richard Sherman, and Karen Snetselaar.

As noted in the Interim Report, "The challenge for us as well as other schools is how best to design a curriculum that integrates traditional liberal arts education with coursework that provides our students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to excel in their professional careers" (63). It is important to note that we are and intend to remain a comprehensive University where both the liberal arts and pre-professional studies contribute to the development of the whole person. This is a key parameter within which curricular change must take place.

This will indeed be an immense challenge, but I'm confident that we can meet that challenge here at Saint Joseph's University. So, what I'd like to do is to address some of those challenges and opportunities that lay ahead of us. Let me begin with the General Education Requirement (GER). Our GER must:

- Provide a liberal education for our students, as was well stated in the report.
- Reflect the University's Mission Statement, as well as the Vision Statement. We will reach pre-eminence if we have an exceptional curriculum.
- Embrace the University's Catholic and Jesuit identity.

I would like to say more about this. Catholic and Jesuit identity in the curriculum certainly involves requiring courses in Theology and Philosophy. But it is more than a matter of the number of such courses. The content of those courses must also represent our identity rooted in the 450 years of Jesuit education. Students should be exposed to Catholic teaching in their Theology courses. And their Philosophy courses should deal with those philosophical doctrines that are presupposed by Catholic teaching. Both of these things can and must be done in a way that respects the integrity of each of the academic disciplines involved. But these responsibilities are not confined to Theology and Philosophy alone. In the case of disciplines to which Catholic social teaching is relevant, care should be taken to see that this teaching is presented fully and fairly. This need not exclude critical reaction to it.

In addition, the GER must:

- Prepare our students to be life-long learners who have developed while here an intellectual curiosity and the ability to reflect on complex issues.
- Prepare our students to be leaders in a nation becoming more and more diverse and in a world becoming smaller and smaller. There must be a way to ensure that all students learn about and experience diverse cultures within our borders and outside them.

I think we would all agree that an education at Saint Joseph's University is not just preparing our graduates for a job, but preparing our graduates for life in an ever-changing world. The graduates of our University will need to have skills to evaluate critically an ever-changing knowledge base and values systems. Such skills will be needed for their lifetime.

The challenges facing American education and us at Saint Joseph's University are stated quite well by Vartan Gregorian:

Instead of helping students learn and grow as individuals, find meaning in their lives, or understand their role in society, college has become a chaotic maze where students try to pick up something useful as they search for the exit: the degree needed to obtain decent employment. Today's students fulfill general education requirements, take specialized courses in their majors, and fill out their schedule with some electives, but while college catalogs euphemistically describe this as a "curriculum" it is rarely more than a collection of courses, devoid of planning, context, and coherence (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 4, 2004, B12).

In the Interim Report, our colleagues have stated the issues as skillfully as Mr. Gregorian. A curriculum needs clearly defined goals; goals that faculty, students and their parents can grasp. Goals need to run across overlapping sets of courses and be embraced by faculty within and across departments. For an example, we are all responsible for leading our students to think critically and teaching them about the ethical and value-related dimensions of our disciplines.

Gregorian asserts, as do our colleagues in the Interim Report, that "we must reform higher education to reconstruct the unity and value of knowledge" (B12).

So, as this process goes forward, let me list some concerns and issues:

- At the end point of this process, we, and the generations behind us, all need to know why we have the curriculum we have.
- Integration is, of course, important, but specialized learning is necessary in the major concentration. Integration *within* the GER and major is important, but integration *between* the GER and major is just as important.

- We need to orientate our students to the academy and the intellectual life through a freshman seminar required of all students, and conclude their intellectual experience at Saint Joseph's University through a capstone experience.
- The curriculum needs to stretch our students, thus requiring rigor and engagement in the classroom. Students must write frequently and well and they should read widely and critically.
- We need to provide our students an opportunity to work both in groups as well as independently.
- Our curriculum and each course within the curriculum needs to have established learning goals as well as an associated evaluation and assessment processes that clearly link to those goals.
- Little was said in the Interim Report about our Honors Program. That program needs to be the “gem” of our curriculum.
- One dream I have for our University is that we provide a seamless curriculum for our students that includes learning in the classroom and outside the classroom. There is a need for the faculty, and our colleagues in Student Life and Campus Ministry, to identify more ways to work together in order to educate “the whole person.”
- Obviously, the curriculum is important, but just as important is how the courses are taught. Consequently, faculty need to continue to be open to using varying types of pedagogy, including technology resources, in the classroom.
- Every student at this University, by the time he or she graduates, should have an experience of service learning.
- We are educating the whole person at this University. Consequently, our emphasis on values is not restricted to Ethics, but must include an encounter with the full range of our humanity, including aesthetics and the arts.
- The curriculum must reflect a faith that promotes justice. Justice must be sought through the rigorous analysis of complex social, political, economic and moral issues. Reliable analysis combined with infectious passion can bring us to a more just world. We cannot forget that the promotion of social justice at Saint Joseph's University is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The curriculum must be flexible enough to provide an opportunity for our students to pursue intellectual interests outside of their concentration and the general education requirement.

- Learning today must be inter-disciplinary in order to slow down an ever-increasing fragmentation of knowledge.

Each of us has a responsibility for the curriculum of this University. The general education requirement is not the sole property of the service departments that provide the courses, but is the responsibility of the entire faculty. Obviously the major and certificate programs reside within the department. We are so well poised to review this curriculum and change it in order to better prepare our students, due to the wisdom, openness, and willingness of the faculty.

Four years ago on this exact date, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, addressed the Jesuit Higher Education Conference at Santa Clara University. In that address he stated the following:

For 450 years, Jesuit education has taught to educate “the whole person” intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally, and spiritually. But in the emerging global reality, with its great possibilities and deep contradictions, the whole person is different from the whole person of the Counter Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, or the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Tomorrow’s “whole person” cannot be full without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow’s whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity.

We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to “educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world.” Solidarity is learned through “contact” rather than through “concepts,” ... When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change.

Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed (*The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education*, 8).

We must have a curriculum that integrates experience and the classroom—a curriculum of seeing and feeling combined with concepts, facts, analysis and rigorous thinking.

Let our work continue to instill in each of our students “a love of learning and of the highest intellectual and professional achievements; moral discernment reflecting Christian values; and a transforming commitment to social justice.” That is our mission. Let our work move us closer to being recognized as the Pre-eminent Catholic Comprehensive University in the Northeast.

In this important process, we must work toward consensus, cooperation and mutual respect. Only if we are committed to achieving consensus and are willing to make the appropriate compromises, can this process succeed.

We must move beyond any and all “turf wars” and seek the *Magis*—the better good—for the sake of our students. One major reason for the failure of the last attempt at curricular change was the absence of such consensus. Disagreement among us is inevitable. So I challenge you to become engaged in this process that is at our very core: to press your views and opinions and to listen to other views, especially those views that differ from yours. We cannot and will not fall short, because I believe we have the will and the heart to reach a common ground for this comprehensive curricular review and change.

I firmly support that process and encourage the change it will affect. I am asking you, I am asking all of us, to make the same commitment today.

## **Bibliography**

Interim Report of the Comprehensive Curricular Review Committee of Saint Joseph's University.

Vartan Gregorian in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 4, 2004, B12.

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Address to the Jesuit Higher Education Conference at Santa Clara University, October 6, 2000. *The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education*, 8.