

The Jesuit, Catholic Mission of U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities



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Colleges and Universities

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The following statement offers a consensus reflection of the twenty-eight presidents of U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities on the Jesuit, Catholic identity shared by these institutions. It was developed through several drafts in preparation for a dialogue between presidents and the U.S. provincials of the Society of Jesus in October 2010.

The consensus statement has been written in such a way that it can stand on its own and can be used, independently of the dialogue with the provincials, in other conversations, e.g. with our boards or university colleagues, Jesuit communities, etc.

The statement describes how the presidents understand the apostolate of Jesuit higher education within the framework of the overall national Jesuit apostolic strategy, and addresses key relationships and important issues as seen by the presidents. We see this statement as part of an ongoing dialogue and welcome feedback from our colleagues and friends.

This statement was approved by the presidents of U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities in January 2010.

Presidents of the Association of
Jesuit Colleges and Universities

Preface

The apostolate of higher education has a prominent role in the mission of the Society of Jesus in the United States and internationally. From the beginning of its history, the Society of Jesus has seen the importance of this ministry for bringing about the greater apostolic good and has invested significantly in it as a primary way of striving to fulfill the Society's mission. More than in any other country Jesuit colleges and universities in the United



Defining Character: Catholic, Jesuit Universities

Being “Catholic, Jesuit universities” is not simply one characteristic among others but is our defining character, what makes us to be uniquely what we are. Our apostolic rationale flows from this defining character.

Our apostolic significance is founded on the fact that we are universities with all of the essential dimensions of what universities are and do. Our primary mission is the education and formation of our students for the sake of the kind of persons they become and their wide influence for good in society in their lives, professions, and service. We agree with Fr. Kolvenbach, “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become.” We carry out this university education through highly qualified professors and colleagues acting with academic freedom for the sake of the full pursuit of the truth and the students’ free attainment of knowledge and values. As colleges and universities, we exercise an intellectual apostolate vital to the Society of Jesus and long a recognized characteristic of its tradition in teaching, in scholarship, and within the community of other scholars and intellectuals for the sake of the advancement of knowledge and the service of society. This unique work of our 28 institutions as colleges and universities in the United States, its impact on the lives of our students, and the access it makes possible to persons of influence in our country and beyond is very significant apostolically both for the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus.

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We are Catholic colleges and universities and see ourselves as an important ministry of the Catholic Church. We are committed to and guided by the official understanding of a Catholic university as articulated in the Church’s document Ex Corde Ecclesiae (*From the Heart of the Church*). We do many things which are essential for the Catholic Church to do: educating and forming an adult Catholic laity,

continuing to educate first-generation Catholic immigrant populations, developing a dialogue between Church and culture, providing a forum to address important issues of Church and society, making available scholarly and educational resources to the Church, supporting ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and making contact with and representing the Church to many persons it would not otherwise encounter. We do all of this within the essential framework of faith and reason, which mutually confirm and advance each other. Our Jesuit colleges and universities are the largest and most united network of Catholic higher education within the United States. From a national, Jesuit perspective this special kind of service to the Church is apostolically invaluable.

As Jesuit colleges and universities, we are a continuation of the Ignatian heritage and of the distinctive tradition of Jesuit education.

This means that St. Ignatius, with his charism and his *Spiritual Exercises*, inspires and gives shape to how we educate in a way that seeks God in all things, promotes discernment, and “engages the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation”. (General Congregation of the Jesuits #35 = GC35.) We are Jesuit also in the sense of having a clear relationship

with the Society of Jesus which is formalized in written understandings, sharing the Society's "commitment to a faith that does justice through interreligious dialogue and a creative engagement with culture" (GC35), and a willingness to have our mission as Jesuit educational works evaluated as being in alignment with the overall mission of the Society of Jesus. We prize this Jesuit character, which uniquely characterizes how we are Catholic colleges and universities. We celebrate and honor the fact that we originate from the Society of Jesus with its charism officially affirmed by the Catholic Church, are served by Jesuits and other persons of Ignatian inspiration, and are part of the overall ministry of the Society of Jesus and the Catholic Church in our country and globally.

Each of our colleges and universities in its own way gives priority of attention to being faithful to, deepening, and applying this Catholic, Jesuit character in what it does. The specific means we use for this run into the hundreds, are well resourced and staffed within our institutions, are coordinated by a person charged with responsibility to further



- e. For several years global engagement has become an essential element of our rationale as colleges and universities. The internationalization of the curriculum and experiences of students, the education of international students, the connections and exchange programs developed with universities—often Jesuit universities—in other countries, the application of scholarship to global issues, and the programs of learning from and bringing educational resources to other countries are part of the





Collaboration and Governance

The Society of Jesus' way of operating apostolically from the beginning of its history has been strongly collaborative, especially with lay people who have exercised leadership and responsibility within Jesuit works. This takes a new and more intentional form today in all of our works and to the highest degree in our colleges and universities. Trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, students and their families, friends, and those we serve and learn from play an essential role in shaping our mission. Our way of collaboration and governance for the sake of fulfilling our distinctive Jesuit educational mission in our colleges and universities today calls for an accommodation and adaptation to time, place, and people which has always been the hallmark of the Jesuit "way of proceeding". It simply takes new forms today.

The full responsibility for the policy, governance, and operation of each of our colleges and universities rests with its board of directors, trustees, or regents as established by articles of incorporation and/or by-laws. Each of these institutions is legally and functionally independent of the Society of Jesus and its provinces and institutions. Provincials, for instance, do not exercise authority in the external or internal governance of these institutions. The board has fiduciary responsibility for—holds in trust—what enables the institution to be what it is. Most importantly, it holds in trust the Catholic, Jesuit character of the college or university and has a responsibility to understand, assure,

Our boards have brought us better management, sounder financial status, higher academic quality and education of the whole person, and a fuller realization of being distinctively Catholic, Jesuit universities and colleges. We recognize the increasing importance of the preparation and ongoing formation of our board members for bearing the responsibility of fulfilling the Catholic, Jesuit purpose of our colleges and universities and we welcome sharing ways with the Society of Jesus for this formational process of our boards.

At the same time that each Jesuit college and university has this proper and necessary independence and responsibility,

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it welcomes and needs to have for its integrity as a Jesuit university an actual, lived relationship with the Society of Jesus, especially as represented by the provincials of the Society (and very importantly with the Jesuits and Jesuit community of the college or university—cf. below #4). Essentially the college/university must have open and good communication, mutual listening and learning, and committed partnership or collaboration with the Society of Jesus, and in particular with provincials. The provincial should not be a stranger to the university but be welcomed and—to the extent

possible—known within it.

It is vital that each college and university fiduciary board, as well as each president, have open dialogue with the provincial regularly initiated by the university and as requested by the provincial. This dialogue provides a context for support of the Jesuit character, understanding of initiatives and apostolic emphases of the Society of Jesus, the solidarity of the university with other Jesuit ministries, knowledge about the formation, availability, and assignment of Jesuits

for the ministry of Jesuit higher education, the promotion of vocations to the Society by the university, programs for the formation of lay apostolic partners, and the role of the provincial in the process of the board's appointment of a president. The more the board and the president can have an open and ongoing dialogue with the provincial and a spirit of working in welcomed partnership between them, the more the issues and opportunities of relationship with the Society of Jesus—for the good of both the mission of the Society and the college/university—can be addressed and mutually supported. Most of what is needed in regard to all of the issues of relationship can be resolved by improved communication.

In our colleges and universities, Jesuits comprise less than five percent of the total number of faculty, staff, and administration. These institutions depend overwhelmingly on “lay apostolic partnership” or collegueship. Already the leadership of our institutions, whether as deans, directors of programs, or central administration, is overwhelmingly exercised by persons who are not Jesuits and it is foreseen that fewer of our presidents in the future will be Jesuits. Because of their responsibility, our boards are also a critical part of the reality of lay apostolic partnership. We are long familiar with this evolution and have actively been engaged with it. We recognize both that it calls for special initiatives to assure the Jesuit character of our colleges and universities and that it is an opportunity that we should welcome for new apostolic vitality in the future.

Each of our colleges and universities has created responsibilities, structures, and programs for the hiring, orienting, and developing of faculty and staff according to our Catholic, Jesuit mission. We make available special retreats, seminars in Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit education, programs and colloquia which seek to enhance Catholic, Jesuit identity, development and scholarship opportunities, service and immersion experiences, special events that focus

on our mission, and we utilize university convocations, conferences, liturgical celebrations, and award ceremonies to articulate our Catholic, Jesuit identity. Some of our colleges



Jesuits and Jesuit
Communities

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that individual persons or the institution itself cannot do, but only the Jesuit community can do. Their hospitality, prayer, cohesion, and residing presence as a group of Jesuits personalizes and concretizes the Jesuit character in a relational way. Their knowledge of the *Spiritual Exercises*, leading retreats for faculty, staff, and students, giving spiritual direction, assisting in lay apostolic formation, bringing a Jesuit

perspective to teaching, collegueship, and committees, and significant ministerial and sacramental service are critical to the animation of the university as a genuine apostolate. We are committed as presidents to make sure that our Jesuit communities know their inherent value to the colleges and universities and to learn from them in what ways we can be of support in the fulfillment of their apostolic purpose as communities.

Most of our students and colleagues, because of their knowledge of and personal relationship with Jesuits, do not believe that Jesuit education—at least as anything like what they experience it to be—is possible without Jesuits who embody, concretize, or personalize it in the college or university. It seems to be the case, however, that this impact does not depend completely on there being a sizable number of Jesuits, but at least some, who visibly represent by their presence

the commitment and engagement of Jesuits with the college or university. Because of the size and great variety of the faculty, staff, schools, and students of our institutions, we do not believe they can realistically maintain their Jesuit identity unless Jesuits are assigned to and work within them. We welcome the variety of ways we, as presidents, can work with

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provincials to support Jesuits in their apostolic development, opening to them wider opportunities for engagement, and helping to develop their leadership within our colleges and universities.

We are learning that the kind of presence and work Jesuits may have can differ greatly from one college or university to another. For instance, because of their nature, some universities may need Jesuits who are scholars and others may not, but may need Jesuits in other equally important roles. While respecting that Jesuits should have a status that is credible with other university colleagues, we have already begun to and can increasingly find new ways for Jesuits to contribute to our educational missions as they live out their Jesuit calling and bring all of their gifts and formation to this apostolate.

We believe that the current assignment process for Jesuits to colleges and universities, though conceptually correct in its essential principles of the assignment of Jesuits on a national basis and for apostolic purposes, sometimes does not work well in practice or in its details. We believe that if these principles and the respective roles of Jesuits, the college/university, and the provincial in the process were better observed in practice, and if communication between colleges/universities and provincials about apostolic needs, especially on a national or conference-wide basis, were improved, the mission of the Society and of the colleges/universities within that larger mission would be better served.

We do not recommend that the Society of Jesus in the United States decide at this time that Jesuits should be assigned to some colleges or universities but not others. We believe that we are different enough in emphases, programs, size, and wider or more regional impact that this varied and rich Jesuit apostolic concreteness should be honored and supported by the assignment of Jesuits when and where it is apostolically appropriate to do so. As we develop greater lay leadership and enhance our Catholic, Jesuit character

as colleges and universities, we need the assistance of



Presidents, Rectors, and Provincials

Presidents, as “Directors of the Apostolic Work”, and rectors, as religious superiors of individual Jesuits and of the Jesuit community (or a delegate of the rector in the instance where the rector is not involved in the college or university), need above all to have regular, open, and trusting communication. This communication may concern the work of individual Jesuits, new opportunities for Jesuit involvement and assignment, ideas for how the community might help animate the Jesuit character, ways in which the college or university can know more about and recognize the community in its identity, how it can promote vocations to the Society of Jesus, and other ways of mutual assistance to one another. This dialogue should be kept clearly separate from the relation of the rector as religious superior with the president as Jesuit and as a member of the community. As presidents, we will find ways to highlight the responsibility and role of the rector of the community and we will seek occasions and communications to make the Jesuit community more recognized for its important role in the college or university. The ongoing relationship and communication of the president with the university Jesuit community as a whole should be fostered. Especially in institutions where the president is not a Jesuit, communication should be assured and strengthened in order that the knowledge of the community about the university and its role in it be clear.

Open communication not only between presidents

of the Vice President for Mission and Ministry (or persons of similar titles and responsibilities) and the role of the rector as the religious superior of the Jesuit community. While not an official of the university, the rector leads the community in its corporate animation of the apostolate and its initiatives as a community within the college or university. The rector supports each Jesuit in his apostolic work, helps the community discern common apostolic initiatives, leads the community in its hospitality of university colleagues and students, helps it decide how to promote vocations, and at times represents and articulates the Society's apostolic

priorities and commitments. The apostolic assistance of the rector to the college or university in this regard will likely increase as fewer presidents, as Directors of the Jesuit Apostolic Work, are themselves Jesuits.

The ongoing relationship and communication of the president with the university Jesuit community as a whole should be fostered.

We encourage provincials to play an important role in the process by which the university, through its governing board, chooses the president of the college or university as this is articulated in the joint Jesuit Conference and Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities document: *The Role of the Society of Jesus in the Selection of a President for a U.S. Jesuit College or*

University. The kind of regular communication called for above between the provincial and the university, and especially its board, is foundational for how the provincial can be involved when this process of the university and its board occurs. The provincial's ongoing knowledge of the university or college allows him in the time of the search for a president to identify or to encourage potential Jesuits, to discuss with them their availability and suitability, to confer with their own provincial, and to give his clearance for their service as a Jesuit in this apostolic role within the province.

From the experience of the ongoing communication with the university and board he can advise the search committee of opportunities or challenges he sees the president—whether Jesuit or not—as Director of the Apostolic Work will face. The provincial should be informed of candidates who are not Jesuits and know of their qualifications to be the Director of the Apostolic Work in furthering its Catholic, Jesuit character. He should be able to discuss his views about this responsibility with the candidate and the search committee. As Director of the Apostolic Work, the new president, whether Jesuit or not, appointed by the board, should be “missioned” to this Jesuit apostolic aspect of his responsibility by the provincial on behalf of the Society of Jesus. Experience shows that this “missioning”, especially when done publicly, is very meaningful not only to presidents who are Jesuits but very supportive of presidents who are not Jesuits. The provincial’s involvement in the search process in these ways can reassure the college or university and the province of their unity of purpose and mutual support.



Relationship with Bishops

The Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States are in both an advantageous and challenging position in regard to relationships with bishops. We are often the ministry and dimension of the Society most in contact and communication with bishops and therefore have an opportunity of collaboration, mutual support, and personal relationship which is unique and is of special significance for the relationship of the whole Society of Jesus with the episcopacy. We also, however, live a tension in our relationship with bishops because of our visibility, our representation of the Church in the minds of many, our attempts to live the reality of being in harmony with the Magisterium together with upholding academic freedom, the way in which we are called to be Catholic differently

experience and the pressures they are under because of

the United States has adopted, by which it has called us and all Jesuit ministries to be challenged and guided. We are committed to work with our colleagues, with our Jesuit communities and other Jesuit works, and with the leadership of the Society of Jesus to grow together in a fuller and more unified realization of our common mission that is so vital to our Church, to the people of our country, and to our world.

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