

Seattle University
Mission Examen Self-Study
Peer Visiting Team Report
March 30, 2017

After carefully reviewing the written Mission Examen Self-Study prepared by Seattle University, the Peer Visiting Team had the honor of meeting with a wide range of campus representatives from Wednesday, February 15 through Friday, February 17, 2017. We positively affirm, without reservation, the findings of the Self-Study and thus the existing mission strengths and mission priorities that will ensure Seattle University's Jesuit, Catholic identity in the northwest United States now and into the future. In this brief report, we will make some general observations, enumerate several points worthy of particular commendation, and affirm several mission priorities along with a few recommendations for consideration.

General Observations:

It is clear that the Mission Examen Self-Study emerged from an extensive series of campus conversations during which people voiced their deep commitment and hopes for Seattle University. The team witnessed this through its representative conversations with well-informed and engaged students, faculty, staff, and Board members. Two particular sets of meetings stood out for us. First, nearly 70 faculty, staff and administrators who had participated in one or more Ignatian formation programs gathered to share their experiences in very positive and constructive ways. We had to divide the group in three. Second, an impressive number of Board members met with us for breakfast and spoke passionately and proudly about the University's mission and its plans for the future. These were impressive and inspiring groups.

Although not a focused part of the team's visit, we find it important to mention and affirm at the outset of this report the obvious and intentional integration of aspects of Catholic, Jesuit character throughout the academic and co-curricular dimensions of the

University, especially in the new core, service-learning, immersion experiences and ethics courses, as well as well as in many centers and institutes, most notably, the Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture.

Points of Commendation:

We highly commend the University for

- 1) its strong commitment to the Jesuit values of social justice and solidarity at the local and international levels as evidenced, for example, in the innovative Seattle University Youth Initiative and the ongoing collaborative partnership with the University of Central America in Managua, Nicaragua. The former is a program for civic engagement that is among the best in the Jesuit network and will surely be emulated by other schools. The latter is built upon a commitment of mutual respect and serious academic engagement that raise it well beyond consciousness-raising immersion trips.
- 2) the enduring and fruitful commitment of the Seattle Jesuit Community in spearheading the development of an impressive array of Ignatian formation programs for staff and faculty that will help ensure that Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values will continue to animate the life of the University. Of particular note are the Arrupe Seminar, the Colleagues in Jesuit Education Program, the Summer Justice Seminar, the Women's Retreat and SEEL (Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life).
- 3) its clear voice for and witness to Catholicism in a highly un-churched part of the country. Especially noteworthy are (1) the strong, persistent presence and leadership of the President, Fr. Steve Sundborg, S.J., throughout Seattle and (2) the distinctive contributions of the School of Theology and Ministry in providing graduate training for pastoral ministers who will serve in Catholic parishes (and other denominational settings).
- 4) its practical commitment to religious, racial, ethnic, gender, and economic diversity as evidenced, for example, by the recent hiring of a Chief Diversity Officer, the administration of a Campus Climate Survey, the presence of interfaith

ministers in Campus Ministry, and financial aid for deserving, even undocumented, students.

- 5) the strong, palpable commitment by the Board of Trustees to the Catholic, Jesuit mission of the University and to its place in the Seattle community. Board members expressed great confidence in Fr. Sundborg and a deep awareness of many of the mission-centric activities of the University. These include The Search for Meaning, an annual values-focused book fair that draws upward of 2,000 visitors to the Seattle University campus.
- 6) its strong commitment to caring for the whole person—a commitment that permeates the entire campus, from academic advising to the classroom and to co-curricular activities. Of particular note are recent efforts to infuse service-learning, vocational discernment, and global awareness more deeply into the student learning experience.

Affirmation of Mission Priorities and Recommendations.

The Self-Study lists a series of five challenges. The fifth relates to “limited financial resources” and does not seem to us to be a mission challenge, *per se*. We therefore affirm as “mission priorities” the following four challenges:

1. Maintain the University’s commitment to its Catholic, Jesuit character during the next 25 years and beyond
2. Be intentional in mission focused hiring, promotion and development of faculty and staff, with clear communication of Catholic, Jesuit mission
3. Build procedures of mutual respect and openness
4. Increase capacity, in the current era of social change, to engage students, faculty, and staff on timely issues with transparency and effectiveness

Based on our visits with a wide cross-section of the campus community, we believe the University is addressing the issues underlying these broad challenges, has the good will and other human resources to continue addressing them, and, with God’s help, to move forward.

Also based on our campus visits and in a collegial spirit, we offer only the following reflections/recommendations:

1. To maintain the Catholic, Jesuit, character of the University, it will be important to develop greater clarity and a shared understanding of what is expected of candidates “hired for mission”; and, once hired, how best to help them develop their engagement with mission. It also will be important to factor such engagement into considerations for promotion and merit. The existing array of excellent formation programs noted above is seminal in regard to mission development but calls for a degree of coordination and efficacious engagement with participants’ day-to-day work that seems not yet to have been fully realized. Achieving the desired coordination of various formation programs and capitalizing on their success may prove problematic in light of the recent decentralized restructuring of the mission office.
2. Given the distinctly secular environment and even at times anti-Catholic sentiment in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, there is an opportunity to highlight the resonance between the spiritual humanism and social justice commitment endemic to the University’s Jesuit heritage *and* the gnawing hunger that many in secular society experience for deeper spiritual meaning in their personal lives and the betterment of those plagued by poverty in their communities. We heard this view expressed in our meeting with trustees, reflecting their experience in the Seattle community beyond the University. Gradually at least some of those who find their spiritual longing and noble secular values compatible with the University’s Jesuit ethos may come to appreciate the grounding of that ethos in the Catholic world view. The University should strive to make this Catholic foundational viewpoint more explicit. It is of course a worldview that encompasses creation by a loving God, incarnation, and redemption in Jesus. And along with its related intellectual and cultural traditions, it is the worldview that clearly sets Seattle University apart from its secular counterparts.

Conclusion:

Seattle University is, without question, a thoroughly Jesuit, Catholic University. As such, it engages the culture of the Pacific Northwest, especially Seattle, in transformative ways, which is a hallmark of a Jesuit institution. Accordingly, Seattle University serves the Church in a unique and indispensable way. The University can rightly draw inspiration from the words of Pope Benedict XVI during his address to the Jesuit fathers of General Congregation 35, “The Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching.”

It was a privilege for us to see the many, creative ways Seattle University is living and advancing its mission in and beyond the classroom, within and beyond the porous boundaries of the University. Despite emerging fiscal and cultural challenges that confront much of private higher education today, Seattle University is poised for a bright future founded upon a deep commitment to mission that animates the entire campus.

Respectfully submitted,

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