

## The Jesuit Character of Seattle University: Some Suggestions as a Contribution to Strategic Planning

Stephen V. Sundborg, S. J.

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As we enter into strategic planning as a university, I would like to offer my perspective on our Jesuit character and what it suggests for our planning. I do so for several reasons. First of all, I have long held and firmly believe that while Seattle University has many characteristics, it has a single character and that is its Jesuit character or soul. Being Jesuit makes us to be the kind of university we are and gives us through our alumni the impact we have. Secondly, as we set about strategic planning this year it is vital that this character of being Jesuit inform our strategic plan and shape how we go about fulfilling that plan. Finally, as we are engaged in a great capital campaign for funds for Seattle University, to which people are so generously responding, I believe it is important that there also be what you might call a “campaign for the Jesuit soul of Seattle University.” As the capital campaign is proving successful because it credibly builds on all we have done as a university, so the campaign for the Jesuit soul of our university builds on how genuinely, credibly, and promisingly Jesuit we currently are because of how hard we have all worked to assure this our defining character. Because of how clearly and confidently Seattle University is Jesuit, we are well recognized for this quality by other Jesuit universities in our country and beyond.

### Why is it important to emphasize our Jesuit character?

Before indicating what I think are some dimensions of our Jesuit character or soul as a university, let me address why this central dimension of our identity is important. Ultimately it is important for Seattle U. to be Jesuit for three reasons. First of all it is because we believe that this kind of education is the best possible one for the formation of our students and alumni as persons in their values, perspectives, commitments, spirituality, reflectivity, leadership, citizenship, and the very quality of their lives. Jesuit education holds that the person is sacred and, therefore, its primary rationale is who our students and alumni become as persons. Secondly the Jesuit character of our education is important because the overall purpose of a Jesuit university is its impact on society for the good primarily through the service of its alumni and students but also as a university in itself through the service of its faculty, staff, administration, programs, and its engagement as a university in the community. As a Jesuit university we seek to form “women and men for others” and to be a “university for others.” We summarize this in our mission statement as “empowering leaders for a just and humane world.” Thirdly, for the very practical and critical reason of being distinctive among universities being Jesuit is important among the diverse range of universities in our region and country which are often in competition with one another. Being clearly and distinctively Jesuit in undergraduate, graduate, professional, and on-line programs is an enviable and distinguishing mark with a long-standing tradition and a reputation for quality of education.

Now let me address what I believe our Jesuit character calls for in a renewed way as we enter into strategic planning of our future

### An education on the edge

My first suggestion for how Seattle University can strengthen its Jesuit soul or character as it charts its future deals with how, being Jesuit, we are a Catholic university. We need to start by recognizing that our university is a Jesuit way of being a Catholic university. Not all Catholic universities are able to give our kind of Catholic education, to give our kind of witness, and to make our kind of contribution to the Catholic Church. We should embrace how we are Catholic according to our Jesuit mission and because of how we have been officially and repeatedly endorsed by the Catholic Church.

The most straightforward way of putting it is that as a Jesuit university we are meant to be a free and formative space where the Catholic Church meets the culture. We are meant to be on the edge—and to have an edgy education—that exciting and challenging edge where church meets culture, where faith encounters the concrete context of our world and its toughest issues. To be on that edge sets us up to be criticized from the center of the Church. We are not a parish where the Church meets the faithful; we are a Jesuit university where, true to what we have been sent to do and grounded in our spirituality and tradition, we meet, engage, dialogue with, and impact a culture which is increasingly secular and disassociated from faith or religion.

We have been sent to be at this place of encounter by the popes. Pope Paul VI famously said of the Society of Jesus and its works:

“wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme fields, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the front line between the deepest human desires and the perennial message of the Gospel, there have been, and there are, Jesuits.”

This mandate has been renewed by successive popes, and has been adopted in the official articulation of the Jesuit mission of the Society of Jesus. While being grounded in the center of the Church, we are sent to places of engagement with unbelief and indifference; with science and ideologies; with ethics and technological capabilities which challenge humane life; with justice, migration, the environment, and human rights; and wherever we meet and learn from and serve the poor and the vulnerable. To be at these places of engagement as a Jesuit university in our academic courses, our faculty research, our student commitments and service, in our programs and, therefore, in our reputation, is to be a Catholic university in a Jesuit educational way.

We can be somewhat arrogant about being out there on the edge, if we are not grounded and centered in faith, in the gospel, and in the teaching parameters of the Church. But we cannot retreat to the center. The people of the Catholic Church and the people of our society need this witness of a Jesuit university in which faith confidently meets culture, where religion goes to where it is usually not found. Could there be a more exciting, a more challenging way of being a Catholic university, and a more necessary one in witness and service to people of today? It is easier to give this kind of witness when the pope is himself a Jesuit and shows in all he says, does, and is that from the very center of the Church he goes to meet all people in welcome and

dialogue and compassion, and because he goes there he is criticized. We, too, should not be surprised to be criticized for living out this character of our university which takes us to the edge, to meet all people in welcome and dialogue and compassion,

Being Jesuit in this way lies behind attracting the kind of student we want, the kind of faculty and colleagues we recruit, the donors and supporters who believe in us. This Jesuit soul shapes our curriculum, which can be called “edgy”. We are meant to be a bold university. As we like to say, “You don’t go out into the world when you graduate from Seattle University because you have never left it!” As we plot the strategies of our future, this bold and faithful Jesuit character of being on the edge must inform our choices and how we live them out.

### “Jesuit-educated”

My second suggestion for what is most important to guide the future of Seattle University as Jesuit is an appeal to retain and reinforce what has been the strongest mark of Jesuit higher education in the past and needs to be so today: its exceptional and unique intellectual rigor. When commentators mention that prominent persons are “Jesuit-educated” they mean that these persons have been put through their paces intellectually, have been challenged in their presuppositions, can think critically, logically, independently, reflectively, deeply, know where they stand and why, are capable of communicating effectively, can apply thought to issues, and can move from thought to action. All of this is summed up in that simple phrase which is decades and centuries old, “Jesuit-educated”. No other higher education system or set of schools has anything like this well-known mark and clear designation of intellectual rigor as does Jesuit education. It has withstood the test of time and proven itself in many contexts and cultures. In all else that the Jesuit soul or character of Seattle University must mean for the future—whether in regard to justice, or spirituality, or engagement with issues—this intellectual rigor of being “Jesuit-educated” must not be lost or overshadowed but must be renewed and bolstered, and frankly, trumpeted. Without this core of being “Jesuit-educated” through intellectual rigor, all other marks of our Jesuit character are weakened and diminish our uniqueness and distinctiveness as a kind of university among other universities.

On other occasions I have summed up this mark of being “Jesuit-educated” as “being intellectually roughed up for life!” A Jesuit education takes students apart in their thinking and assumptions and in what they take for granted from their cultures. It roughs them up in taking them apart in order to give them the means, the logic, the methods, the critical thinking to put themselves back together again mentally, intellectually, in their own way so that they know how and why they think what they do and can stand up for it. We see this intellectual mark of our Seattle U. education when alumni repeatedly refer to their philosophy and theology courses and claim that the greatest impact of Seattle U. was that here they learned how to think. We find it in students who graduate from a Jesuit university to go on to a more advanced education, who repeatedly comment that it was in the Jesuit university they learned to think more than in the graduate one. This mark of Jesuit education is reflected in the seriousness of our core curriculum for all undergraduate students and in the critical and ethical requirements of our graduate and law programs. It is reflected in the “Ignatian pedagogy” of moving from context, to experience, to reflection, to action, to evaluation in how we educate our students on all levels of the university,

The north star of being “Jesuit-educated” for guiding the future of Seattle University will depend on the quality of our faculty, their collaborative collegueship in maintaining and raising our academic standards, the evidence of their own intellectual rigor in their scholarship, and our support of them in their free and full intellectual mentorship of their students. In the long run this intellectual rigor is the mainstay and the distinguishing mark of our kind of education.

In the future of Seattle University the traditional intellectual rigor of Jesuit education needs to be applied to new areas of importance. Primary among these are sciences and technology, and their interplay with ethics and the liberal arts, which are such hallmarks of our education. Our new Center for Science and Innovation will bring Seattle University more assertively into the new era we are all experiencing. We need both the very best in the sciences, in technology, in mathematics and engineering, in medical sciences, while all of these need to be situated, complemented and enriched by the liberal arts, the philosophical, theological, and ethical education of our students. This is what we should be good at. We have something unique to offer from our Jesuit educational tradition in the scientific/technological/ethical challenges of today and of the future.

The Society of Jesus in recent years has focused its mission on reconciliation, responding to the ever-more-evident need to overcome the hostilities and polarization between people and even our alienation from our planet. How can Jesuit intellectual rigor apply itself to these pressing needs? A key principle of anything that calls itself Jesuit is that we always give the best interpretation to the words and actions of others, and that we lean into understanding others in a positive stance of listening, as we dialogue to understand the truth. This Jesuit principle goes a long way toward the search for reconciliation. In addition, the Society of Jesus is calling all its institutions to promote a culture for the protection of all vulnerable people. How will “Jesuit-educated” persons of the future create and promote that culture which is currently so lacking and is so needed? These are some examples of how the intellectual rigor of Jesuit education should shape the curriculum, the programs, and the resources for the future of Seattle University. We should encourage and support our students in their passionate commitments to social justice, even in their protests and actions, and we should equally insist that as “Jesuit-educated” students they apply their whole education to these issues both to understand them fully and to decide how most effectively to address them. Because of how we support our students and alumni to be “Jesuit-educated,” we believe in the impact they will have for the common good for all people.

### Educating the whole person

My third observation of how being a Jesuit university should guide how we shape our future at Seattle University is the famous Jesuit claim of “educating the whole person”. Going boldly to the edge of issues, and developing an intellectual rigor by being “intellectually roughed up for life” requires addressing the whole person of the students as they are, accepting and respecting them for who they are, honoring them in their identity, showing them a personal care as individuals in their total experience inside and out of the classroom—what the tradition calls cura personalis—helping them to know and live out of their faith or spirituality, giving them the opportunities for a healthy development of their bodies, inspiring and guiding them in service and in works of justice, and creating an environment and community where they can grow socially and learn to put the good of others first.

The Jesuit education of our students seeks to form in them through their total experience of Seattle U. the capacity to discern their life choices. As a Jesuit university we will have failed on our promise to our alumni if they do not have this capacity for discernment in the most important decisions of their lives. We must help our students to be deeply reflective and at times to be present to the truth of themselves in silence so that they may listen to the voice within them guiding them in finding their way forward corresponding to the truth of themselves. This capacity for discernment is especially needed in our day and can be a unique Jesuit asset and treasure in our education. Only the comprehensive and cohesive experience of students in academics, campus life, service, activity, leadership, and exploration of spirituality with competent guides will fulfill this Jesuit aim of our education.

This education of the whole person is a tall order for a Jesuit university to pull off, a promise on which it is a challenge to deliver. It requires the concerted, intentional, collaborative and generous effort of all of our faculty, staff, advisers, mentors, career specialists, coaches, student recruiters, administrators, and our inclusive excellence and diversity leaders. These colleagues in mission must appreciate the contributions of one another to the education of the whole person of our students as an essential quality of what distinguishes a Jesuit education. A Jesuit education is only a Jesuit education of the whole person of our students if the student activities director knows about and supports the faculty professor's intellectual formation of the students, if the administrator and multi-cultural director listen to and welcome the expertise and work of one another, if the athletic coach and academic mentor equally appreciate each other's contribution to the students' total experience, if the campus minister and the scientist know they are about same thing, if the Jesuits and the campus grounds crew share a common purpose, if the cabinet and the deans and the president engage and listen to and learn from the students and the students from them.

In a Jesuit university the whole is greater than the sum of the parts because each and all are pulling for and empowering one another. This concerted, collaborative, generous support of one another greatly impacts the students. The experience of genuine personal care within and by a whole community seeking the education of the whole person of the student teaches more than any single dimension of our education could possibly teach. In a Jesuit education we aim at the formation of the whole person within a collaborative community focused on the good of the student. For this reason it is critical that we give one another the benefit of the doubt, appreciate and celebrate what all do in their important contributions to the mission, and strive to have a culture among us that supports this Jesuit purpose. The comprehensive student experience in the total educational community of Seattle University teaches and forms what no part of the university on its own can do, and, when done well, distinguishes Jesuit education from other kinds of education.

### Service for impact

The original reason St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, chose to dedicate most of the ministerial resources of the first Jesuits to education was that he came to believe that education had the greatest potential of any endeavor to transform society. He and his first companions were all graduates with advanced degrees of the University of Paris and deeply

understood the power of higher education for promoting the good in society. From that time in the Sixteenth Century forward the Jesuits have in practice placed a priority on university education always for the purpose of the difference it makes in changing the world for the better through the impact of its alumni in their lives, occupations, and service. Service for impact is at the heart of both how we go about Jesuit education and is also the measure of its success.

The role of service through experience is critical to how we go about educating in a Jesuit way. Service learning within multiple academic disciplines, community engagement with involvement of all of the schools and colleges, practicums, capstone and service projects in collaboration with businesses, organizations, and institutions, wide participation in service and action on behalf of justice are inherently important in Jesuit education because of the mutually formative influence of experience and study. We believe that “concept” connected with and tried out in “contact” with practical issues makes a difference in learning itself as well as in helping students to become women and men for others in their attitudes and commitments. In Ignatian pedagogy, experience always stands at the center of and is essential to learning. The importance of the Center for Community Engagement with its Seattle University Youth Initiative as a common project of the university together with the community engagement of all colleges and schools are testimony to how much this aspect of service for impact animates what we do as a Jesuit university. The achievement of this aspect of the Jesuit character of education results in what has been aptly called “a well-educated solidarity” in action on behalf of justice.

While engagement in service is inherent in how Jesuit education is carried out, the overall and public purpose of our university is the impact our alumni have on society through service to others in their lives, their work, and their commitments in action. It is important for us to remember that only our alumni can show us whether we are fulfilling the mission of the university because that mission of “the education of the whole person, professional formation, and empowering leaders for a just and humane world” can only be demonstrated in whether and how our alumni actualize those realities in their lives and in their impact on society. All students in every course, in every campus program and activity, should be asked incessantly how they will use their education for others, who will count in their lives, what impact for good they will strive for through putting their education into practice in their lives. These questions are questions that Jesuit education asks in being faithful to its origins and its purposes today to transform the world.

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I offer these suggestions from my experience of leadership in Jesuit education as a contribution to the university as it plans for the future of Seattle University through the strategic planning process of this year. I hope these suggestions are helpful as a lens for deliberating about that future so that what we plan is clearly Jesuit in character and has a Jesuit soul. The points that I have made in this document are not intended to determine the content of the strategic plan which the university will devise, but hopefully give an essential perspective on our character and thus help to inform the deliberations of all those participating in the shaping of the strategic plan of our future. In summation, my view of Seattle university as Jesuit is that it 1) is bold in being the kind of Catholic university that engages issues on the edge where church meets culture, 2) stakes its central claim on an acclaimed and special kind of intellectual rigor by which students and alumni who are “Jesuit-educated” think for themselves and act in accord with the

commitments they have formed, 3) educates students as whole persons academically, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically through a collaborative community of colleagues, and 4) both in its way of education and in its outcomes emphasizes learning through experience and impact on society through service. I believe that if we look to these four ways of educating from the Jesuit soul of who we are, Seattle University will plan and enact a very promising and distinctive future worthy of our past, our present, our students, our alumni, and ourselves.