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A Call for Upholding Access and Affordability at Jesuit Institutions

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Abstract

Jesuit colleges and universities share a distinct mission that is centered on access and affordability as part of the social justice work of Jesuit higher education. However, the context of higher education is often at odds with the fulfillment of this mission; innovation is needed in policy and practice to uphold access for the nation's most marginalized populations. In this piece, we define and advocate for this mission, juxtaposing it against current forces in higher education. We then use analysis of data from all twenty-eight Jesuit institutions to raise questions about the fulfillment of this mission currently, and we point to areas where we should turn our individual and collective focus to better uphold these efforts at our Jesuit colleges and universities.

Jesuit universities share a unique set of values and pride themselves on being mission driven. While each of the twenty-eight Jesuit schools has its own unique mission statement, they all share a commitment to working towards a greater common good. Jesuit institutions uphold a dedication to the holistic development of all students, particularly those of first-generation status, those from “a wide diversity of economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and geographic backgrounds,”¹ and a commitment to serving “the persistently poor, the homeless, racial minorities, the unemployed, victims of discrimination, immigrants, etc.”² These shared values speak to a mission that is centered on *access* and *affordability*, highlighting these goals as part of the social justice work of Jesuit higher education. While access and affordability are often considered separately, we think of these notions as being one and the same. Though access can mean mere acceptance into an institution, whether or not a student can afford to attend may preclude enrollment just as much as admission can. Further, affordability, like access, must be considered as being shaped by both the individual and the institution—what an individual brings to the table, but also how the institution is able to support the student to success.

Within higher education, and Jesuit higher education is no exception, access and affordability are positioned against real tensions of a need for resources, prestige, and survival. Social justice work is costly, complex, and particularly within today's context, innovation is needed. Administrators and practitioners across the United States must seek creative ways to achieve these social justice aims. It is imperative as distinct institutions charged with carrying out social justice in higher education that we look to one another and highlight innovation and effectiveness as models of a world that could be.

In this article, we argue that access and affordability are central to the Jesuit mission. While Jesuit colleges and universities struggle to uphold these values amidst the “new normal” context of higher education, it is increasingly important to be innovative in realizing this commitment. Thus, the purpose of this article is to give a historical view of the Jesuit mission of providing access and affordability to unserved students and to underscore this need for innovation in achieving our collective mission. To do so, we unpack the Jesuit mission of higher education, highlighting the ways in which access and affordability are central to Jesuit values. We

cite evidence of this mission being threatened at our Jesuit institutions, as well as evidence of the fulfillment of this mission through innovative approaches. We close with calls for a conversation across the Jesuit community of how to better uphold our commitment to access and affordability.

Access and Affordability as Central to the Jesuit Mission

In order to position the mission of Jesuit higher education adequately, it is important to highlight briefly the tradition and values from which the enterprise was born. Long before the first Jesuit university opened its doors, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and his Jesuit companions began a journey focused on improving the world through social justice. This journey, which is nearly five hundred years in the making, was reaffirmed in 1995 at General Congregation 34 in Decree Four, which provides poignant insight into the Jesuits' relentless pursuit of justice in all of their ministries. As captured in the document, the Jesuit "commitment to social justice and ongoing human development must focus on transforming the cultural values that sustain an unjust and oppressive social order."³ In this statement, the Jesuits acknowledge cultural and political systems, which directly contribute to inequities, while simultaneously expressing commitment to serving society's most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

History has shown that universities are uniquely positioned to influence thought and create systemic change, a truth acknowledged by Saint Ignatius who sent Jesuits to institutions of higher education, citing the wide cultural impact of universities "as places where a more universal good might be achieved."⁴ Gregorian University was among the first Jesuit schools to open, welcoming students as early as 1551.⁵ According to the Gregorian University's Mission Statement, the University has, since its inception, "been seen as a crossroad between Church and society, between faith and culture, faith and justice, faith and science."⁶ Nearly five hundred years later, at the time of General Congregation 34 there were over a half million students enrolled at more than two hundred Jesuit universities worldwide, twenty-eight of them in the United States.⁷ Clearly the

Jesuits have chosen higher education as the primary vehicle to fulfill their apostolic mission. The twenty-eight American Jesuit universities make up an important body that individually has enough autonomy and flexibility to make meaningful change on the micro-level, yet collectively is large and influential enough to create a national discourse around social justice issues such as access and affordability in American higher education.

Analysis of Access and Affordability as Central to the Jesuit Mission

Access and affordability is not a new conversation in Jesuit higher education. For years there has been clear documentation that indicates making our universities accessible and affordable to historically underrepresented and often marginalized students is of paramount importance. In 2010 the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities released a document titled *The Jesuit, Catholic Mission of U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities* issuing a "consensus reflection of the twenty-eight presidents of U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities."⁸ This document shares several guiding principles including the following, which speaks directly to access and affordability:

The Jesuit colleges and universities of today are committed to continuing the historic mission of educating first generation students. Our students are of a wide diversity of economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and geographic backgrounds. We prioritize the education of these often vulnerable and underserved students at great financial sacrifice to our institutions for the sake of their access to and success within our Jesuit colleges and universities and their needed influence of Society with our Catholic and Jesuit values.⁹

The Jesuit, Catholic Mission of U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities explicitly states that access and affordability play a pivotal role in the fulfillment of the mission of Jesuit higher education. However, two years later the Presidents of the twenty-eight Jesuit schools produced a follow-up document titled *Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument*,¹⁰ in which access and affordability are less clearly

defined. This document identifies seven characteristics of a Jesuit university and is “intended to be used by Jesuit universities and colleges in the United States as a tool for self improvement, particularly with regard to their fulfillment of their Jesuit and Catholic identity.”¹¹ Furthermore, the seven characteristics are now being used as the framework for the AJCU *Examen* process as highlighted in Tom Reynolds’s recent summarizing article, *AJCU Institutional Examen: A Shared Ignatian Experience*.¹² The seven characteristics are: (1) Leadership’s Commitment to the Mission, (2) The Academic Life, (3) A Catholic, Jesuit Campus Culture, (4) Service, (5) Service to the Local Church, (6) Jesuit Presence, and (7) Integrity.

While all of these values are certainly important, and we encourage readers to learn more about them by reading the document in its entirety or Reynolds’s summarizing article, we want to pay particular attention to the fourth characteristic, *service*, which we argue is the area that should speak directly to access and affordability.

According to the *Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument*¹³ there are three tenets within the service characteristic: (1) solidarity, (2) the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, and (3) community outreach. Because we believe it is important to examine this tenet in its entirety, the following descriptions are pulled directly from the guiding document.

Solidarity:

Are the University’s service workers treated with respect and made to feel at home on campus and welcome at University events? Are the poor and marginalized made to feel at home on campus? Do those engaged in service trips learn the local language (for longer trips) and spend time living with and working alongside those they serve? Do participants come away with the ability to see the world through the eyes of those they serve? Do participants find that they gain from the communities with whom they serve in ways consonant with how those communities feel they have gained from the participants?

Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm:

Is service learning integrated into the curriculum? Are there enough service learning opportunities to reach all students? Are faculty members, campus ministers, and student development professionals trained to lead students through reflection? Is there evidence that the University is able to utilize and promote the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, which stresses experience, reflection, and action, with special attention to the needs and plight of the poor, those suffering and those who are marginalized? Are there special programs utilizing an engaged pedagogy (immersions, service learning, volunteer programs, internships, etc.) that are marked by the Jesuit concern for the service of faith and the promotion of justice?

Community Outreach:

Does the University work to be a good neighbor to its local communities and constituencies as well as to the countries and communities that host its study abroad programs? Does it offer itself as a resource for education, cultural outreach, community growth, and discussion of matters of interest to the Church and beyond, and the fostering of community growth?¹⁴

While there are intentional questions that point towards inclusion in this section, there is also an important gap that we bring to light. Notably absent in this statement is a specific commitment to access and affordability as was explicitly defined in the 2010 document. While it is important to assess whether or not the poor and marginalized are made to feel at home on our campuses, we argue an even more important question would be *Do the poor and marginalized have access to our universities and can they afford to be on campus?*

Framework for Understanding Challenges to Access and Affordability in Higher Education Today

The current landscape of higher education is challenging across all sectors, particularly for institutions in efforts to provide quality, affordable education for all students. Over time, the cost of higher education has shifted to students, with tuition increasing at a rate greater than the rate of

inflation;¹⁵ in the past decade, tuition increase rates have exceeded the rate of inflation by approximately eighteen percent.¹⁶ During the Great Recession of the past decade, private institution enrollments were particularly hard hit as students and their families had fewer financial means to pay for college, attributing to decreased enrollments at many of the nation's private institutions.¹⁷ Enrollment challenges have persisted for private institutions in the years since, with declines in college enrollments nationwide.¹⁸

In addition to lasting impacts of the Great Recession, access and affordability have been challenged by institutional efforts to compete for high-achieving students and offset related increased costs of higher education. The cost of competition manifests as institutions seek market recognition and prestige through the investment in campus amenities, athletics, and other costly, non-academic enterprises.¹⁹ To compete for students, many colleges and universities invest heavily in merit-based aid that disproportionately underserves marginalized students.²⁰ As such, higher education has been highly critiqued for increasing tuition to meet the increased costs,²¹ in effect, having students foot the bill for what some have critiqued as administrative inefficiency.²² Increased tuition rates have occurred at the same time that many colleges and universities have increased emphasis in online programs and recruitment of wealthy international students.²³ These trends and challenging contexts demonstrate ways in which colleges and universities have positioned students as a key money maker driving the higher education enterprise.

Theories of resource dependency may provide a useful lens for making sense of these trends. Resource dependency is a perspective that recognizes and foregrounds an organization's efforts to "acquire and maintain resources."²⁴ The activities of organizations — including colleges and universities — are shaped by this need for resources. In higher education, resources include actual dollars and other forms of resources that may translate into dollars, directly or indirectly, such as political power, prestige, and of course, students. While all colleges and universities are subject to these pressures of the higher education context and need for survival, Jesuit colleges and

universities have a unique mission that should be able to respond to these pressures in ways that maintain organizational survival and uphold the Jesuit tradition. As Decree 17 of General Congregation 34 states:

Jesuits must continue to work hard, with imagination and faith and often under very difficult circumstances to maintain and even strengthen the specific character of our institutions both as Jesuit and as a University. As we look to the future we need consciously to be on guard that both the noun "university" and the adjective "Jesuit" always remain fully honored.²⁵

Jesuit institutions are committed to a mission that upholds the value of access for some of the most vulnerable populations in our country, a commitment that should simultaneously uphold a shared responsibility to ensure that access is obtainable. While Jesuit values continue to guide Jesuit colleges and universities, the context described presents the various challenges that are faced in fulfilling this chosen mission. However, given these challenges, to what extent have Jesuit colleges and universities been able to sustain access and affordability for its students?

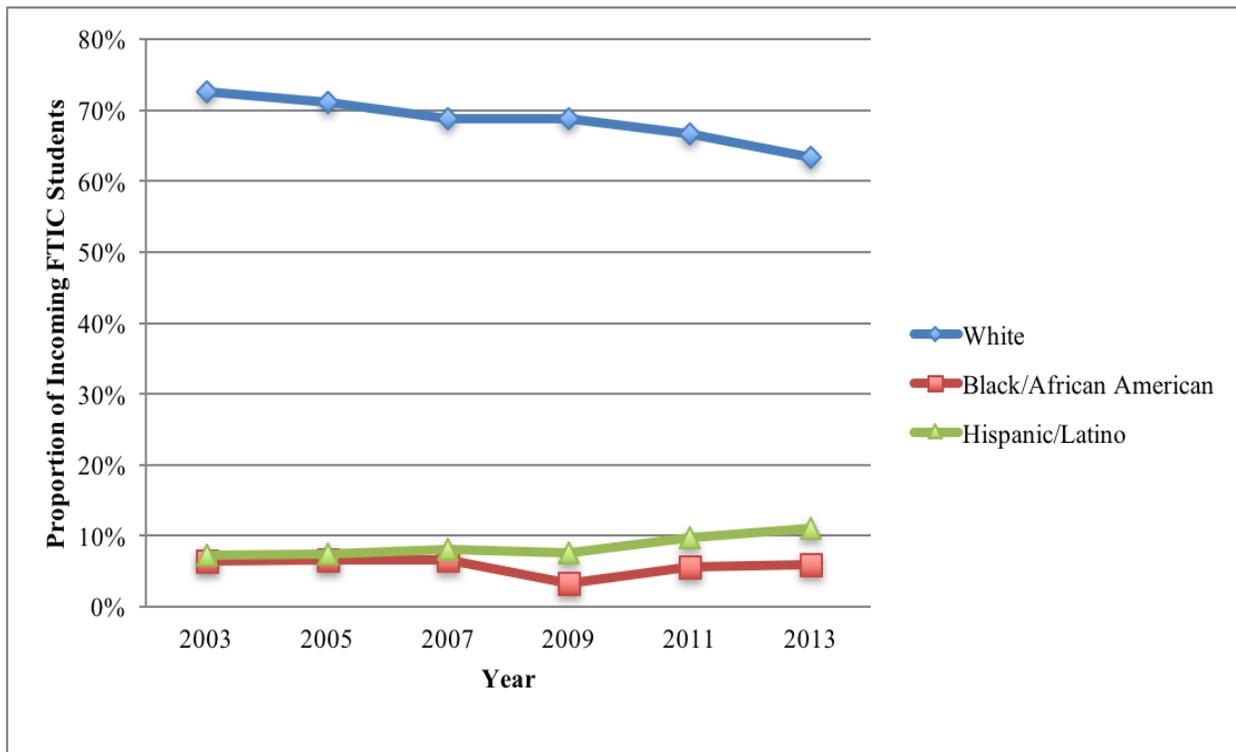
Implications of Non-Commitment to Access and Affordability

Examination of trends over the past decade raises questions and points to potential areas where the commitment to Jesuit mission can be strengthened. For instance, we can look at measures of access as determined by demographics of first-time-in-college (FTIC) students. To do so, we examine data from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS), a national survey of all accredited colleges and universities that asks institutions to report on data related to enrollment, finances, hiring, and student success. Examination of trends between 2003 and 2013 across all twenty-eight Jesuit institutions demonstrates notable changes in the proportional enrollments by white, black, and Latino students (see Figure 1). African Americans and Latinos are among some of the most marginalized populations in the urban centers served by Jesuit colleges and universities; however trends show

they remain somewhat underserved by Jesuit institutions. On average, the number of FTIC students at a majority of Jesuit institutions has consistently remained under or just above ten percent. For African American students, that

proportion has decreased over the past years, while increasing slightly for Latino students — notably during a time when the number of college-going Latinos in the United States has increased significantly.²⁶

Figure 1. Enrollment by Incoming Students at Jesuit Institutions by Select Racial Groups

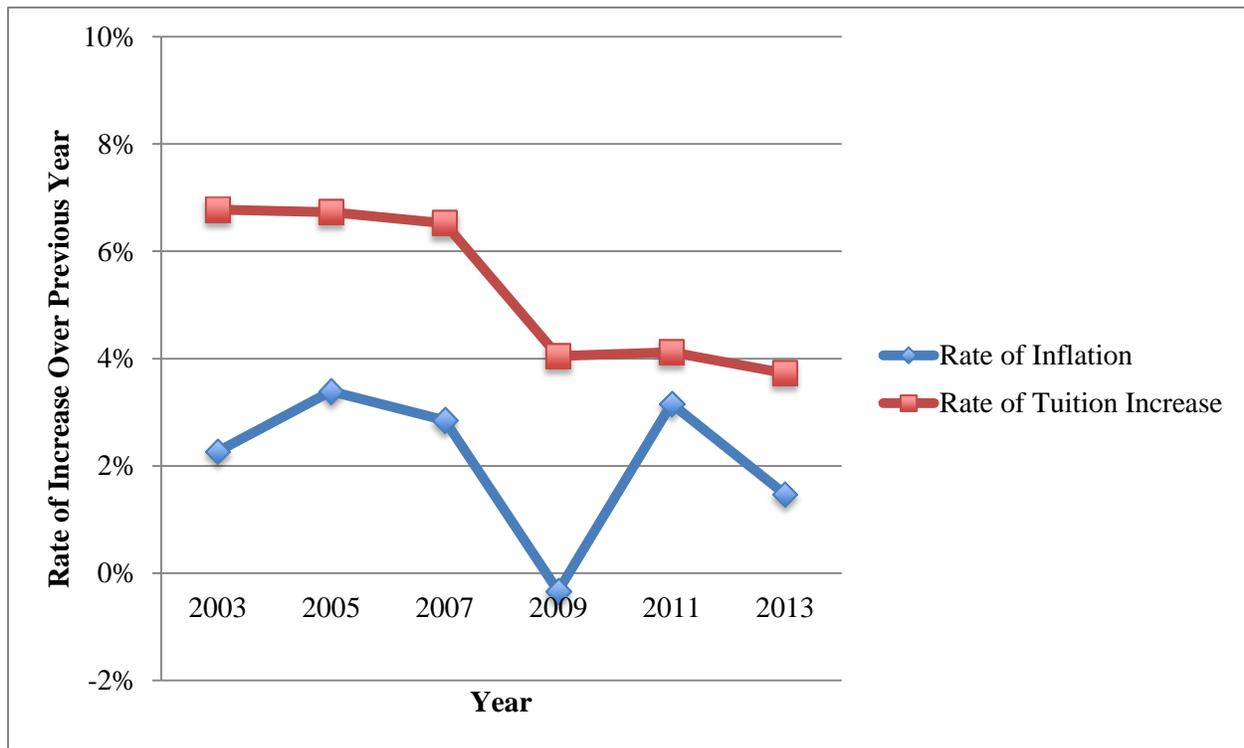


Surely, these trends may not be surprising when considering cost, a key factor that shapes access for marginalized students.²⁷

The question of cost paid by students for their education must consider multiple elements. We first consider cost as defined by tuition. To contextualize this information, we juxtapose changes in cost of tuition relative to the rate of inflation. As demonstrated in Figure 2, tuition has increased at higher rates than inflation consistently

over the past decade. While the rate of inflation across the United States broadly has remained between one and just over three percent, with a period of deflation in 2009, the average rate of tuition across Jesuit institutions has increased by over three percent consistently. Though increases have steadied since the recession, when one institution increased tuition by as much as fourteen percent in one year, tuition costs are still rising.

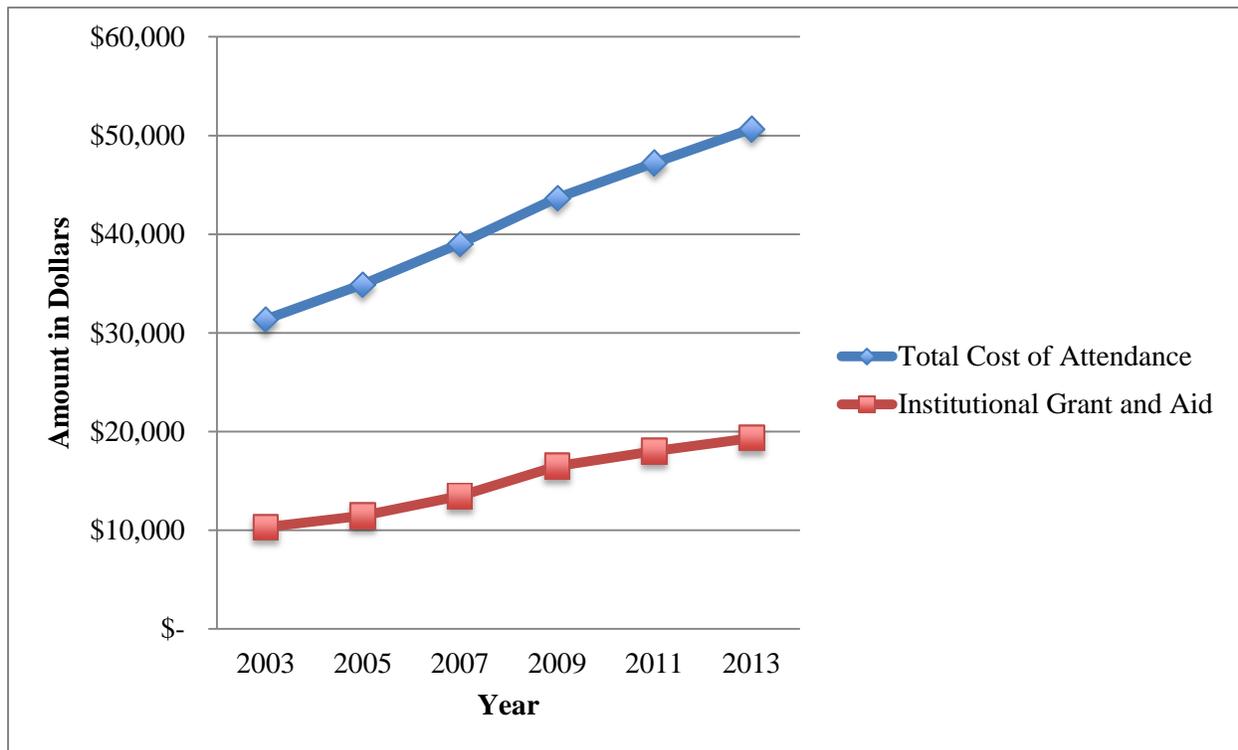
Figure 2. Rate of Inflation vs. Rate of Tuition Increase over Previous Year at Jesuit Institutions



Surely, the cost of tuition increasing can be attributed to a number of factors. While recently politicians have attributed high tuition costs to amenities such as recreation centers and lazy rivers, capital projects are typically funded by student fees, which are not counted within tuition costs, and paid over longer periods of time.²⁸ Competition with other institutions and investing in efforts that will increase rankings is another area researchers have attributed blame for increased costs.²⁹ Though state disinvestment is to blame for increased costs shifted to students among public institutions, these trends for Jesuit institutions raise questions about why costs have continued to increase at such a rate. Some have speculated that tuition rates increase because greater amounts of student aid are available and thus universities charge what they think the government will help subsidize.³⁰

Looking at trends in cost of attendance as compared to amount of aid awarded per student may offer some insight and a more complete picture of these trends (see Figure 3). Between 2003 and 2013, the average cost of attendance at Jesuit colleges and universities increased by nearly \$20,000, reflecting the broader trends in higher education through the recession. However, across this same time period, the average amount of institutional grant aid awarded increased by less than \$10,000, with the average gap between cost and aid growing from about \$20,000 to over \$30,000 per year. This means that students are increasingly either priced out of higher education or need to rely more and more on debt-forms of aid, which marginalized students tend to avoid when making college financing decisions.³¹

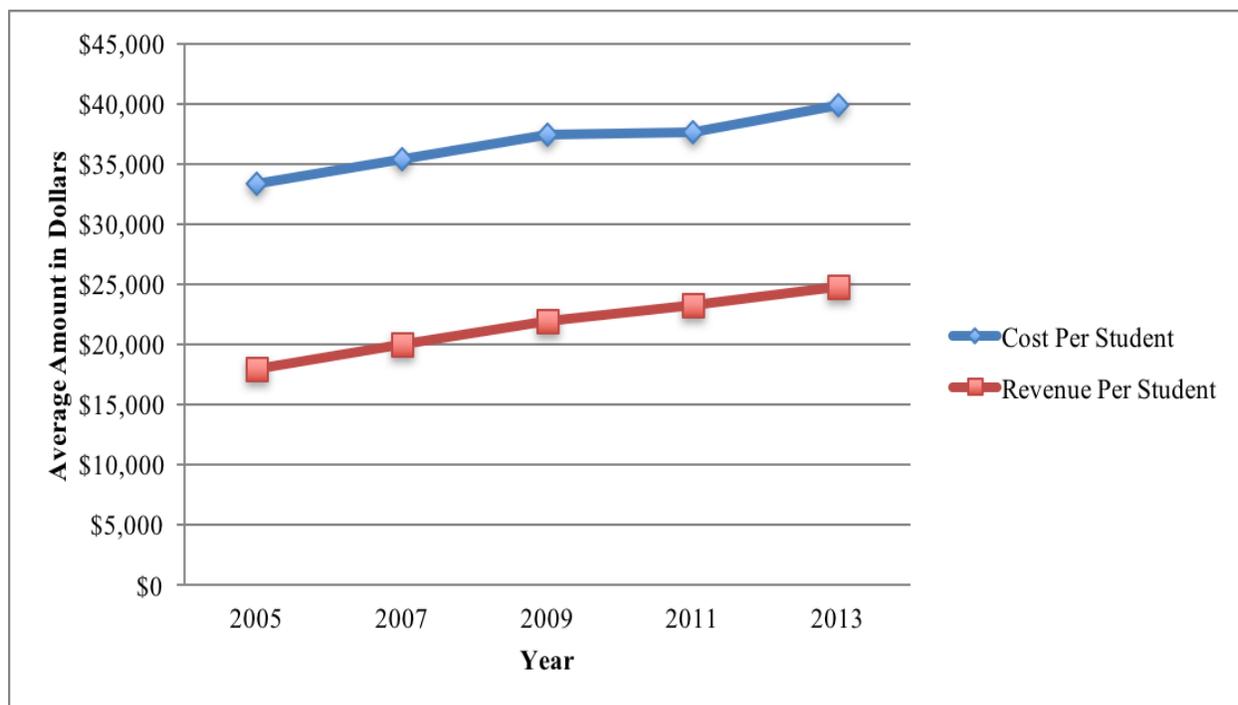
Figure 3. Average Cost of Attendance and Amount of Aid Awarded at Jesuit Institutions



The last trend presented for consideration juxtaposes total average annual expenses across Jesuit institutions with the total average amount of revenue from student tuition and fees per full-time student equivalent enrollment (FTE) (see Figure 4). Generally parallel trends, though quite distanced apart, are demonstrated, with consistent increases over time for both. These trends show the great increases in spending across Jesuit institutions over the past ten years. An increase of twenty percent is observed in terms of institutional expenses relative to FTE; concurrently, the revenue earned per student increased by nearly forty percent. Trends in expenses are interesting to note: although there was a plateau in the amount of spending during the recession, the amount promptly increased again following economic recovery. That trends in the amount of revenue derived from students consistently increased despite spending changes

may be concerning. What is demonstrated here is that a great proportion of these expenses were increasingly covered by money paid by students, even when spending was curtailed, underscoring the significant role tuition plays in the finances of Jesuit and other private institutions. While tuition revenue composes a large part of institutional revenue, it is worth noting that there is a significant proportion of revenue that derives from other sources. However, beyond the typical sources of private donations and endowment funds, are there potentially innovative financing efforts Jesuit institutions are pursuing? Are Jesuit universities addressing this question? Increased spending, coupled with the data presented previously — increases in revenue from student dollars and increases in cost of attendance — paints a story of our institutions that may bring reason for concern.

Figure 4. Expenses and Revenue per Full-Time Student at Jesuit Institutions



In no way intended to be an exhaustive analysis, these trends provide a starting point for Jesuit institutions to start looking inward collectively and individually at trends and what they mean about the true fulfillment of the Jesuit mission.

Upholding the Jesuit Mission: A Call to Action

Upholding the Jesuit mission in higher education is more important now than ever. As so much of higher education drifts away from affordable tuition and access for marginalized students, our institutions that have an explicit dedication to these efforts must be sure to not succumb to the pressures of the environment. The analysis presented above is intended to paint broad strokes about the collective trends among Jesuit institutions; however within these broad strokes there are distinct cases worth noting. Though overall average increases in African American and Latino enrollment at Jesuit institutions were slight, Wheeling Jesuit, for example, has demonstrated a commitment to growing their marginalized populations, having enrolled two percent each African American and Latino students in 2003,

growing to eight and six percent in 2013, respectively. Wheeling also notably had the second smallest gap in average cost of attendance and institutional grant aid awarded. Whereas the mean across all schools was over \$31,000, Wheeling’s gap was under \$24,000. Other notable access efforts observed include Loyola University New Orleans, which increased the proportion of incoming African American students by eleven percent points (from nine to twenty percent). These points demonstrate a commitment to access at these institutions.

Other institutions have focused on finances, reducing expenses and the share of income derived from student tuition. While overall Jesuit universities increased expenses (considered in our analysis per FTE), Wheeling Jesuit and Rockhurst University decreased expenses by thirteen and fifty percent each, respectively, over the time period analyzed. John Carroll University decreased the total revenue earned from student tuition by eight percent, the only Jesuit institution to have a decrease. It is important to note that we are merely reporting trends observed in our analysis of the IPEDS data; we invite our Jesuit colleagues

with knowledge, expertise and insights into these seemingly positive outliers to come forward and share any insights or best practices that may be beneficial to the twenty-eight.

Data can tell just part of the story. Innovative practices at Jesuit institutions across the United States highlight the efforts being made to uphold the Jesuit access and affordability mission. Saint Peter's University, located in Jersey City, consistently had a diverse student body reflective of the diversity of its surrounding community. Programs such as the Oscar Romero Project are vital to upholding this diverse access. The program focuses on access for Latino students who are first generation in the United States and for whom English is not their first language. Loyola University New Orleans similarly upholds great diversity access, demonstrated through its First in the Pack program that provides bridge support and mentorship for first-generation in college students, resulting from a partnership network that brings together faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, we point to Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago, which is now offering associates degrees rooted in the liberal arts and Jesuit tradition to low-income students for under \$2,000 a year. While more information is needed about these programs to understand the motivations and efforts that shape them as well as how they uphold the Jesuit mission, they highlight promising practices across our universities that are making a difference in the lives of students.

By briefly highlighting a handful of promising models, we hope to inspire scholars and practitioners to identify best practices on their own campuses that reflect the creativity and commitment to uphold access and affordability. It is imperative as distinct institutions charged with carrying out social justice in higher education that we not only seek innovative ways of achieving our Jesuit mission, but that we look to one another and highlight innovation and effectiveness as models of a world that could be. This journal seeks to be a resource in this effort. With the current manuscript serving as an initial conversation starter, the goal is to expand scholarship with contemporary research and best practices from faculty, administrators, and practitioners from across the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities of the United States,

sharing scholarly and empirical pieces that highlight these efforts to uphold our Jesuit mission of access and affordability, particularly during times of financial stress. We call to our colleagues who are working creatively in spite of this challenging financial context, asking them to share their own stories of upholding access and thereby serving the Jesuit mission.

Full-length manuscripts will be accepted and considered for publication in *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* as part of a continued focus on this important topic. In particular, we are seeking pieces that highlight promising practices, models, programs, policies, and perspectives that draw our collective focus to identifying new ways to uphold social justice within our challenging context.

Notes

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⁸ “The Jesuit Catholic Mission of U.S. Colleges & Universities.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

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