

November 2020

New Faculty Perspectives in a Jesuit Institution Amidst Unprecedented Challenges

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Recommended Citation

Stroup, Cassandra, T.J. Sayre, and Allyson L. Spence. "New Faculty Perspectives in a Jesuit Institution Amidst Unprecedented Challenges." *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 9, 2 (2020).

<https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss2/3>

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Cover Page Footnote

We would like to thank Daniel Justin, Kari Kloos, and Kevin Burke, S.J. for their unwavering support throughout our first-year Manresa Experience at Regis University, and all faculty, staff, and students within Regis School of Pharmacy.

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Abstract

The struggles and stressors that new faculty members face have been well documented, but during our first year at a Jesuit institution, we encountered unexpected, unprecedented challenges beyond typical. Fortunately, we developed a unique sense of community as new faculty stemming from Regis University's Manresa Experience. The Manresa Experience exposed us to Jesuit values, provided networking opportunities with colleagues, and introduced a togetherness that would help unite us against two unforgiving viruses. The first virus plagued Regis University in Fall 2019, when a cyberattack crippled our entire network security. As new faculty members, we were unable to utilize valuable resources that would normally aid in our successful transition to a new university. Almost immediately following this cyberattack, Regis University faced the tremendous challenges surrounding the COVID-19 global pandemic, which forced us to transition our team-based learning pedagogy into an online platform within a matter of days. The Manresa Experience and Jesuit values supported us in unexpected ways despite these extraordinary circumstances. Individually, we experienced the challenges in our own unique context. Together, we found peace amidst the turmoil and success amongst the chaos as we all relied on the Jesuit values and our support system created by the Manresa Experience.

Introduction

New faculty at Regis University begin their first year in academia through a transformative journey entitled the "Manresa Experience." At the start of this journey, new faculty attend a retreat where they learn more about Ignatian spirituality through periods of enlightenment and reflection. This journey continues throughout the academic year with six sessions, each focused on one of the key Jesuit principles. The Manresa Experience allows new faculty to network, collaborate, and begin the conversation of what teaching at a Jesuit institution entails.¹ For new faculty starting in Fall 2019, the Manresa Experience gave us the necessary tools to immerse ourselves in Ignatian

pedagogy, understand the value of infusing Jesuit principles in education, and navigate our own new experiences in academia. What we did not know is that our Manresa Experience would be different than any other year. The Jesuit values we were introduced to, practiced, and taught would help us navigate the known challenges and unforeseen circumstances of our first year at Regis in a way that we were not expecting.

On August 22, only a few days before the start of the Fall 2019 semester, Regis University was targeted by a ransomware attack. A ransomware attack, also known as a cyberattack, is when an outside agency uses a virus to take control of computer systems and information.² The attacker

then demands payment before giving back control. Regis University did pay the ransom shortly after being attacked in hopes of getting systems and control back as quickly as possible, but much of the damage had been done. The cyberattack virus, and precautions used to avoid a repeat occurrence, crippled all network security, including computers, emails, phones, websites, and online course portals. What followed was a university-wide network shutdown that was restored gradually over a few months. The day-to-day operations were completely disrupted, and faculty, staff, and students relied almost exclusively on non-technology and physical paper material for learning and communication. The timing of the attack was no coincidence—it was designed to occur right as a new semester began. However, this timing also happened to coincide with three faculty members starting their new positions with the Regis University School of Pharmacy.

Almost immediately after our campus had recovered from the cyberattack, we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. We were forced to transition from teaching in a face-to-face environment with little to no technology to teaching in a virtual environment that heavily relied on technology. Although COVID-19 impacted colleges and universities on a global scale, our university had the unique struggle of recently recovering from a cyberattack that essentially forced us to rebuild our online platform from the ground up. Similar to other universities, the impact of COVID-19 on our faculty, staff, and students was multifaceted and complex. We had to reimagine how to successfully deliver our integrated, team-based learning pedagogy while still ensuring a holistic, inclusive learning environment for our students. Although these unprecedented challenges initially seemed insurmountable, the Regis community came together to tackle these obstacles head-on. As we continue to face the challenges surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain committed to our Ignatian principles and providing students with a dynamic Jesuit education.

Transitioning from Student to Faculty -Cassandra Stroup

As a graduate of the Regis University School of Pharmacy, my adoration for a Jesuit education was engrained and solidified as a student. However, as an academic, I was nervous about how I would navigate the Jesuit values. *Cura personalis* was easy to exemplify and incorporate into my practice as a pharmacist but caring for the whole person in academia was unfamiliar. I thought about how caring looked different for students. Caring for myself was different, as well. Caring for myself included avoiding “perfection” and trying to be less critical of my shortcomings. What would happen if I messed up in the classroom? What if my passion for teaching at a Jesuit school of pharmacy with team-based learning came across as arrogant? These were all my new faculty concerns that caused anxiety.

The Manresa Experience helped ease these fears and provided a sense of community that I was not expecting. I was able to dive deeper into the Jesuit values from a professor’s perspective and learn how to incorporate those values into the classroom before the Fall semester. I was learning how to help students embody *cura personalis*. However, that sense of security was short lived.

During the cyber-attack, I was a new faculty member without all the resources I thought I needed to teach class. I realized I needed to find comfort in consistency. I needed to let go of the “perfectionist” concept and take care of myself and my students. Again, the Manresa Experience helped us all find this togetherness. Suddenly the bi-monthly meetings discussing Jesuit values and Ignatian pedagogy weren’t a place for me to simply sit and listen. It became a place where faculty members relied on each other to navigate the cyber-attack in different ways.

During the Spring of 2020, I felt more comfortable embodying Jesuit values as a faculty member and found contentment in all aspects of my life. That consistency would be immediately changed. The COVID-19 pandemic struck Regis quickly, and pointedly for the healthcare provider programs. Several valid, unprecedented concerns arose. How were we handling social injustice for our patients, as well as our students? How was I

supposed to help students with these fears when I had them myself? Everyone felt the unknown. Thankfully, I was able to look forward to the Manresa Experience summer institute. Our mental health, physical health, and emotional well-being were discussed simultaneously with Ignatian pedagogy. This helped me again find unique ways to support my students, and my own concerns.

Part of my Jesuit education that I carry with me is the reflection on situations, no matter how troublesome, to try and learn. I wish I could reflect on my first year as a pharmacy faculty member and say I improved team-based learning best practices, or at least was an integral part of enhancing scholarship. I didn't achieve any of those accomplishments. The normal faculty challenges were dominated instead by how to teach without using technology, to later only rely on technology. Despite this lack of traditional accomplishments, I am fortunate to say I still helped my students "survive" the year and overcame my own insecurities. I learned that healthcare students are fearless in the pursuit of the well-rounded treatment of all patients, just like the *cura personalis* value that I try to instill in them. Though not traditional, I did accomplish that goal, and am proud of myself and colleagues after this turbulent year.

Transitioning into a Jesuit Model of Education

-Allyson L. Spence

Prior to joining the faculty at the Regis University School of Pharmacy, I gained valuable experience as a full-time faculty member at a state-funded university. Although there are many similarities between teaching at these two institutions, I have noticed several fundamental distinctions between the two. I anticipated that I would encounter differences as I transitioned from a public institute to a private, Jesuit institution. In fact, I was looking forward to joining a university that offered a comprehensive, value-centered education. I researched Jesuit universities and learned about their unique approach to education that incorporates six key Jesuit values: *magis*, *cura personalis*, men and women for and with others, unity of mind and heart, contemplatives in action, and finding God in all things.³ Although this research gave me insight regarding Jesuit

educational philosophies, the actual experience of joining Regis has been far more impactful and meaningful than I foresaw.

I expected the curriculum to emphasize spirituality, educational rigor, and service to the community. What I didn't anticipate was how well the Jesuit values would be seamlessly integrated into every component of students' educational experience. During my first year at Regis University, I observed students as they grew intellectually, spiritually, ethically, and socially. The team-based learning pedagogy offered at the Regis University School of Pharmacy provides an innovative, active-learning educational approach that facilitates higher-order learning through relevant and engaging educational experiences. The application exercises included in the curriculum encourage students to present their diverse ideas and perspectives. Through these courageous conversations, students develop an increased awareness of how an individual's unique background and experiences may influence their approach to solving problems. Like many Jesuit universities, our student body is composed of individuals from all over the world who have distinct viewpoints related to their different backgrounds and experiences. The diversity that Jesuit institutions attract is present through our students' various ethnicities, cultures, ages, gender identifications, sexual orientations, and disabilities.

Our curriculum also incorporates ongoing periods of reflection, which allow our students to reflect on their prior experiences and relate them to these new perceptions. As our students analyze and interpret the true meaning behind their own experiences, they learn from their classmates' experiences, as well. Through the inclusive team-based learning activities, our students identify their common misconceptions. As they compare their perceptions with those of their team members and classmates, they experience a profound growth and maturity that allows them to construct new, more inclusive perceptions. This notion of embracing all individuals, regardless of their beliefs, is one of the foundations of the Jesuit tradition first exemplified by Ignatius Loyola.⁴ These reflections encourage our students to be contemplatives in action, where they apply these experiences and acquired skills to help them succeed as a pharmacy student at Regis University,

as an active member of their community, and in their future careers as pharmacists.

Transitioning from Full-Time Practitioner to Faculty

-T.J. Sayre

“How ought we to live?” is a succinct proposition that encompasses the heart of most philosophical and theological traditions. However, amidst unprecedented, colossal obstacles it may feel as though one has no choice in the matter. Our feet are cemented, and our hands are forced. Indeed, during Regis University’s cyberattack of Fall 2019 and the coronavirus pandemic of Spring 2020 the circumstances of serving in higher education were stipulated and immovable. But, of course, “how ought we to live?” is not simply asking us how to conduct business and determine logistics. It is both a challenge and a model for meaningful growth. I have found self-reflection spurred by this question imperative in the past as it has been engrained in me as a professional and human being in many settings. However, as a novice faculty member in a Jesuit institution, it seemed inadequate to helping me approach the unique, immense challenges introduced by the two viruses. I discovered the core Jesuit values were a necessary additional guide to my “way of proceeding.”⁵

Prior to starting as a faculty member in the Fall 2019, I worked full time as a clinical pharmacist specializing in mental health care. I was only peripherally familiar with the concepts of the Jesuit tradition before coming to Regis. I quickly found comfort in learning my beliefs are congruent with the same intellectual, moral, and humanitarian values of the Jesuit ideals. The ideal of *cura personalis* most resonated with my own principles even before the virus experiences. *Cura personalis* is consistent with my philosophy of patient care and equally applicable to student development. In mental health care, the spiritual, social, and emotional facets are inseparable from the symptoms or pathology. It is truly a contemplation of the whole person. Just as I seek to impact the whole person in my treatment of patients, I strive to elevate students into complete, dynamic people.

I relied on the *cura personalis* value most heavily during the coronavirus pandemic as every person was uniquely affected. Addressing student needs required a conscientious refocusing on students as individuals living with distinct circumstances. On a global level, the physical safety and health of students rightly took precedent during the pandemic. However, I was concerned that the spirit and mind were not being adequately addressed during this time. This was also a moment when the value of “contemplatives in action” aligned synergistically with *cura personalis* to drive my movements. In reflection of my own experience and in promotion of spiritual and mental health I was compelled to act, which resulted in creating a wellness and well-being seminar for our students. This service may not have come to fruition without the framework of Jesuit values in our work as faculty.

To be a healthcare provider is to live the value of “men and women for others.” The fundamental purpose of acquiring the knowledge and skills is to serve patients. When the veil of career achievement is removed it comes down to caring for others. This notion was crystallized during the cyberattack as I was truly just starting out on a new career path in academia. I was hyperaware of making a good first impression, familiarizing myself with procedures and policy, organizing, and other general performance-driven motives. When I lost access to an electronic network of resources and virtual communication, I had to condense the work down to core values. The revelation is that serving in academia, like healthcare, is about caring for our neighbor. This was evident in coworkers supporting one another, setting up students to thrive in a new environment of learning, and generally putting the interest of others ahead of our own. It was the value of “men and women for others” that allowed me and others to overcome the cyberattack obstacle. Ultimately, I cannot envision my experience as a new faculty member, amidst unprecedented challenges, without the guidance of Jesuit ideals.

Conclusion

As we continue to face the challenging circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, we will remain diligent about infusing the Ignatian principles into our educational

approach. We understand the Jesuit values are not an idea learned, but rather a process practiced. We understand there is much work to be done in order to fully engrain these principles into our lives and those of our students. The circumstances surrounding the two viruses have both humbled and inspired us. We know we can lean on our university family and continue to evolve our connections made in the Manresa Experience. We

are thankful for a community that supports the opportunity to embody Jesuit values in our own individual way, based on our own distinct backgrounds and ideals. We share the belief that Jesuit values were indispensable in our response to the challenges this past year as new faculty. We will continue to reflect and grow from those experiences and weave the Jesuit ideals into our lives as we serve in higher education. HJE

Notes

¹ “History and Mission,” Regis University, accessed August 14, 2020, <https://www.regis.edu/about/history-mission/index>.

² Josh Fruhlinger, “Ransomware Explained: How It Works and How to Remove It,” CSO, accessed June 19, 2020, <https://www.csoonline.com/article/3236183/what-is-ransomware-how-it-works-and-how-to-remove-it.html>.

³ Larry A. Braskamp, “A Review of ‘A Jesuit Education Reader.’” *Christian Higher Education* 8, no. 4 (2009), 342-345, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363750903054418>.

⁴ Paul F. Harman, S.J. “Vocation and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola,” in *Revisiting the Idea of Vocation: Theological Explorations*, ed. John Haughey, S.J. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 2004), 97-118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284tjs.10>.

⁵ Braskamp, “A Review of ‘A Jesuit Education Reader,’” 11.