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John O'Malley as a Guide for Eloquentia Perfecta, Community-Engaged Work, and Graduate Education

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank the community partners involved with The Baltimore Story and The Saint Louis Story.

John W. O'Malley as a Guide for *Eloquentia Perfecta*, Community-Engaged Work, and Graduate Education

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Abstract

John O'Malley, S.J. was primarily a Jesuit and Catholic historian. But to scholars in writing studies, his work is illuminative due to his rhetorical analysis of church documents and his discussion of *eloquentia perfecta* when examining Jesuit education.¹ More recently, in works like "Not for Ourselves Alone," he stresses the importance of Jesuit education focusing on the betterment of others inside and outside of the academy.² During an interview conducted four months before his death, O'Malley restated the necessity of Jesuit education including writing and *vita activa*, that is, active civic life. In this article, we pay tribute to O'Malley's scholarship connecting *eloquentia perfecta* and *vita activa* by overviewing two O'Malley-inspired digital public humanities projects and the work completed on them by two graduate students at Saint Louis University. The graduate students reflect on the value of these contributions to their Jesuit education. Please note that this essay pairs with another in this issue, "[John W. O'Malley S.J.: Scholar of Eloquence and Eloquent Scholar](#)" by Cinthia Gannett, John Brereton, and Allen Brizee.

Introduction

As noted in "John O'Malley: Scholar of Eloquence and Eloquent Scholar," O'Malley's work, intended or not, demonstrably altered the landscape of Jesuit studies from a focus on political and ecclesiastical history to cultural history, which allowed for including rhetorical theory, specifically in the area of *eloquentia perfecta*. As he explains so clearly in his *Conversations* essay "Not for Ourselves Alone: Rhetorical Education in the Jesuit Mode with Five Bullet Points for Today," a vital part of speaking and writing

eloquently is, when appropriate, using words to foster action. O'Malley states that

The virtue the rhetorical tradition especially wants to inculcate is prudence, that is, good judgment, the wisdom that characterizes the ideal leaders and makes them sensitive in assessing the relative merits of competing probabilities in the conflict of human situations. It hopes to turn students into adults who make humane decisions for themselves and for any group they might be leading. It

fosters a wise person, somebody, that is, whose judgment you respect and to whom you would go for personal advice, rather than to the technocrat, the bureaucrat, and the zealot.³

In this tradition, then, we have attempted to integrate the instruction of *eloquentia perfecta* for students with its use in two digital public humanities projects, [The Baltimore Story: Learning and Living Racial Justice at Loyola University Maryland](#) and the new *Saint Louis Story: Learning and Living Racial Justice* at Saint Louis University, which is in progress. In addition to integrating these projects into undergraduate education, we have more recently integrated these projects into graduate education.

As a Jesuit and a historian, O'Malley reinvigorated the study of rhetoric and the Jesuits' continual striving for *eloquentia perfecta* within the history of Jesuit pedagogical development.⁴ Equally important, his scholarship underscores the need to integrate Jesuit pedagogy with community-engaged work, also called *vita activa* (active civic life). Specifically, O'Malley describes how dedication to civic work is fundamental to St. Ignatius's spiritual, communal, and educational engagement.⁵ His linking of *eloquentia perfecta* to community-engaged work supports the original Jesuit education model outlined in the *Ratio Studiorum*, published in 1599. As many readers of this journal are likely aware, the *Ratio* integrates Cicero's study of humane letters (*studia humanitatis*) with the study of rhetoric and other disciplines.⁶ The *Ratio* also integrates elements of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* in which he argues that love must be shown through words and deeds. Mission statements of early Jesuit colleges reflected the *Ratio's* model and St. Ignatius' action-focused pedagogy: "Work for the Society, work for the students, work for the locality."⁷ In highlighting the long-standing connections between rhetoric, *eloquentia perfecta*, and community-engaged work in Jesuit pedagogy, O'Malley provided a pathway for faculty members to follow in their own pedagogy. As he so deftly noted in "Jesuit Schools and the Humanities Yesterday and Today," "Beginning with Isocrates in the fifth century, the imperative of directing one's skills and talents to the benefit of one's country and fellow citizens has been a central and consistent element in the tradition."⁸

He follows this by explaining Father General Pedro Arrupe's influence on contemporary Jesuit education when he argues

[When] Arrupe pronounced that turning out graduates who would be, in his expression, "men and women for others," I am sure he realized how profoundly his words resonated with the Jesuit tradition of Christian spirituality, but I very much doubt he realized how it resonated with the broader humanistic tradition. The moral imperative has been at the heart of the humanistic tradition from the very beginning. It correlates well with the mission of the Society of Jesus.⁹

Though many Jesuit institutions remain committed to *eloquentia perfecta* and community-engaged work, faculty members at Jesuit colleges and universities often perceive community-engaged learning and scholarship as the responsibility of co-curricular offices, social justice centers, or fields more traditionally perceived as outward-facing like psychology, nursing, public health, and speech pathology. Even within Jesuit writing and English departments that focus on developing *eloquentia perfecta* and community-engaged work within their curricula, the historic connection between these elements is often underemphasized and underrepresented in the academic reward structure. The May 26, 2022, interview with O'Malley provided us with the unique opportunity to ask a veteran Jesuit pedagogue why he thinks the split between *eloquentia perfecta* and community-engaged work has occurred despite such a strong Jesuit commitment to all three. In response, O'Malley surmised "I guess that's the way people are trained...they're all trained in graduate schools...so the big thing with faculty, I think it's getting ahead." He followed this by stating that publishing helps faculty members "get ahead," and so faculty members often prioritize it over community engagement. He finished by wondering, "So I don't know how you persuade faculty because it's just so ingrained in the system." O'Malley highlighted one of the ongoing structural challenges that modern Jesuit higher education faces for those who want to rejoin *eloquentia perfecta* with community-engaged work to fulfill the Jesuit mission of social justice. As Kainulainen argues, "I suggest that the

emphasis Jesuits laid on the *studia humanitatis*—and on the teaching of rhetoric in particular—furnished the Jesuit education with an intrinsically civic quality and brought about significant political implications.”¹⁰

Responding to O’Malley’s suggestion that a lack of community-engaged experiences in graduate school sets future faculty members up to de-prioritize it, Brizee and Hurter Brizee pursued an opportunity to involve two English graduate students at Saint Louis University in two digital public humanities projects. These projects, *The Baltimore Story* and its sister project *The Saint Louis Story*, aim to make Black history accessible to students and to create opportunities for students and faculty members to collaborate with residents from local marginalized neighborhoods. By engaging students in research and direct service, the projects have helped students gain a first-hand understanding of structural racism and its ongoing impact on neighborhoods close to Loyola Maryland and Saint Louis University. *The Baltimore Story* also offers recently developed teacher resources to help integrate Black history into middle school classrooms in Baltimore City—a much-needed resource given the recent spate of laws passed by conservative state legislatures that restrict how race in America may be taught. As a tribute to O’Malley’s scholarship and an invitation to the academy to look at how we might increase *vita activa* through our approach to training graduate students, the next section overviews these projects and includes reflections from the two graduate students who worked on the projects during summer 2022. In doing so, we hope to show how O’Malley’s scholarship lives on through these public digital humanities projects.

Brizee and Hurter Brizee launched *The Baltimore Story* in 2019 as a pedagogical resource for first-year writing students at Loyola Maryland. Focused on the history of enslaved people and systemic racism in Maryland and Baltimore, the project originally included information ranging from the 1600s to 2019 gleaned from scholarly sources but presented in an accessible format. Hurter Brizee, who holds a PhD in early American history and an MA in digital humanities from George Mason University, co-authored the project and used her experience with web design (for example, <https://gulaghistory.org/>) to ensure accessibility.

Open-source images and an interactive timeline added to the multimodal experience. Always searching for ways to integrate community-engaged learning and research into his work, Brizee began integrating *The Baltimore Story* project into upper-level service-learning professional writing courses at Loyola Maryland. Students in these courses completed direct service with a local non-profit organization by supporting their clients in finding and applying for jobs. Students also completed research on various local topics by collaborating with community members. Community members identified strengths and challenges, such as digital literacy and employment, and Brizee’s students developed workshops in a participatory manner to address these issues. These workshops garnered positive responses from community members and led to almost half of participants receiving jobs.¹¹ Students and community members worked closely together on these projects, developing meaningful relationships and impactful results.¹² Other student deliverables included detailed research reports on access to mental health facilities, support networks maintained by faith communities, and the effects of mass incarceration. At this point in the project, Brizee reached out to Loyola faculty members and administrators to form an advisory board. The board also included members of a local historical society and community members. From here, the project bloomed into a cross-disciplinary endeavor that yielded local art projects and oral history interviews with neighborhood residents.

In the second phase of *The Baltimore Story*, Brizee developed a collaborative relationship with a Baltimore school teacher who in turn partnered with a team of other teachers to write lesson plans for middle school students. These lesson plans use information on the project site and include information from research the teachers conducted on topics like Baltimore’s Negro League baseball team, the Giants, and Lewis H. Latimer’s role in developing the light bulb. To support this work, the project received a three-year \$30,000 grant from the McCarthy Dressman Education Foundation. The project is currently in its second year and has already generated a longitudinal study that investigates the outcomes of using *The Baltimore Story* material based on teacher interviews. For phase three of these efforts, Brizee

and Hurter Brizee branched out to create the sister project, *The Saint Louis Story*, as Brizee moved from Loyola Maryland to Saint Louis University to accept the Writing Across the Curriculum Director position in the university's new undergraduate Core. Based on the model proven in Baltimore, Brizee and Hurter Brizee began collaborating with English graduate students at Saint Louis University in summer 2022. The reflection of Meha Gupta, one of the graduate student collaborators, recalls for O'Malley's explanation of *eloquentia perfecta* in "Not for Ourselves Alone": "*Eloquentia perfecta*, perfect eloquence. This expression took hold in the Jesuit tradition as capturing the most immediate goal of rhetorical training. The goal was achieved through the study of great literature in one's own language and in the languages of other cultures."¹³ With the two public digital humanities projects Brizee and Hurter Brizee hope to use language and action to bring about positive change in Baltimore and in St. Louis.

Meha's Experience: Summer with *The Baltimore Story*

I spent the summer of 2022 working with Brizee and Hurter Brizee to expand the community art section on *The Baltimore Story's* website. After contemplating the potential effects of different genres, we settled on poetry for its literary merit. My idea behind the project was to showcase a comprehensive account of one poet from different eras, thereby creating a timeline of poetic development. The final product tied together poets Frances E. W. Harper, Lucille Clifton, and Lady Brion based on their connection with Baltimore and contribution to anti-racism literature. I modulated the poet profiles in a way that would attract the attention of students with different interests, structuring content around poets' biographies, writing styles, critical comments on their work, poetry recommendations, and pictures.

Emerging from the spirit of resistance against Eurocentric poetics, Black poetry has maintained that, in Audre Lorde's infamous words, "poetry is not a luxury," but rather a way to "give name to the nameless."¹⁴ Several poets of color, including the ones who are the focus of my study, have used the medium of poetry to demand social

intervention. If we look at them not as outsiders in the poetic tradition but as a part of the change, we can understand the essence of Black poetry. Reading about the historical evolution of poetic styles while the urgency for racial representation in historical and contemporary coverage remains consistent can be an eye-opener for readers of all ages. Black poets from different centuries show the universality of the exigence of being heard. If we look closely, the three poets have an almost dialectical relationship that can encourage readers to perceive where they stand. Are they standing on the shoulders of giants or building their own village?

My research work as a master's student has been motivated by the alienation caused in students due to delocalized pedagogy. While I had previously been interested in trying to comprehend the postcolonial problem of westernization and standardization of college education, generating teaching materials that engaged with the community encouraged me to push myself into thinking through the practicalities of decentered education. I take away the realization that along with using an accessible lexicon and finding points of relatability, I need to provide students with a way to take their curiosity forward. Recent community-engaged art initiatives, like Delmore Baltimore, have challenged the reputation of poetry being inaccessible by popularizing spoken word and experimental poetry. I think opportunities like these would appeal to the students who desire the possibility of being what they read about. Going forward, along with bringing the community to the students, I intend to prioritize bringing students to the community, too.

Colten's Experience: Summer with *The Saint Louis Story*

In the summer of 2022, I worked with Brizee and Hurter Brizee to begin the process of adapting the central text of *The Baltimore Story* into a framework that would allow us to build a similar project for St. Louis. This task was based upon a presumption that the history section from *The Baltimore Story* would likely include very similar material to Saint Louis which could be adapted into the history section for *The Saint Louis Story*. My work then proceeded in four stages: 1) re-edit the original

history section for mechanical flow; 2) shift the appropriate sections which were Baltimore-specific into a more general African American narrative history; 3) locate parallel events in St. Louis which might replace the Baltimore-specific sections; and finally 4) identify possible St. Louis-specific expansions of the history section as well as potential research sources for those expansions. My graduate training and my own research had paved a solid path for both the technical editing and the research, but they did not prepare me for the personal experience of reflecting upon how similar the narratives of the two African American communities would be, nor did they prepare me to encounter the entrenched influence of systemic racism within American history and within St. Louis, in particular.

As a dissertating PhD candidate, I constantly struggle with the nature of “stakes” within academic research and the academy at large. Manuscripts, close reading, and even theoretical lenses provide interesting insights, but those inquiries are often divorced from the lived reality of those persons on the ground—especially those persons whose voices are systemically silenced. Even feminist, postcolonial, or anti-racist academic inquiries often move more comfortably within the abstract than within the personal suffering of real persons. I am reminded of how O’Malley describes the initial Jesuit foray into education not merely as a way for the Masters of Paris to share their knowledge but as a way to share their compassionate mission, Messina being as much a local outreach program for peace in Sicily as a school for young aristocrats.¹⁵ My work on *The Saint Louis Story* similarly provided a localized, human grounding to my academic investigation: for example, Michael Brown’s murder by a police officer occurred less than a seven-minute drive from where I was researching his story. While an education in the humanities implicitly claims a sort of “humanizing” effect upon the student, without human contact and human community it remains safely within the abstract—safely without pressing stakes for change.

If the original product of Jesuit education was the *eloquentia perfecta* of the student—understood as that fully embodied, teleological excellence where there was no separation between the internalized

content of lessons and the externalized action of the students—there is presumably a similar “humanizing” of the academic endeavor which should necessarily take place, especially in Jesuit rhetorical education. For me, this project helped facilitate that introspective reflection essential to studies in the humanities, giving that study stakes and reminding me of the call from Pedro Arrupe, S.J. that Jesuit education be essentially “for others.”¹⁶ In that way, the community engagement made the academic more human, and made empathy with that community necessary as part of our shared humanity. Though we were right in our presumption that the narratives of Baltimore and St. Louis would be similar, it became evident to me that these narratives match many other narratives of systemic racism. But further than the abstract reality of pervasive and systemic racism, my experience working on *The Saint Louis Story* brought me closer to home, closer to the people and places directly affected, closer to the stakes of the lived reality of the local community.


Within the *Ratio Studiorum*’s guidelines for “Professors of Higher Studies,” the instructor is encouraged to “move” his students via his “virtues” and with the “exemplary actions of his own life.”¹⁷ Of course, that presumes a sort of lived modeling from the instructor which gives credence to the educational experience, but it also presumes that the professor should be visibly working in such a way that the students see the stakes and importance of the lessons. In historical terms, this explains why Jesuits working at the universities were still required by their superiors to do local community service, but it also provides a useful standard by which humanities professors should constantly draw their instruction into the lived reality of their students and local communities. As valuable as publications are for the modern professor in academia, those publications rarely have a direct effect upon students, at least not in the way that the *Ratio Studiorum* challenges professors to “move” their students. Perhaps O’Malley was right when he spoke about the pressure to publish as focusing academic energy on “getting ahead,” but I wonder if that manic focus also has the added complication of turning the academic endeavor more toward the head than the heart, and more toward the abstract than the embodied and integrated. Working on the *Saint Louis Story*

introduced me to the more human side of humanities research, particularly regarding how stakes of any inquiry should be grounded within lived realities.

Conclusion: WAC, Graduate Work, and Community-Engaged Work

As WAC director at Saint Louis University, Brizee's goal is to integrate community-engaged learning and scholarship into the writing-intensive courses that he is supporting. Within the university's new undergraduate Core, written, oral, and visual communication have been woven into students' four-year experience through a three-course sequence called *Eloquentia Perfecta* and a writing-intensive course. This required course of study includes a first-year composition class, a visual and oral communication class, a fine arts class, and an upper-level writing-intensive class that may be satisfied by either a professional writing course in the English department or by writing-in-the-disciplines courses offered across fields offered at the university. The sequence takes its cue directly from the Ignatian pedagogy originally described in the *Ratio* but is updated to meet contemporary learning outcomes and technology requirements. Brizee perceives the upper-level writing-intensive courses as the perfect opportunity to introduce community-engaged work. Brizee also plans to integrate community-engaged work into English graduate studies, as well as the graduate experiences of other disciplines as much as possible through *The Baltimore Story* and *The Saint Louis Story*. The two examples included in this section serve as a beginning; as noted in this article an IRB-approved participatory community-engaged research project is underway looking at teacher responses to using the middle school material on *The Baltimore Story* site, and more research will follow through empirical methods courses. Paid internship positions and research assistant positions are also in the works. And more grants

are on the horizon given the success of *The Baltimore Story* project.

As the former director for Community-Engaged Learning and Scholarship at Loyola Maryland, Brizee helped build upon a strong legacy at that institution that encourages students to engage in *eloquentia perfecta* through service-learning. As Brizee now collaborates with administrators and faculty members across Saint Louis University's campuses, O'Malley's large corpus of scholarship on Jesuit rhetoric will play an integral role in developing curricula. Along with the work of Pedro Arrupe, S.J., Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., and Walter Ong, S.J., O'Malley's scholarship has done more for the resurgence of rhetoric, *eloquentia perfecta*, and *vita activa* than any other Jesuit scholar. Moreover, O'Malley's insight on increasing community-engaged learning and scholarship through graduate education is beginning at Saint Louis University, as noted above in Gupta's and Biro's reflections. And as O'Malley suggested, if colleges and universities, and especially Jesuit institutions, are to achieve their full potential in addressing the most pressing issues of our time, they should integrate more community-engaged work into graduate education. O'Malley reinforced this point when he explained the goals of Jesuit higher education during his interview. He noted, "The formation of an engaged citizen through eloquence, through good acts, through being informed, through ethical behavior, is at the center of what we do. Even if we are a university, we still hold some of those deep values, and therefore our expectation is that, in a variety of ways, not just one. So you can't compartmentalize it, but you will have experiences throughout your whole education project that will lead you to think about what it means to be with others or to accompany others." We couldn't have said it better. 

Notes

¹ John O'Malley, "Jesuit Schools and the Humanities Yesterday and Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 29, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/jesuit/article/view/5924>

² John O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone": Rhetorical Education in the Jesuit Mode with Five Bullet Points for Today," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 43, no. 4 (2013): 5.

³ John O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

⁴ John O'Malley, Foreword, in *Traditions of Eloquence: The Jesuits and Modern Rhetorical Studies*, eds. Cinthia Gannett and John C. Brereton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), xi; O'Malley, "Jesuit Schools."

⁵ O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 3-5.

⁶ Allen Brizee, "Reimagining the Humanistic Tradition: Using Isocratic Philosophy, Ignatian Pedagogy, and Civic Engagement to Journey with Youth and Walk with the Excluded," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 11, no. 1 (2020): 2-25, <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol11/iss1/2>

⁷ John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 212-13.

⁸ O'Malley, "Jesuit Schools," 29.

⁹ O'Malley, "Jesuit Schools," 29.

¹⁰ Jaska Kainulainen, "Virtue and Civic Values in Early Modern Jesuit Education," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 5 (2018): 531.

¹¹ Allen Brizee, Paola Pascual-Ferrá, and Giuliana Caranante, "High-Impact Civic Engagement: Outcomes of Community-Based Research in Technical Writing Courses," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 50, no. 3 (2020): 224-251, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281619853266>.

¹² Brizee et al., "High-Impact Civic Engagement," 18.

¹³ O'Malley, "Not for Ourselves Alone," 5.

¹⁴ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 2012), 37.

¹⁵ O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 201-07.

¹⁶ Pedro Arrupe and Kevin Burke, *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 173.

¹⁷ *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, trans. and ed. Claude N. Pavur (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005).