

Michael J. Garanzini, S.J. remarks at Faculty Convocation
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At the beginning of another academic year, it is very appropriate for us to take a look at some achievements and to recognize the accomplishments of many of our faculty. Although too numerous to name each of you, there were a record numbers of articles and monographs, and near- record gain in monetary awards for research and for support of students.

Our academic reform and renewal efforts were impressive as well. The revised and integrated core curriculum is in full implementation, with new programs for adult learners being launched this fall, including several new masters degrees. We have attracted the strongest freshman class on record. In nearly every school and program, we see the kind of growth that we are hoping for - growth in quality of faculty and students, matched by improved facilities and resources. Recent efforts to link more purposefully the extra-curricular experiences of our undergraduates and graduates with their courses—through such programs as service learning opportunities, internships, learning communities in residence halls, and so forth—plus efforts to assess and measure these activities so as to be more certain of their value and worth have helped us attract talented students and faculty and to retain them in greater numbers.

I believe these changes show that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift, from a teaching-centered to a learning-centered environment in our classrooms and programs. Again, I think the generosity and flexibility of our faculty is impressive.

Over the past nine months, a widely representative task force, led by Susan Malisch, our CIO and VP for Information technology, and Father Justin Daffron, our associate provost for academic services, has worked under a two-fold charge. The task force was asked to assess Loyola's present economic model and its progress on the present five year strategic plan in light of the challenges we face. The plan stresses initiatives to improve Loyola's academic quality and position in the broader landscape of higher education. This is year three of the plan, and it's ready for review. We all know higher education has become more competitive and is increasingly under fire from a host of critics who see post-secondary education in this country as elitist, expensive, inefficient. (We talked a bit about that last year if you will recall.)

Using data collected on our own progress on key measures such as graduation rates, retention rates, student satisfaction, progress toward expanding out-of class opportunities for students, expanding opportunities to deepen their faith lives, to develop leadership skills, to record and assess their progress toward these goals in e-portfolios, the task force was able to conclude that we are making significant progress on those initiatives and strategies. And, in light of their charge, measures of our progress and our weak spots in delivering the kind of transformative education we say we want to deliver were analyzed for their cost as well as their effectiveness.

This group also looked at key external factors to assess Loyola's vulnerability to forces such as the shrinking market of traditional college students, government retrenchments from support for

higher education, the stagnant economy, rising student debt, aging infrastructures—challenges faced by nearly all higher education institutions nationally. The Task Force was able to offer suggestions on how we might be better prepared to recruit and retain students in a diminishing market of 18 year olds, expand our outreach and attraction to adult students who seek to complete their education, gain more students with ability to pay our tuition, further internationalize our campuses, and finally, retain a healthy number of need-based and first-generation students—our historic mission and gift to our wider community.

In the months ahead, we will be publishing the Task Force’s report, entitled “Positioning Loyola for the Future,” which was recently vetted and, I should add, well-received by the Board of Trustees earlier this month. It contains some critical choices and suggested directions for us.

But, let me briefly say why I believe Loyola is well-positioned to offer a quality education and thus, to compete as an exceptional institution delivering a relevant education, one suited to preparing student to lead extraordinary lives, as we claim.

Fundamentally, all education is about preparing students for their own future, by a group of individuals who will only partially inhabit it, and who can see its parameters, only dimly. As we look at the world which our present students will inherit, inhabit and help create, we see them faced by challenges like those presented by rapidly expanding information technologies—giving them an abundance of information without coherence, analysis, and all too often, without accuracy. We can envision a furthering of environmental degradation and depletion of the planet’s resources. We know that they will live in communities and participate in workplaces that are increasingly a mix of cultures, races, creeds, and values. Furthermore, these communities will experience political and social forces pushing them toward either authoritarian solutions—might makes right—on the one hand, or toward paralysis and inaction, due to social gridlocks and to a post-modern notion that all positions and ethical systems are of equal value, that is, a moral relativism.

They are, I believe, in desperate need of a convincing and cogent narrative, a view of the future and these necessary paths for managing cultural convergences and clashes; for making choices when it comes to preservation of the resources of this world; for application of faith-based values which can be defended as more likely to bring harmony and a fair share of our good to each person who inhabits the earth. They need to take from their experience at Loyola a humble conviction that there is hope for their future, and that they have skills to work for solutions, not simply professional and disciplinary knowledge. They must have, then, in their repertoire of talents, the capacity for critical thinking and analysis, a value system examined and forged in light of enduring principles, and a willingness to listen without feeling threatened by difference or disagreement.

If ever a generation needed something more than what the past had to offer by way of best ideas, it is this one. And, if ever a generation needed to absorb the wisdom of the past embodied and carried in such traditions as our own Judeo-Christian and Catholic one, it is his generation. Why

do I believe we offer something unique and important? We have a liberal (freeing), well-conceived, relevant philosophy of education supporting what we do here.

The University's core curriculum has at its heart an engagement with life's big questions of meaning and purpose that, when taught well and with passion, can shape the course of a person's life and thought. Philosophy and theology are the disciplines that most directly consider these kinds of questions--the question (and problem) of God, the issue of what it means to be a human creature--and our Jesuit, Catholic tradition has been one of the great carriers/archivists of this tradition of thought. Our challenge then, is: how do we engage an already diverse student body in such an intellectual pursuit?

Our focus on experiential learning and Ignatian pedagogy in all our programs draws on the insights of Ignatius and this spiritual tradition from which our University finds its inspiration that learning is not limited to the disembodied mind but happens through the experience of the particular--places, faces, cultures, contexts, and problems--and through the movement of our hearts as well, the affective dimension of our lives. This is well recognized here as an essential ingredient in a well-rounded, engaged education.

Our job, it seems to me, is to teach each class, run each lab, supervise each placement with the conviction that superficial assessment of knowledge or handling of important questions robs the student of his or her purpose here and is therefore a waste of our time together. Professors here challenge and demand, according to data collected on their experience at Loyola.

Jesuit institutions all over the world have been urged in recent years to incorporate concern for the environment and a commitment to the world's ecological challenges at the core of their own mission, in collaboration with the Society of Jesus' mission. The Document, *Healing A Broken World*, developed by a task force at the urging of the Jesuit Father General, calls us to the frontiers of our world where nature and human life are seriously threatened. In this way, a commitment to ecology and the environment is an expansion and undergirding of an ongoing commitment to protecting and caring for all forms of life at the margins: the poor, the disenfranchised, the alienated and ill, the aged and disabled, new life and old life--it is an embrace of the fragility of life and a call to protect it in all its forms. Our students are leading the way here and calling us to this challenge.

So, as a University, we are making major investments in curriculum, in programming, and in buildings and infrastructure to be a leader in sustainable urban living. This commitment is not, however, for bragging rights. Rather, it is to demonstrate to students that their future will be one where individual and collective commitments will be crucial to preserving the quality of life which we have been blessed to enjoy and are compelled by our faith to share with all creatures.

In the same way, we must be engaged in a dialogue within cultures and with different religions because the Ignatian tradition is one that finds God in all things. A Jesuit education has always been (and this one must be) one in which a student gains an appreciation and a comfort with those who are different in language, race and creed, so that the student can feel "the whole world becoming our house," as one of the early Jesuit fathers expressed it. Expanding our commitment

to internationalize the campuses and our programs, developing opportunities for more students and faculty to immerse themselves in another culture, and bringing more international students to campus is a commitment in the strategic plan. Chicago is the perfect place to do this.

Finally, among several interfaith initiatives, we made a commitment to develop and promote a retreat and ecology center in Woodstock. Last year, LUREC had 3,500 overnight guests. The leadership programs and retreats, which hundreds of students now make, are designed to help them grow spiritually, putting them in touch with the sources of their faith, no matter the tradition. The model used is often the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises which conclude with The Contemplation on the Love of God--a reflection on a God who loves without limit and who asks us to live our lives in a generous response to that love. The effect or goal here is to encourage the retreatant to make of his or her very life a gift. This is at the heart of what we understand an extraordinary life to look like. It is a life lived in the spirit of gratitude.

Let me conclude by saying that what we are working on as a collective project, as a community of scholar-teachers and co-learners, will in important ways allow us to say we are equipping our students for this new world. We offer a curriculum that is liberal, that stresses critical thinking in exploring values as passed on in the arts, in literature, in philosophical and theological discourse. We give them an historical perspective so they are not enslaved in fallacies of exceptionalism and provincial thinking, that problems are new and without a track record. We challenge them to explore their faith traditions, to learn languages and travel, immersing them in the thought patterns, customs and perspectives that come with contact and enculturation. We stress in our campus environment, core and curricular offerings how we might appreciate the natural world around us, collectively address its challenges and repair it where broken. In short, we want them to be grounded in an intellectual tradition and have skills for serious depth of inquiry and investigation; we want them to be comfortable in a world of diverse cultures by having the experience of at least one culture other than their own, making them global citizens.

We want them to be knowledgeable of what resources they consume and how to prepare themselves and others for some potential sacrifices in the decades ahead-- we want them to be green. And, if they see these issues through the eyes of faith, we believe their world view will be enriched and their personal experience of potential for a fuller deeper life will lead them to gratitude, the fruit, I believe, of all scholarly and educational endeavors. We work from a well-thought and well-honed philosophy of education which differentiates us.

Thank you for being here. Have a great academic year, recommitted to our common project.