

# Conversations

*On Jesuit Higher Education*

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Work Issues, Engaged Citizenship, and AI

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# Conversations

On Jesuit Higher Education

## Work Issues, Engaged Citizenship, and AI



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Ben Dunkle, 3D printed  
chess set. Canisius College.

For more about all the artists  
featured in this issue, visit  
[conversationsmagazine.org](http://conversationsmagazine.org).

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Cover: Michael F. Tunney, S.J., *Lorcán and Iñigo*. St. Ignatius Jesuit Community, NYC.  
Photo credit Paul Mutino.

## These Changing Times

**It has become** a tired trope to talk about how much has changed since a microscopic virus no one was expecting moved stealthily across the world. Still, that doesn't make it any less true.

Work, interpersonal communications, healthcare, politics, dating, relationships, our faith communities, even something as ordinary as going to a movie has changed. And none of these things may ever again be what they once were. The fact that I'm completing this letter on the morning the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* adds a large exclamation point to my thoughts.

It's not just the substance of the changes that caught us by surprise, it's also the types of change and, perhaps most importantly, the pace of it. This issue of *Conversations* is very much a product of these changing times, not just in content but in its production, as well.

We look at changes in work, especially among those in higher education and explore ways to encourage engaged citizenship. Lastly, we look at the role of artificial intelligence in infiltrating society, particularly higher education, and how we might evaluate its benefits and failures.

I think you will see among the positives brought about in this post-COVID world—if it's not too daring to say that—is that so many of us are finding ways to unite our skills and talents with those of others to move toward a brighter future. We are listening to previously muffled voices and inviting once-ignored populations to the table to address issues that affect us all.

I hope you are able to find hope in these thoughtful articles written by members of the large community of thinkers, educators, students, alumni and staff and administration in the Jesuit education community.

This is our first print issue in more than a year and you may be wondering where *Conversations* has been. Even before the pandemic, the Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education was looking at the changing times and wondered whether two issues of this magazine a year was still the best way to present this information to our readers. After a long discernment process, we decided the answer was no.

We sensed a need to be more responsive to the issues of the day, while also still producing a print product. So, we decided to pull back to one issue a year and enhance our other programming. We solicit and post articles year-round at our newly redesigned website at [conversationsmagazine.org](http://conversationsmagazine.org). On this site you will find podcasts, video discussions and more. We hope you consider using the information on this website in faculty meetings as classes begin and across the university to offer time and space for conversations that deepen the understanding of and commitment to the promise of Jesuit education.

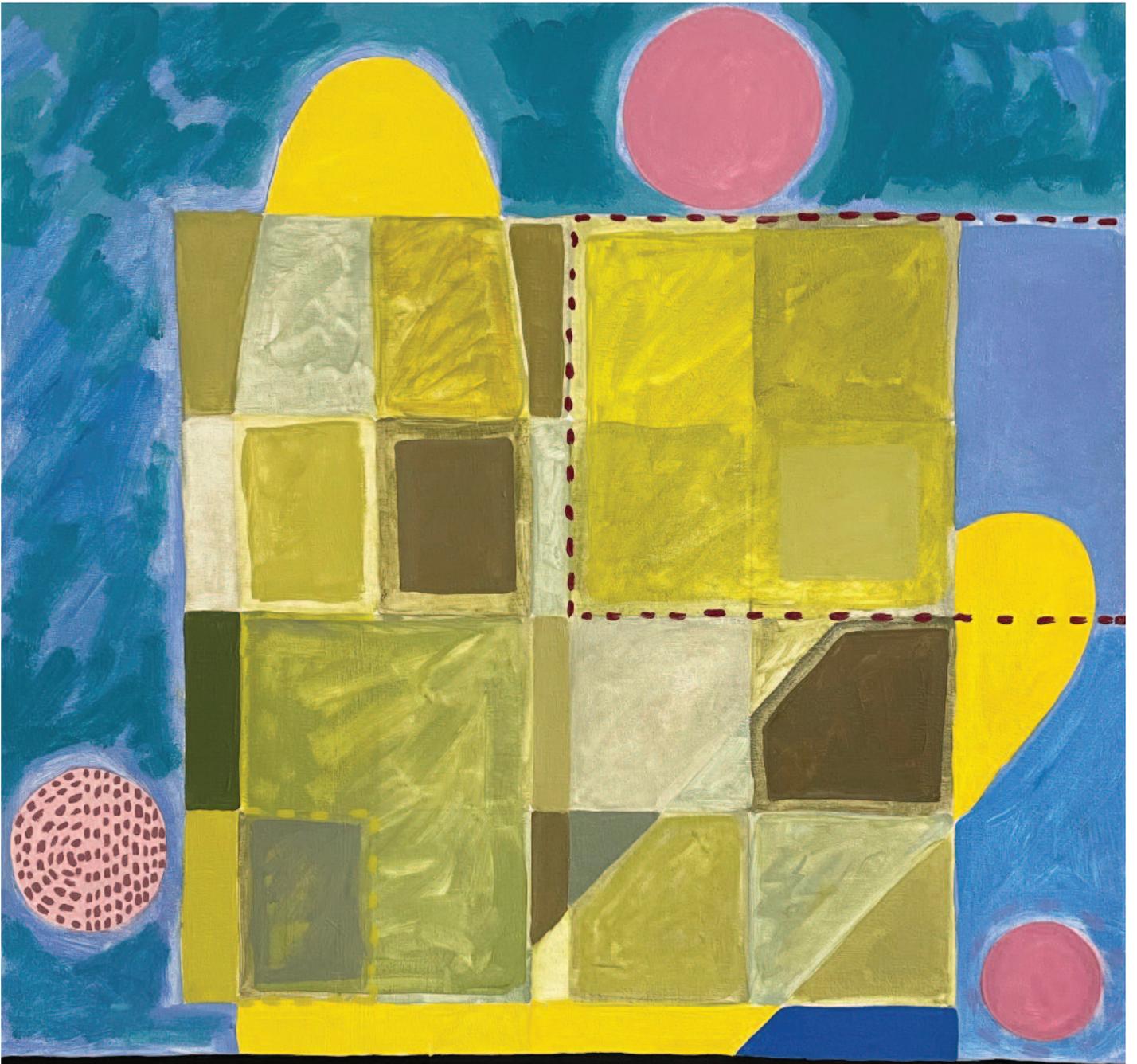
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This issue is illustrated mostly by original artwork created by artists from across the Jesuit network. It's a departure from our past policy of accompanying articles mostly with glamour shots of AJCU campuses, often not adding much to the content of the article. We think these artists have something to say and hope you do, too. *Conversations* designer Pauline Heaney (an alumna of Saint Peter's University), ran with this decision and has come up with one of the most attractive issues we have printed in quite a while. I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you for being part of the conversation,

Ron Bernas, editor





# The Post-Pandemic Future of Work and Workers

By Joseph A. McCartin

**Prior to the** onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, concern about “the future of work” abounded. Seemingly everywhere, urgent discussions among academicians, policymakers, and business leaders focused on that phrase.

The nation’s biggest consulting firms, including Deloitte, McKinsey, and Catalant, competed to show that they would be able and ready to guide their clients through the challenging world that lay ahead in the reorganization of work. The business press, too, embraced the phrase, as outlets including *Fortune*, *Forbes*, and *The Economist* created beats to monitor the future of work. Think tanks and philanthropies—from the Aspen Institute to the Ford and Rockefeller foundations—sponsored studies of the future of work.

Governments and international organizations at all levels were also becoming increasingly concerned about the future of work prior to the pandemic. The California State Assembly hosted a “Future of Work Summit” in 2017, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) created a “Future of Work Fellowship Scheme,” and the International Labor Organization (ILO) focused on the future of work as it marked the centennial of its founding in 1919. The World Economic Forum (WEF), whose annual gathering attracts the world’s financial and political titans to Davos, Switzerland, held

numerous discussions about the future of work.

Driving this wave of attention to the methods and means of work was a growing sense that we stood on the cusp of a radical reorganization of work to be ushered in by the spread of artificial intelligence, increasing automation, and the proliferation of new technologies. That transformation, many feared, would lead to a jobless future. That fear in turn drove rising interest in the idea of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) that would provide an income floor to people, whether employed or not, an idea that attracted many adherents from Andrew Yang to the founder of Tesla, Elon Musk, who argued that a UBI would eventually be necessary, because there will be “fewer and fewer jobs that a robot cannot do better than a human.”

Then the pandemic hit.

In some ways the impact of COVID-19 and our responses to it confirmed the prediction that work was on the cusp of a rapid transformation. We saw this in our own colleges and universities, as so much instruction in 2020-21 took place virtually, in online formats. Zoom and similar platforms, once little-used add-ons, became indispensable instructional tools and many of our classes became both distant and asynchronous. But for those of us who had the luxury to fall back on new technologies to do our work remotely, work did



not diminish. New technologies did not lead to broad elimination of jobs. For many, work time increased and the boundaries between work and nonwork blurred.

For those who had to continue to leave home to work—especially those who worked on the front lines in healthcare, foodservice, grocery stores, post offices, delivery vehicles, and a host of other jobs—there was little sign that a brave new world of automated work by smart machines was in the offing. It turned out that what we came to call “essential work” included very few jobs indeed “that a robot cannot do better than a human.”

For a brief time during the pandemic, the human beings who toiled at essential work were celebrated. A wave of gratitude poured forth from those of us who relied on such workers to help get us through the pandemic. In cities around the world a spontaneous custom arose in which people threw open their windows at an appointed time, banging pots, clapping, making rough music in honor of those whose labors were pulling them through the worst of the contagion. Some grocery chains offered bonus pay; and some localities passed ordinances forcing large grocery chains to pay bonuses of \$4 to \$5 per hour.

Yet none of that lasted long. Two months into the pandemic, the nation’s largest grocery chain, Kroger, ended its \$2-an-hour hazard pay raise. By 2021, many essential workers were hurting. One union’s survey of its membership of 36,000 hourly grocery workers in the Western states found that 42% relied on borrowing money to pay for basic needs during 2021, one-third said they cut out calories or skipped meals because they couldn’t afford food. More than 10% said they were unhoused.

Left: Arturo Araujo, S.J., *Cienaga de la Virgen*.  
Seattle University.

Stimulus checks and the extra \$300 a week in payments that were added to unemployment checks during COVID helped. But these dried up by September 2021. In fact, governors in 25 states opted to block the \$300 unemployment bonus payments early in an effort to push workers back into the labor market.

Workers at our own institutions of Jesuit higher education did not escape the pain caused by the pandemic and its attendant economic dislocations. Pay freezes, pay and benefit cuts, and layoffs, including even tenured faculty in some instances, were common. These measures were all the more painful on campuses where resistance to faculty and graduate assistant unionization had been fiercest in the years before the pandemic. For the first time in the history of U.S. Jesuit higher education, activists on several campuses formed an organization—the Coalition of Jesuit Higher Ed Workers and Students—that challenged the economic priorities of their campuses and circulated a petition demanding reforms.

Both the nation and our campuses began to recover over the summer of 2021 thanks to federal bailouts and the deployment of effective vaccines, the appearance of the Delta and later the Omicron variants notwithstanding. Unemployment began dropping nationally more precipitously than ever before, a return to pre-pandemic “normalcy” briefly seemed plausible.

Yet a return to the status quo ante has still yet to happen, and indeed is becoming increasingly unlikely. During the second half of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022, it became clear that the pandemic had dramatically changed things for workers, and there is no way to put the toothpaste back in that tube. Like the World Wars of the 20th century, each of which also spawned a wave of worker activism, the pandemic disrupted old patterns, reminded workers of how important their labor actually is to their employers and the nation, and also made clear to them how undervalued much of that labor is. In short, the pandemic prompted many workers to rethink their relationship to their jobs for the first time in their working lives.

Evidence of the extent of the resulting disruption started to become clear in the late

summer of 2021, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics measured an explosive growth in the rate of workers quitting their jobs. In August, 2.9% of workers quit—the highest monthly figure on record to that point. Quit numbers continued to rise over successive months. Nor did they slow much as we entered the second quarter of 2022. Yet it wasn’t only that workers began quitting the jobs they had in search of better ones, or to spend more time tending to their families.

Workers’ restiveness also expressed itself in the form of a significant uptick in private sector strikes, after years of declining strike numbers. Walkouts in the fall by John Deere and Nabisco workers led to talk of “Striketober.” And, by early 2022, growing interest in unionization was also detectable as Starbucks and Amazon workers staged attention-grabbing organizing drives, breaking through fierce resistance and establishing the first union beachheads in those antiunion companies. As unemployment hit 3.6% in March 2022, nearly matching its pre-pandemic low, workers’ confidence in their market power seemed to grow week by week.

If questions about the “future of work” attracted attention prior to the pandemic, now it is the “future of workers” that is emerging as the most pertinent labor question. Robots and artificial intelligence are not haunting today’s workplaces as much as is a deep, and apparently growing, level of worker dissatisfaction with the state of their jobs. Complicating matters further in 2022 is the gnawing bite of inflation on workers’ incomes. While getting a job is easier today than it has been in years, finding one that pays a living wage amid soaring costs—especially for housing—is becoming more challenging, especially those in the lower half of income earners.

This building wave of dissatisfaction follows decades of worker disempowerment and changes in the organization of work that have made workers’ lives harder and our economy increasingly unequal in the distribution of its fruits.

As the economist David Weil documented in his landmark 2014 book *The Fissured Workplace*, since the 1970s the U.S. labor market has been increasingly fragmented by lengthening supply

chains, rampant subcontracting, and, most recently, the development of a “platform” economy that has led to precarity for the Uber drivers and others who make their living from cellphone apps. The financialization of the economy, which began during the economic restructuring in the 1970s, has both driven these transformations and ensured that the wealthy have benefited most from them. According to Americans for Tax Fairness, this nation’s 15 richest people saw their wealth balloon by 62% during the pandemic.

These developments highlight how deeply broken the U.S. system of labor relations is. Workers’ rights in private sector employment are governed by a law—the Wagner Act—that is now almost 90 years old, and which was last significantly amended 75 years ago—by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. Since 1965, multiple efforts to update that law in response to a changing economy and increasing employer resistance have been attempted only to be filibustered to death in the U.S. Senate. Nor is there much hope that that logjam will be cleared anytime soon. All of this suggests how much the future of workers has become shrouded in uncertainty, albeit due to forces quite different from those anticipated in pre-pandemic “Future of Work” discussions.

The precarious condition of so many workers in this transitional moment both mirrors and exacerbates the weakened state of our democracy in the 2020s. Thirty-three years ago, in 1989, as communism was unraveling and a global order premised on free trade was taking shape, Francis Fukuyama’s famous essay, “The End of History?” struck a triumphalist tone, heralding “the unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” and the “total exhaustion of viable systemic alternatives” to the world order that the U.S. was then shaping.

Democracy and capitalism seemed to many at that moment to be not only triumphant but mutually reinforcing. Events since then have called that assumption into question, as forms of authoritarian-minded, populist nationalism have gained ground, even in economically advanced liberal democracies like the United States. As was the case during the Great Depression, many of these political tendencies have fed off the economic

anxieties of working people who feel increasingly insecure about their and their children’s futures.

This present state of affairs raises important questions for Jesuit higher education. Are our institutions resisting or replicating the yawning inequalities that characterize work in the 2020s? Are we alleviating or perpetuating the precarity of our own essential workers? Are we preparing graduates to reform or profit from the trends that have made work less secure and rewarding for the many?

In 2000, Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., called on us to make social justice the hallmark of Jesuit higher education, to “take conscious responsibility for being ... a force for faith and justice.” That summons is all the more pertinent—and challenging—today in light of the economic transformations we’ve witnessed since he issued it. Inequality has grown and work has become more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of market forces.

It is clearer now that our responsibility to create and maintain institutions that seek justice cannot stop with a concern for the poor and the unemployed, although their welfare must continue to be our priority. It must extend as well to all those who work in conditions that degrade their humanity and deny them a voice in determining the circumstances in which they work, whether they are beyond or within our campus gates.

Fortunately, we can draw inspiration and guidance from a conversation that began within the Catholic church prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In May 2016, a conference called “Sustainable Development and the Future of Work in the Context of the Jubilee of Mercy,” convened in Rome and began developing a strategic road map toward the creation of “decent work,” a future of work in accord with the vision animating Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*. An international network came together around a project called “The Future of Work After *Laudato Si*” or FOWLS. For more information, see: [futureofwork-labourafterlaudatosi.net/](http://futureofwork-labourafterlaudatosi.net/). Inspired by the encyclical’s call for “a correct understanding of work” that sees in “every form of work a concept of the relationship which we can and must have with what is other than ourselves” (LS, n. 124-125),

FOWLS believes that the future of work is not “already written or predetermined,” but that it “will be what we, as humankind, want and are able to build. It will not depend only on formal laws or impersonal and anonymous forces, but on concrete collective choices, on the way we structure our society and economy.”

In December 2020, FOWLS produced a report based on regional consultations with affiliated researchers from around the world, informed by the impact that the pandemic was having on workers everywhere, especially those on the front lines whose work was to care for others. That report, *Care is Work, Work is Care*, offered a refreshingly challenging way to think about the future of work that puts the welfare of people at its center. Drawing on the experience of care work during the pandemic, it conceived of all of the ways in which good work of any kind is, ultimately, a form of care.

Such a vision should resonate deeply throughout U.S. Jesuit higher education.

The work of education is self-evidently care work, after all. Yet a candid assessment of our institutions suggests that we continue to fail to see and valorize the care work and the workers who perform it. Our institutions have responded admirably to the ecological vision of *Laudato Si* while eliding the integral dimensions of Francis’s vision. While sustainability programs and research initiatives grow on our campuses, we have yet to embrace, as a community, Francis’s call for a “correct understanding of work.” Most of our institutions have yet to commit in writing to just employment policies that ensure that all of the full

time workers on our campuses, whether directly employed or subcontracted, earn a living wage. Many continue to resist their workers’ demands that we recognize their rights to unionize, a right deeply embedded in Catholic social thought and reaffirmed by the U.S. Catholic bishops’ 1986 pastoral letter, which made clear that “All church institutions must also fully recognize the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively with the institution through whatever association or organization they freely choose” (*Economic Justice for All*, n. 353).

As we look toward a post-pandemic future, the time has come to address our persistent failings in this area. Only by doing so can we hope to shape a future in which the worker—not the methods and means of work—becomes our central concern. If we hope to build a more just and sustainable social order, we must begin to lead the way forward.

*Joseph A. McCartin is professor of history and executive director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University.*



Rachel Mindrup, *Henry Dew*. Creighton University.

# Success is Found in a Vocation, Not Mere Work

By Sophie Wink

**In my 20** years, I have worked quite a few different kinds of jobs.

I've been a nanny and a consignment store clerk, a summer camp counselor and a tutor, an editor for a newspaper and an agricultural worker picking strawberries in the blistering July heat—you name it, I've dabbled.

These are the kinds of jobs that, for me at least, I would call work. I have taken memories and lessons from all of them, certainly—I now know how much I love working with children, I know the unique challenges of the retail industry, I am intimately familiar with the backbreaking work is that goes into harvesting every carton of strawberries and bag of zucchini in the supermarket.

But all these jobs have been some sort of means to an end. I picked them up to pay for a vacation or my groceries and I worked hard, but that work has a different meaning from vocation, something that I am moving toward as I approach my college graduation.

Vocation, to me, means something very different. A vocation is not just a job, nor is it even just a career. To me, the word vocation is linked with the word passion. A vocation is not just something that you do because you have to do it, but rather something that you do because you feel a calling to it.

A Jesuit education uniquely positions students to pursue a vocation rather than just a job. As Jesuit-educated students, we're educated in a way that emphasizes humanity above all else. Whether you study biology or history, engineering or business, you're reminded again and again that whatever you do should be done in pursuit of passion and vocation—an education of the mind, body, and soul

requires a person to look beyond a job to find a vocation. For Jesuit-educated students especially, I think that this often leads us to work that exists in service of others, that fills the soul by sharing knowledge, wealth, and above all love through a vocation that our own unique gifts make us especially suited for.

Although I have yet to leave the bubble of university life in search of my career, it is already abundantly clear to me that this will not always be easy. Today's world can often feel like a top-speed race to the finish line, a mission to make the most money or be the most.

In families, the world of higher education, and social circles, there is certainly a great deal of pressure for young people to chase the careers that will make them the wealthiest or position them the highest in society. These pushes are generally well-intentioned: In a world where money does, unfortunately, often mean happiness, students' loved ones want them to be comfortable and successful—and students want that for themselves, too.

But I don't believe that the pursuit of success means abandonment of the pursuit of caring for the whole person or the pursuit of vocation. In fact, maybe I'm an optimist, but I think that the pursuit of vocation has tremendous potential to enhance the pursuit of success. The most important thing that I try to remind myself of is that by pursuing what I am passionate about and what fills my soul, I will find success. I like to think that the people who are the most successful are the ones who pursue their passions because for them, they are not just working. They pour everything that they have into their vocation because it holds deep

meaning. Sure, a job that aligns with my passions will probably still be hard. I'm under no illusions that whatever career I choose will be easy just because I love my work.

The difference, though, is that a vocation backed by passion is free from the soul-sucking monotony of a job that is nothing more than a job. If you love what you do and you love why you do it, you can wake up each morning and rest your head each night secure in the knowledge that you, through your vocation, are changing the world for the better.

I wonder what would happen if, instead of looking at success in the way that we have been conditioned to look at it—as defined by money and power—we make a shift toward defining it by the passion that defines vocation. If we go out into the world and pursue the things that fulfill our hearts and minds, won't we be successful? If we can come home every night content with the fact that what we spent our day doing has made the world a better place, isn't that an even higher form of accomplishment? And on top of all of that, I tend

**A Jesuit education uniquely positions students to pursue a vocation rather than just a job.**

to believe that if one pursues that higher, value-driven form of success, more traditional forms of success are bound to come naturally.

Twenty years from now, I hope that I (and you) can wake up in the morning and know that the work we are doing is making a difference because I have spent my energy on something that I love, something that nourishes mind, body, and soul and extends its goodness into the world around me. So, as we all get ready to leave behind the safety of college and brave a world of fear, doubt, and uncertainty, here's what I have to say: Chase your passion and the rest will follow.

*Sophie Wink is a history major and a member of the Class of 2022 at Santa Clara University.*



Littleton Alston, Globe night view. Creighton University.

# The Great Burnout

By Sheila E. McGinn

**The COVID-19 pandemic** has posed so many challenges across society it tends to be blamed for every problem, even those whose roots pre-existed it. The “great burnout” is one such reality. COVID did not create this issue; it revealed insidious dynamics in American businesses that have been festering under the surface for some time.

U.S.-based industries have moved increasingly toward a 24/7 framework, expecting salaried employees to respond to company demands not only during regular working hours but also on evenings, weekends, and holidays, even during vacations or when the employee is on sick leave. A 50- or even 60-hour work week is no longer rare, although many of those work hours are done outside of the office setting. And, of course, none of these statistics includes the hours one spends in unremunerated “housework” in addition to actual paid employment hours. Sound familiar? This has been faculty life for a while, with administrators and students sending emails or texts at all hours of every day and expecting near-immediate responses.

Employees with hourly-wage jobs are no better off than professionals. While unlikely to work more than 40-hours/week for an individual company, many hourly staff have to keep two to three jobs to earn enough income to sustain a family. In not one county in the United States can a person afford a two-bedroom apartment on the income from one, full-time, minimum-wage job. Furthermore, with childcare costs averaging \$9,000 a year per child, nearly 50 percent of income from one job would be consumed by that single expense.

Staff at our universities feel these kinds of economic pressures, yet university administrations have repeatedly “downsized” support staff over the last decade, expecting more work from fewer people, and U.S. businesses—including Jesuit universities—en-

gage in union-busting tactics to prevent employees organizing to negotiate for better wages.

Ample research shows that such work schedules are deleterious to one’s mental and physical health. Rather than alleviating the situation by changing their work culture to ensure respect for employees’ personal time, some U.S. companies—again including Jesuit universities—have started charging higher health premiums to employees who exhibit high blood pressure, higher than average BMI, and other health concerns associated with overwork environments. Such policies exhibit the company’s disregard of their employees’ well-being and compound stress levels rather than reducing them.

Specifically in the higher education sector, additional pressures create a veritable crockpot for stress: declining admissions, rising tuition discounts, the erosion—or outright elimination—of tenure and academic freedom. The increasing corporatization of higher education steadily erodes the culture of shared governance, creating ripe conditions for persistent misunderstandings between administrators and faculty. Long before COVID, the balance of power at universities was shifting to bureaucrats with little or no understanding of the unique nature of the university enterprise.

Board members ignorant of university mission made suggestions like “why don’t we teach the conservative arts?” Deans were heard to opine that university mission interferes with market success. Upper administrators’ obsession with the “bottom line” as a numerical figure on a spreadsheet (instead of the creative instructional and formative goals of the university enterprise) led to bloated administrative lines at the expense of support staff, elimination of full-time tenure-track faculty lines, rising numbers of contingent faculty, and other pol-

Rachel Mindrup,  
*The Wristband.*  
Creighton University.



icy changes fundamentally corrosive of the university as an educational and research enterprise. Faculty and academic support offices were pressured to do more and more with fewer and fewer personnel.

Then came COVID-19.

Faculty pivoted on a dime, creating online course content and hosting classes through remote systems they learned on the spot. ITS staff scrambled to develop the necessary infrastructure for remote teaching. Student affairs staff reached out with mental-health interventions and other means of support. Everyone did this for the good of the students, because of their commitment to the university mission.

Typically, these extraordinary efforts have been taken for granted, not compensated. Even no-cost rewards systems are abjured so that annual evaluations, which could be used to build morale by recognizing such enormous efforts, instead are skewed by stringent policies forcing supervisors to “grade” their reporting personnel as simply “meeting expectations.”

Gaslighting—manipulation that tries to get people to question their own reality, memory or perceptions—dominates administrative responses to concerns about compensation. In some institutions, COVID is used as an excuse for still more layoffs of staff and faculty, the functional elimination of tenure,

sudden program eliminations, and other targeted reductions, imposed by boards or administrators without faculty consultation and in violation of established procedures of collaborative governance.

As universities normalize post-COVID operations, little thought has been given to the ways these decisions reify patterns destructive to employees and the university community as a whole. Constant overwork, unreasonable obstacles to telecommuting, exploitation of commitment to mission, double-speak about university decisions, cant about “community building” in the midst of chronic disregard for faculty and staff needs and expertise—all these factors have become embedded in the post-pandemic university environment, creating a perfect incubator for burnout. Because these factors have been created by executive fiat, faculty and staff have every reason to be suspicious rather than trusting of university boards and administrators.

The only way forward involves a return to true joint governance and a reversal of these exploitative trends. Will Jesuit universities choose to walk the mission and not simply mouth the words? That remains to be seen.

*Sheila E. McGinn is professor of theology and religious studies at John Carroll University.*

# HR Rose to the Many Challenges Presented by the Pandemic

By Kay Turner

**It has been** a long and challenging two-and-a-half years for human resources professionals in higher education.

We have hit many twists and turns along the road as we managed the move to almost entirely remote workplaces, then to an incremental return to hybrid workplaces, then to the mix of work arrangements that have emerged on campuses over the past year.

Yet one of the most significant elements of our work has been transitioning to a new level of involvement in the area of employee mental health.

As I come up for a breath and take stock of what we have done over the course of the pandemic, these are the key lessons I think we've learned when it comes to employee mental health in the workplace.

## Lesson 1: Monitor Employee Mental Health Data

Amid the suffocating isolation and uncertainty of the lockdown phase of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, the first major lesson became crystal clear: Monitoring and understanding the data on employee mental health is essential to being able to offer appropriate support.

Fortunately, we were able to know with statistical certainty that employees were suffering because we could track the increased utilization of our Employee Assistance Programs and the behavioral health services offerings in our Health and Wellness benefits plans. Our colleagues were often facing a work crisis within a larger life crisis, and the data was screaming that they needed help.

Knowing this made all the difference in shaping our response to an array of circumstances, ranging from increased feelings of "the blues" to abject hopelessness, despair, and suicidal ideation.

## Lesson 2: Keep the Communication Simple and the Resources Easily Accessible

The gradual return to some on-ground instruction and operations brought different challenges, as employees navigated conflicting quarantine rules, vaccine protocols, and any number of variations on the theme of "how to live through a pandemic."

In our zeal to help relieve some of the stressors introduced at this stage, human resources professionals learned that employees were being overloaded, even paralyzed, by reams of allegedly helpful information. Little did we know that the very resources aimed at abating the mental health crisis sometimes, in fact, contributed to the problem.

We learned the hard way about the importance of direct, succinct communication and the benefit of presenting resources in an orderly, easily accessible format. Once we adjusted, we came to understand that careful attention to presentation and accessibility allowed employees to focus on the resources themselves while reducing the time and frustration attributed to "data mining" our communication.

## Lesson 3: Customize Care for Caregivers

Amid the pandemic, human resources professionals also discovered that caregivers required distinctive and sometimes separate solutions to meet the specific challenges and the heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout they face.

Employees who cared for children, parents, spouses, domestic partners, elderly relatives, immune-

compromised roommates, and infirm neighbors often had limited or no access to support from family or friends in the pandemic, primarily because of travel restrictions and isolation protocols. These same employees also did not take advantage of the workplace wellness resources, virtual support groups, therapeutic videos and podcasts, affinity groups, and other interventions we initiated.

It took us time to connect the dots, but in the end, we realized that what we were offering was not suited to this particular group and that we must do better in customizing care for caregiver colleagues. We responded, for example, by forging new subsidized, external partnerships that provide caregivers access to enhanced in-home and out-of-home back-up child and elder care and afford them the needed time and space to partake in mental health programs. We also launched a Faculty Child Care Connections app designed to connect members of the community, including students, so they can assist each other with childcare responsibilities.

## Lesson 4: Prepare for the Long Haul

The biggest lesson learned is that dynamic behavioral health solutions must become a part of the long-term strategy in higher education human resources departments.

A 2021 American Council on Higher Education survey of college and university presidents revealed that “more than 70 percent of all college and university presidents identified faculty and staff mental health as the second most important issue facing their campuses.” At the same time, Leo Flanagan of the Center for Resilience has highlighted “a lack of appreciation that the mental health crisis gripping our societies and our university communities will last an estimated seven years after the COVID pandemic is brought under control.”

Accepting the reality that human resources must be in it for the long haul—along with monitoring the data, communicating clearly and accessibly, and developing our capacity for customized care—will make all the difference in ensuring that the trauma of the pandemic does not continue to limit our ability to move forward in the service of our colleagues and of our mission.

*Kay Turner is vice president for human resources at Fordham University.*

*Arturo Araujo, S.J., De Profundis III. Seattle University.*



# Artificial Intelligence: The Brave New World of Moral Issues

By Chris Brooks

“ *Data is not information.  
Information is not knowledge.  
Knowledge is not understanding.  
Understanding is not wisdom.* ”

I often open my artificial intelligence classes with this epigram, an amalgam of quotes from Albert Einstein, Clifford Stoll, and Frank Zappa. Students are asked to think a lot about the ways in which computers can be made to act intelligently; to really grapple with this, we need to be clearer about the sorts of reasoning we want our machines to do.

**Data is not information.** We are awash in data—scores, articles, sensor readings, television shows, songs, photos, and more. It’s estimated we create 1.14 trillion terabytes of data each day, and this number is growing by 7% per year. But almost all of this data is worthless to us. It only becomes information when it tells us something new, helps us to make better decisions, or illuminates something we didn’t understand before. Numbers on a medical chart are data; they become information when we attach labels, units and times that allow a doctor or a computational assistant to give them meaning and context.

**Information is not knowledge.** Information is mathematically defined as a reduction in uncertainty. That is, the amount of information in a message is defined by the amount to which it increases our awareness of the world. More pragmatically, information tells us something we didn’t know: the patient’s blood pressure has

increased, or the fuel tank on the car is almost empty, a new episode of our favorite TV show is available. But to apply information in a complex setting, we need to be able to integrate it with other facts about the world; we call this relationship knowledge. Knowledge might tell us that the patient is a 53-year-old male with a history of heart conditions, or that there’s a recharging station 10 miles away. Knowledge is often implicit and informal; exposing it and making it actionable is a core challenge for modern AI systems.

**Knowledge is not understanding.** The map is not the territory. Having the salient facts about a situation is not the same as truly understanding it. The more complex the domain, the more that understanding it requires integrating disparate sources of knowledge, some of which may be difficult to articulate. A computational medical assistant can integrate knowledge about cancer drugs, prognoses, side effects and treatment regimens from different data sources to develop a treatment plan, but it may not be able to empathize in a way that allows it to effectively communicate this to an elderly patient with a fear of medical treatment. An autonomous vehicle can know the local traffic rules, see the road and know how to maneuver the car, which allows it to solve simple driving tasks, but properly transporting passengers through rush-hour traffic in an urban setting requires it to understand the system it operates in and the people it interacts with, and all their complicated, unwritten rules and objectives, at a much deeper level.

**Understanding is not wisdom.** Wisdom tells us how to proceed. Which action is truly the best? What

values should we uphold? What are the fundamental objectives we ought to pursue? Computational agents are able to objectively consider outcomes and recommend those that are preferred—one treatment may produce better results than another, or one delivery route is better than another. But we have not yet figured out how they might engage in these questions of meaning and purpose—what is the best holistic treatment for a patient? What are the problems worth solving?

This idea of reasoning about reasoning, asking those deeper, more fundamental questions, is a hallmark of Jesuit education, and one that we try to develop in our students. As computing, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) become a greater part of our lives, more and more of these levels of reasoning are carried out on our behalf by computational entities, or agents. In some situations, that's fine and works perfectly, whereas in others the complexity and level of risk is unacceptable.

In general, we are comfortable giving over low-level data and information tasks to computers. We are happy to have an app help us sort our photos or recognize spam. But as the risk level or the knowledge complexity of the problem increases, we become less comfortable with giving this responsibility over to a computational agent. Most of us would not be comfortable with computers performing surgery unassisted or acting as police—these are high-risk activities that require a great deal of understanding and wisdom.

This highlights a very important point. In popular culture, the AI is usually a wise-cracking robot sidekick, or perhaps a super-intelligent, world-destroying supercomputer. These make great characters, but they produce the implication that the primary goal of building AI is to create an other, a machine capable of thinking for itself, and that the core ethical challenges revolve

around making sure that this other behaves correctly, and thinking through the sorts of safeguards needed to prevent a takeover by a hostile computer.

But this is not what we are currently building. The term “artificial intelligence” is misleading here; “augmented intelligence” is a better fit. What we're creating today is not a different kind of entity that stands apart from us with its own morals and desires. Rather, we're creating systems that extend our own knowledge, understanding, capabilities and biases. Therefore, the question is not how we ensure that an artificial being can behave ethically, but the harder, ongoing question of how we as humans use these powerful new tools in ways that are ethically appropriate. This includes both constraints, which ensure that we prevent harm, and goals, which determine what problems we should be solving.

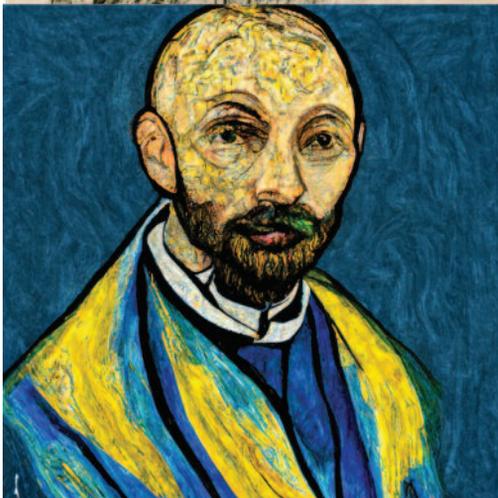
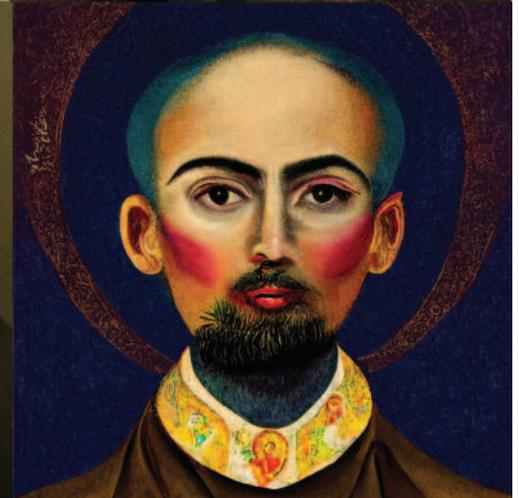
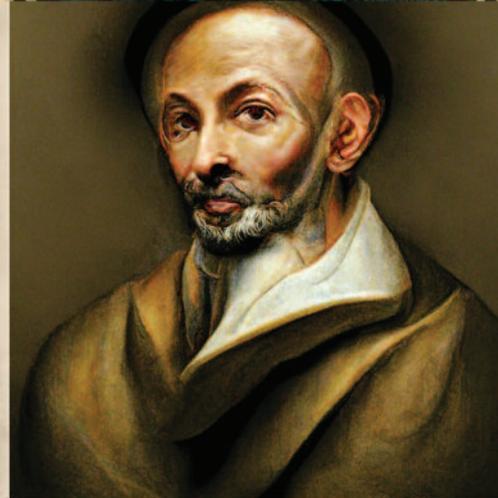
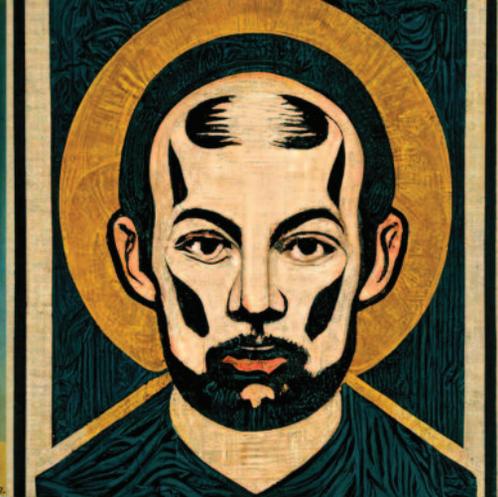
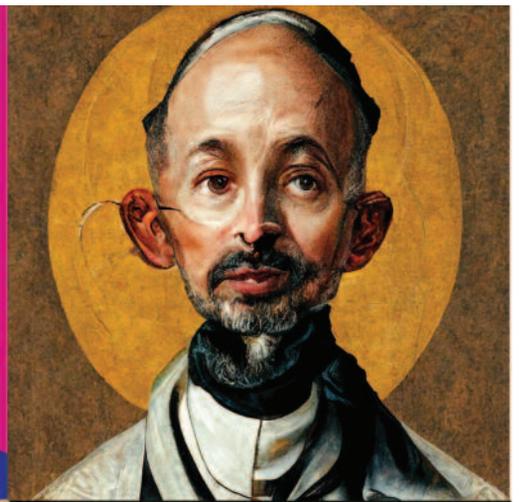
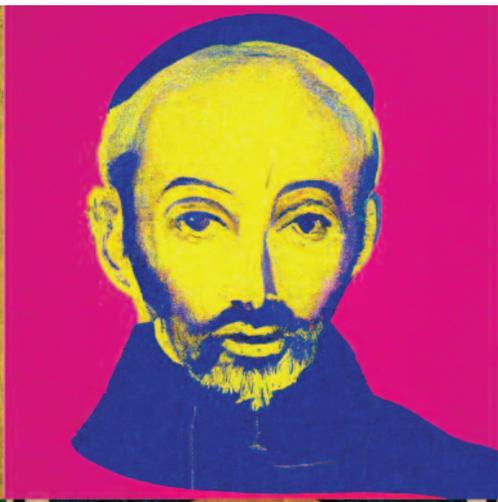
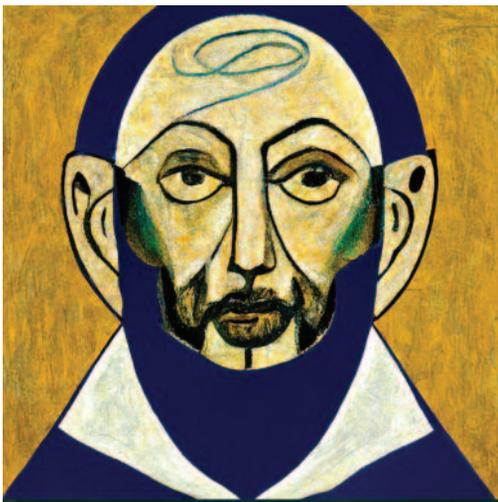
Machine learning is a rich and varied field, with many different approaches and emphases. In the last decade, it's been transformed by the successes of a family of methods known as deep learning. Deep learning is particularly effective at a specific type of task: mapping a high-dimensional input (such as an image, sound, or sequence of words) into a high-dimensional output (such as a different sequence of words, or another image or sound). This has allowed

for the development of a dizzying array of applications, including automated captioning of photos and videos, synthesizing of fake videos, and generation of seemingly intelligent text.

But it's important to understand what is and is not happening in this learning. When humans learn, we typically think of the acquisition of concepts, which come together to

create knowledge. We generalize, we make connections, and we abstract. Deep learning systems are not creating abstract symbolic concepts, or doing the sort of metareasoning we ask of our students (although these are sometimes components of other

**We need to not only build better, smarter AI, we need to be better and smarter ourselves.**



AI systems). Rather, they are using subsymbolic statistical mechanisms to make predictions. They are acting at the level of information; any knowledge or understanding is imposed by the humans creating, using or viewing the system. Because these learners exist within a larger human system, they are subject to the same flaws and biases that make up that system.

For example, one topic I teach all my students about is that of hidden bias. A hidden bias is a bias that exists in a system as a result of some underlying cause that is not immediately apparent. Often, these hidden biases are a result of structural prejudices or inequities.

A classic example of this is the COMPAS system. COMPAS was originally developed as a tool to reduce bias in the detention of criminal defendants awaiting trial. The goal was to use machine learning to take the place of humans, who can clearly have biases, and bail, which is known to be biased against low-income defendants.

By using a database of previous defendants, COMPAS would use past data to learn to predict a risk profile for each defendant. Low-risk defendants could be freed, while high-risk defendants would remain in jail pending trial. Human bias would be left out, leading to a fairer system. Protected characteristics such as race and ethnicity were withheld, so it was

assumed that the system would be fair. However, the result was not what was expected.

It turns out that it's not possible to design a system that a) uses the same risk profile for defendants of different races and b) minimizes the number of wrongly jailed defendants. COMPAS can either have different risk profiles for different races, or else wrongly jail too many Black defendants.

The reason for this is strikingly simple. In the real world, black and white defendants are re-arrested at different rates, often due to racist policing practices such as New York City's famed "broken windows" policy. This means that the dataset COMPAS uses overrepresents Black defendants. Since COMPAS is trained using biased data, it learns and perpetuates those biases, even though race and ethnicity were withheld. The bias is systemic.

In this case, the fundamental AI dilemma is not the creation of an other that will take over or enslave us and needs to learn ethics. Rather, the issue is us—the risks and flaws in COMPAS come from developing systems that perpetuate our own biases, that allow us to take action without grasping the consequences, and that replicate the inequities and injustices that are part of our world. This is one of many examples of AI replicating existing biases. It's also been seen in face recognition, where

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One of the most exciting new applications of AI is generative art.

A neural network is trained, based on a large set of images, to generate other images that are "like" that image. This can then be combined with other tools, such as a neural network that learns the best prompt for an image.

By combining these, we get tools such as Midjourney ([www.midjourney.com](http://www.midjourney.com)), which was used to generate these portraits of Saint Ignatius.

In each case, Midjourney was given the prompt "a portrait in the style of \_", where \_ was, from top left, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Norman Rockwell,

Salvador Dali, Shepard Fairey, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Frida Kahlo, Vincent van Gogh, an 18th Century Qing Dynasty portrait, and Paul Cezanne. I then selected from the many generated candidates and refined the ones I liked.

Midjourney does not have any sort of internal conception of a portrait, or symmetry, or even what a face is. It has no artistic intention. It has learned to associate groups of pixels, color schemes, and particular patterns with keywords extremely effectively, making it a great example of both the promise of AI technologies, and the ease with which we as humans can be fooled.

Chris Brooks

systems were less able to recognize Black faces due to poor training sets, and in hiring, where systems to identify promising recruits replicated the company's internal gender bias.

So we need to not only build better, smarter AI, we need to be better and smarter ourselves. We need to be more aware of what we are building and why we are building it. Where are we getting our data? What generated it, and what underlying biases are present? How do we really define "progress" and "success"? Is it quarterly profits, or "more eyeballs," or is it something deeper, more impactful? How does our work have meaning?

This hard work, the work of thinking carefully and deeply about how to proceed, is the hallmark of Jesuit education. Ignatian pedagogy has at its core a) the ideas of discernment, which teaches us to think carefully about what we choose to do and what values we use in making those choices, b) *magis*, which calls us not to "do more," but to strive to be better, closer to God, and c) solidarity, which reminds us to know and connect with the people affected by this technology.

Within the AI community, there are efforts to do better; to focus our efforts towards problems such as using AI and ML to address problems such as climate

change and sustainable development, and to develop frameworks for measuring and mitigating bias. Within the computing education community, more emphasis on these issues is needed. Discussions on computing's role in society tend to focus on narrow topics of professional ethics, privacy, and intellectual property; these are important questions, but they focus on avoiding harms, rather than choosing to actively do good.

Jesuit universities are poised to take a leadership role in these fundamental questions of how AI and ML should be developed. We explicitly engage in questions of understanding and wisdom, and train students to ask deep questions, to walk in accompaniment with the poor and oppressed, which allows us to better understand their true needs, and to form students who not only ask how they might avoid inadvertently harmful outcomes, but clearly understand the promise, implications and limitations of these tools, and possess the wisdom to use them to fashion a more humane and just world.

We have both the challenge, and the unique skill set, to help students connect this formational, experiential knowledge with their technical knowledge to create a deeper understanding. What

## Five Suggestions for Ethical Scientists

**Ask: Why are you doing this?**

**What is the fundamental problem you are addressing in your work?**

**Who will it help?**

It's easy to get caught up in the hamster-wheel cycle of grant proposals, articles, and deadlines, and forget to reflect on the larger purpose of our work. In this context, it's helpful to recall that St. Ignatius reminds us to discern on our vocation, to ask whether the choices we make are in

service of God's glory and reflective of our truest, deepest selves.

**Ask: Who is included, and who is not?**

Have you heard from all the people who might be involved or affected by your work? Have you considered and incorporated all the perspectives necessary to help you understand the implications of inclusion/exclusion in your work? We

all have blind spots and places where our experience is lacking; it's essential to reflect on and identify those gaps.

**Ask: How can you connect your work to others? How might your work impact other areas?**

Remember to think in systems and to see your contribution as one part of a larger whole. Science is a collaboration, not a competition.



Ben Dunkle, 3D printed chess set. Canisius College.

we need is a concerted effort to integrate our Jesuit way of proceeding with the rapid development taking place within the technical spaces.

As we stand at the precipice of this brave new world, we run the risk once again of deploying technologies whose implications we haven't truly grasped. In order to use AI and ML effectively, it's critical that we understand what they are and are not. AI isn't going to replace us; rather, it's going to extend our capabilities and flaws. If we focus our

energies on preventing the next Skynet or Ultron, we'll miss the mark; we don't need to create rules for intelligent robots.

Rather, we need to do the hard work of improving ourselves.

*Christopher Brooks is professor of computer science and engineering at the University of San Francisco and a member of the National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education.*

**Question authority, both when it comes to getting resources and aligning your values with an institution's agenda.**

Doing science can require significant resources. Getting access to those resources requires advancing the agenda of entities that have the power to provide those resources, such as research labs, corporations, or funding agencies. That agenda might be explicit and laudable, such as addressing something that is

obviously harmful like climate change. More often, though, the agenda might be something more implicitly complex, such as manufacturing weapons or serving the goals of large tech companies. As you seek out the resources and opportunities to pursue scientific questions, look deeply at the agendas of the institutions you collaborate with, and ask whether they truly align with your values.

**Be your own biggest skeptic.**

Physicist Richard Feynman famously said, "The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool." Put differently: It's easy to interpret your findings in a way that leads to the conclusion you were hoping for or to present your results in a way that discourages honest criticism. Be sure not to succumb to this natural temptation.

# Do Amazon Alexas Belong in Dorm Rooms? SLU Said Yes. Their Students Aren't Sure.

By Lexi Kayser

In the fall of 2018, Saint Louis University became one of the first universities in the United States to place personal assistants in student dorms and apartments. SLU, together with Amazon, formulated a new breed of the popular Alexa device: a variation of the Echo Dot equipped with an Ask SLU program, which could answer more than 100 questions about specific university operations. Over 2,300 devices were deployed during that first operational year, and according to SLU's official website, students interacted with them over 150,000 times.

Over time, though, students' questions toward the devices have become far more pessimistic than, "When is Grand Dining Hall open today?" In fact, students do not seem to be asking questions of the devices at all; rather, among one another, they question the relevance of the Alexas themselves.

In a recent, anonymous survey of 600 undergraduate SLU students, only 24 students—four percent—said they had ever used the university-provided Echo Dots. Only one of those students replied that they used the device frequently, with the other 23 saying they only used it sometimes.

Of the 576 students who never use the Echo Dots, only seven percent say they have left them plugged in. The rest claim to have unplugged them and banished them to a drawer, cabinet or corner.

"I do not know anyone who used the Alexa provided in their dorms from the university, which makes the purchase a waste of resources in my opinion," said Danielle McTigue, a third-year SLU student.

McTigue's reluctance is the norm among students. It is difficult to say exactly what caused this shift in public perception; SLU's early reflections on the topic seemed to cite smashing success. However, four years after the original Echo Dots were turned on, it is clear that an increasing number of students are turning them off.

Some students' qualms are directed toward SLU's Wi-Fi rather than the Alexas themselves. In order to operate the devices, students must connect them to the university's private network: a process which many say is tedious. In the typical double dorm room, there are two laptops and two cell phones (along with the occasional tablet, e-reader, TV or gaming console) fighting for a hold in the network. According to the tech blog Lifewire, the more devices connected to a Wi-Fi network, the slower it tends to run—and most college networks are supporting thousands of devices at any given time.

Similarly, Echo Dots have to be plugged into a wall outlet to function. Since the average dorm room is already cramped, outlets are hard to come by, making the Echo Dots a leech of yet another precious resource.

Students who do use the Echo Dots on a regular basis still are not fond of their features. Many wish they could connect to personal accounts to play music, and say the voice commands offered are not useful. They prefer to use the artificial intelligences in their smartphones, like Apple's Siri, which is more easily personalized.

Andrea Porter, a senior who lived on campus during the first two years of the Echo Dots' launch,

was initially excited to use her Alexa—but said the device ultimately fell short of her expectations.

“I honestly thought it was cool that the dorms were going to have the Amazon Alexas. At home, we have one in every room and we mainly use it to listen to music or ask questions if we don’t have our phones on us at the moment,” Porter said. “I was intrigued when SLU sent out an email telling us that they were going to be in our dorms.”

But Porter’s excitement was short-lived when she realized the devices had fewer capabilities than her Alexas back home. Her hopes dropped further when she heard other students expressing their disdain.

“There were a lot of opinions being formed by students about the Amazon Alexas, such as, ‘It’s SLU trying to spy on us,’ and other stuff along those lines,” said Porter. “I didn’t think that’s what they were doing but it did affect me using the Alexa. The negative stuff that was being said made me not want to use it. I did it solely to listen to music if my roommates weren’t in the room with me, but that was the only time I used it.”

The “spy theory” referenced by Porter is one of the most common reasons why SLU students are hesitant to use their Alexas—or even leave them plugged in. Surveyed students were overwhelmingly wary that the devices were listening in on their private conversations. Several students explicitly called them “creepy.” One attempted to deactivate it in a dormitory toilet.

Campus lore about SLU using Alexas to spy on their students worsened in the fall of 2021. After months off-campus for the pandemic, students returned to find that only some rooms were equipped with the devices. A resident advisor in Marchetti Towers said she was ordered to remove them from her residents’ rooms prior to move-in—though, she was never told why. Students speculated that the Alexas were strategically left in certain rooms to listen in on particular people.

Jeremy Schierhoff, SLU’s associate director for Housing Operations, provided a far less ominous explanation for the Alexas’ “mysterious” disappearances.

“Prior to COVID, we would put them all in the rooms in the beginning of the year, before the

students return. And at the end of the year, we’d pull them, because we have summer conferences and we didn’t want all that inventory sitting out because it’s a lot of money,” Schierhoff said.

When the pandemic hit in March of 2020, SLU extended spring break before moving classes fully online. Students returned to campus to pick up their things, and in their haste, some parents accidentally packed the Echo Dots. SLU spent months tracking them down, recollecting them via mail and inventorying them. This, said Schierhoff, was the reason some rooms did not have Alexas during 2021’s fall move-in.

SLU is aware that not all students are happy about the Echo Dots, but maintains that many of their fears are unfounded. The Ask SLU Software—a variation of Alexa for Business—does not have the capability to listen to or record conversations. Alexa for Business’ website confirms, “the organization has no access to the information it receives about how they use a personal device, outside of when they interact with corporate skills. The organization may receive engagement metrics (device and skill usage metrics) for shared devices. In either case, the organization has no access to any voice recordings.”

Moving forward, Schierhoff says SLU is considering allowing students to choose whether or not their room is equipped with an Amazon Alexa. The future success of the program will likely depend on the university’s willingness to adapt to student feedback, providing the features students want to see.

“[In the fall of 2022,] we would like to have them available upon request,” said Schierhoff. “We’re looking forward to getting it going again and seeing if there’s any improved ability with them. Technology moves fast. We’ll be working with [SLU Information Technology Services] to support the initiative.”

*Lexi Kayser is a recent graduate of Saint Louis University, where she received degrees in English and communication.*

# Asking the Right Questions Can Help AI Mean More

By Brian K. Smith

In 1922, Thomas Edison said, “I believe that the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our educational system and that in a few years it will supplant largely, if not entirely, the use of textbooks. I should say that, on the average, we get about two percent efficiency out of school books as they are written today. The education of the future, as I see it, will be conducted through the medium of the motion picture where it should be possible to achieve 100 percent efficiency.”

Though Edison was right about many other things, education has not been radically revolutionized in the last century by film, video, television, or content repositories like YouTube.

What interests me about Edison’s claim is that it’s one of many narratives suggesting that one or more technologies have the potential to make sweeping changes in teaching and learning. For Edison, it was the motion picture. At this moment in time, similar narratives involve the promise of artificial intelligence (AI).

I started working in artificial intelligence when I studied computer science as an undergraduate. AI and the related area of machine learning have made tremendous progress since then. The tools and algorithms in the late 1980s and early ’90s looked promising, but we lacked the computational power and the data necessary to teach computers to perform skills that resemble human cognition.

Fast forward to 2022, and many of the complex problems seem trivial now, from face recognition to language understanding to self-driving vehicles.

It’s not surprising that AI would be applied to problems in teaching and learning. In fact, some of the earliest AI programs were intelligent tutoring systems, machines that “watched” students perform a task and provided feedback if they made mistakes. Going back further, we could consider the teaching

machines developed by Sidney Pressey and B.F. Skinner in the early 20th Century the predecessors of more recent, advanced AI tools to support learning. It’s appealing to think that technology, be it mechanical or computational, could somehow transform the ways that people learn. And AI is just one of many technologies that have been considered as transformational tools.

There are roughly two ways to characterize AI’s use in education. One involves analytics, collecting student data to look for patterns that can be shared with instructors, administrators, and other decision makers. Imagine instrumenting a learning management system to detect when students are logged in, how long they look at specific pages, and how much time is spent on different assignments. Algorithms can be developed to act as an early warning system, discovering students who might be at risk of failing.

The second—AI to support learning—focuses directly on student experiences, monitoring various activities to provide them with useful feedback. For example, AI systems can assist students as they do math problems or write assignments and provide useful feedback if errors are detected. In this case, the computer is analogous to a human tutor or instructor, providing personalized feedback to help students learn and correct their mistakes.

As with Edison, the common thread in these two approaches is efficiency. The implicit claim is that the current system could be better optimized to support learners. Edison pointed to textbooks as an inefficiency. Promoters of AI in education often refer to personalization as a way to increase efficiency.

For example, AI software for math classrooms might present students with problems that are personalized to their current abilities. Students who are more competent in an area would get more

challenging problems; students still struggling with concepts would receive more practice in fundamental skills.

Efficiency isn't a bad thing, but there's more that we can think about with respect to technology and education.

Efficiency and personalization are well aligned with views of learning as a purely cognitive activity that occurs in isolation. It may not be a bad assumption when we think about learning physics concepts or grammar skills. In these cases, a teaching machine or intelligent tutor can help learners master fundamental skills. But we cannot ignore the social and cultural aspects of learning when designing or adopting educational technologies. Much of learning happens when people interact with peers and mentors.

Consequently, we should be asking: How can technology support and enhance those interactions?

We know that many students are turned off by some subjects, and some AI systems claim to detect boredom or frustration as students work. But detecting boredom doesn't solve the bigger concern of designing learning environments that entice learners to engage and challenge themselves to gain deep understanding.

As we think about these issues, I want to propose that great technologists don't talk about technology: They identify significant problems or issues in the world and design appropriate solutions to address them. So instead of asking how AI or any other technology will improve teaching and learning, we should first ask how we want to help learners become better people.

For example, in Jesuit education, we often say that we want people to be attentive, reflective, and loving. (See Howard Gray, S.J.'s "Soul Education: An Ignatian Priority," in the *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George Traub, S.J.) We might ask how AI can help learners to incorporate these abilities into their lives, but it's more important that we first identify these holistic habits before choosing any technology that we may want to introduce.

I haven't discussed any of the issues related to ethics and AI, but they are genuine concerns that also

need to be considered by software designers and engineers. Designers, especially those whose work seeks to advance Jesuit education, should apply appropriate critical lenses to their tools and how they will be used in higher education.

**Instead of asking how AI or any other technology will improve teaching and learning, we should first ask how we want to help learners become better people.**

For example, there's nothing inherently wrong with building AI systems to help computer science students learn programming concepts (I've done this myself). But there are opportunities to think beyond skill acquisition. Adopting ideas from whole person and formative education would lead us to think about issues of empowerment and transformation—how might we design technology-enhanced learning experiences that help people become their best selves intellectually, socially, and spiritually?

Finally, this is not just an AI issue. AI is having its moment, much like motion pictures did in the early 20th Century. It was only a few years ago that, as many remember, Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) were going to reinvent/destroy higher education. And the technological determinists of today are already beginning to construct their narratives around the metaverse, blockchain, and whatever will emerge in the future. It is always tempting to envy emerging technologies and try to find problems for them to solve.

I hope we can resist that temptation and, instead, focus our attention on the concerns we have for our learners and their abilities to be attentive, reflective, and loving people.

*Brian K. Smith is associate dean for research and the Hon. David S. Nelson Chair at Boston College's Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch School of Education and Human Development.*



# In Conversation: Honoring Ideological Divides On and Off Campus

By Lisa A. Kloppenberg, Vincent D. Rougeau,  
and Eduardo M. Peñalver

How can Jesuit institutions effectively respond to the profound ideological division that threatens U.S. society today? What does it mean to embrace a Jesuit, Catholic mission in such a way that it can help our campus communities and our nation to navigate the turbulence through which we are living?

In early May 2022, three high-profile legal scholars and leaders in Jesuit higher education sat down together to address these questions.

Lisa A. Kloppenberg, now a professor of law and special assistant to the vice president for university relations at Santa Clara University, was then serving as interim president at Santa Clara, a role which she assumed after many years as law dean, then as provost there. Vincent D. Rougeau was completing his first year as president of the College of the Holy Cross, after having served a decade as dean of Boston College Law School. Eduardo M. Peñalver of Seattle University was also completing his first year as president, a role to which he was appointed after serving as dean of Cornell University Law School.

**Lisa Kloppenberg:** Thinking about our students in these contentious times, how can our institutions effectively prepare them to be comfortable with ideological differences and to argue and disagree in a constructive way?

**Vincent Rougeau:** Well, one of the reasons it's not easy to do this is that our students are living in a world where they don't really have many elders who are great role models in public life.

Still, we get these young people at formative stages in their lives, where they are more open to learning and engaging, where we can intentionally build community and bring them together to get to know each other in a more intimate way in courses and in residential communities. In these contexts, we can help them build relationships, to feel a little bit more comfort and safety, to get to know people who have different views and see them as human beings. That's a very important start.

**Eduardo Peñalver:** I completely agree that the role models are falling short. For the past six or seven years, the state of our public discourse has been disheartening, and that's a huge portion of our students' lives, really formative times in their development. Another context is the way that people communicate with one another

through social media, where they have not built the muscles of productive disagreement.

So, especially on the Jesuit campus, the beginning of the solution has to be in building relationships of trust among our students and in using these relationships as a foundation for challenging one another in more productive ways.

**LK:** In the classroom, you're always building relationships, particularly in a smaller class. But doing this well demands a lot of intentionality from the faculty and openness from the students, the kind of thing that works in small groups or immersions where people really get to know each other at a deeper level. This is the opposite of social media where we not only self-select into separate groups, but where there's no really deep engagement.

So, how do you see the work of the classroom making a difference in this context? And how should the classroom differ from what's happening in other parts of students' lives?

**EP:** I think when we're preparing students of all backgrounds, we have to pay attention to the importance of really charitable listening. Students may resist that, and today it's just countercultural to train your mind that way.



One of the things I've stressed with law students—and I think we can also apply this to the undergraduate experience—is the importance of empathy, of putting yourself in your opponent's shoes, as an argumentative skill. If you are going to persuade others, that will require putting your mind in places where you would often rather not have it go. Not only do you have to listen, you also have to listen charitably and with empathy to understand the best version of your opponent's argument—and ultimately your own argument.

There is no interest in that kind of persuasion on Twitter, as far as I can tell. And all sides of the political spectrum are falling short in the effort to persuade others, to figure out the opponents' concerns and how I can make the position I'm advocating attractive to someone from that perspective or with that set of experiences. Yet if we want to make progress on any number of issues that we care about on campus and as citizens, we have to be able to do that effectively.

**LK:** That reminds me of Saint Ignatius's famous "presupposition" in which he says we should be "more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false." We listen for that nugget of content that allows us to make the best interpretation, but we also don't demonize that other person when we disagree.

So, my question is how to make sure that we apply this approach in a way that is fair to everyone and that allows us to support vulnerable and marginalized people on campus who don't feel like they belong. How do we help these people engage in argumentation without feeling attacked or silenced?

**VR:** That's a really important issue for us to think about if we're going to live together in a democratic society, and particularly if we're going to live together in this diverse democratic society. The idea that those who are vulnerable or marginalized can come into our institutions and claim a presence and be meaningfully represented in all aspects of our common life—this is critical for building a strong democracy going forward. That we hear the voices of these people in our institutions now when there's at least a little more willingness for them to be heard by classmates and faculty, this can be transformative.

Of course, it can be difficult to engage in diverse groups, and yet diverse conversations allow people to reckon with their own preconceived notions—their own classism or racism, whatever it is—and when they are in a strong community, they can care for one another in a way that allows for transformational work to take place despite the difficulty.

I should add that we've also got to avoid personalizing our critique of structures, so that people don't feel attacked or undermined or judged all the time. If there's a structural problem around the participation of First Gen students or students of color, for example, we can fix those structures. But it doesn't necessarily mean that particular individuals are responsible for building the structures, even if they do have a responsibility to try to get things right now.

**LK:** Let's put ourselves now in the shoes of our faculty, many of whom have growing fears that they might say something or ask a question in a way that becomes an explosive incident. How do you encourage dialogue and deep engagement as a faculty member when it can seem very risky?

**VR:** I think faculty have reason to wonder whether the free exchange of ideas in a classroom is under threat. A lot of our faculty are truly unnerved and truly troubled by the notion that they may be doing something destructive or inappropriate in the classroom, even as they are thinking carefully about how to structure engaging and inclusive conversations. At the same time, they are very wary of attempts, often from institutions beyond campus, to chill debate, to chill learning in an effort to forward some political or ideological program.

## I think faculty have reason to wonder whether the free exchange of ideas in a classroom is under threat.

In the end, we have to start working together to create a context for colleagues to protect one another and even to allow people to make mistakes and not feel that their careers will end because they engage with some very difficult issues. We have to make sure that we can do that work on our campuses in a way that really is enhancing the learning of our students, as well as that of our faculty.

**EP:** As administrators, the most important thing we can do is help faculty by providing them with good resources for better understanding where students are coming from, the kind of training that will help them navigate the shifting sands of our discourse, which can be treacherous. Having good and recurrent support from their institutions can give faculty confidence as they move through this world.

Also, it's important to make sure administrators and people in authority are exercising sound judgment when it comes to conflict and that there is a clear process to work toward a resolution. There aren't actually that many cases where someone's career has been destroyed because of saying something inadvertent in a class. Often, it's something more going on there. And that's where sound judgment and good process make all the difference.

**LK:** Let's go back to the social and cultural context you both brought up at the beginning. The context that our students have been formed in isn't very conducive to deep personal relationships, to dialogue, to working across differences, to finding common ground. So, as you think about this context, what particular things should our institutions seek to stand for as we think about ideological diversity on campus?

**EP:** Jesuit institutions have some real advantages, though we don't always perceive them as advantages. For example, we already talked about the importance of relationship and relationality, which the whole Jesuit pedagogical model is built on. That relationships are baked into our educational approach—this is a kind of social capital that we can draw on when we're grappling with disagreement on campus.

Another thing is the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition which necessitates a sort of discomfort with too much partisanship or tribalism and which encompasses a lot of diversity and tension within itself. At Seattle University, like other Jesuit institutions, all this is

kind of built into our identity. We have this vision statement that says we aspire to be the most innovative and progressive Jesuit and Catholic university in the country. But how do we put all these things together?

I've kind of leaned into the tension embedded in this vision. So, we want to be progressive and Catholic, which means we have to give each one its due. And if one group over here thinks we can't have a particular speaker because they're not progressive enough, then you're teeing up the argument that we can't have some other speaker because they're not Catholic enough. That can't be the path we go down, because it leads to nowhere good. Instead, we have to embrace the tension, the discomfort, the conflict that our vision creates.

In the end, that's all good because that's what universities are for, that's what a Catholic university is for. And our Jesuit, Catholic identity does us a service here.

**VR:** I'm thinking of Saint Ignatius himself here as I think about those spaces of tension, which may be the spaces where we actually find truth and a sense

## The free speech frame doesn't sufficiently take into account the dignity of the person and the way we speak with each other and the way we live with each other.

of the whole. In fact, I think tensions underpin that notion of the “cannonball moment,” too. When there’s something truly challenging and mind altering, it can actually allow you to see more clearly. So I think these institutions need to be able to be places where earthquakes, where cannonball moments, where moments of deep discomfort do the work they are designed to do—the work of moving us forward into clarity.

I think at Catholic institutions, though, we have a real opportunity to have these difficult conversations in a certain context where there are other values that define the rules of engagement, where the humanity of the speaker is always assumed, where we can speak plainly on why we believe in that humanity, and make clear that this humanity in itself is a reason why we think that these conversations have to happen. We can proceed from a deep sense of faith and spirituality that is committed to the dignity of the human person. And not only to the dignity of the human person as an individual, but to the dignity of the human person in community. That value of

interconnectedness is a critical part of how we should talk about disagreement and navigate conflict.

In a culture that is so focused on the individual, so winner-take-all focused, we’re ultimately being countercultural by drawing on our Catholic commitments to structure these conversations as communal and not merely individual.

**EP:** People often frame issues around “freedom of speech” on our campuses, and I think for the reasons Vince just gave, this is not the right frame. Not to say that there isn’t a freedom of speech on campus or that there shouldn’t be a right for free academic exchange.

But the legal rubric of the First Amendment, I think, ignores what’s unique about the educational mission of Jesuit and Catholic universities where the frame isn’t purely about the various substantive positions, but instead about affirming people’s dignity and about a shared entitlement to be engaged in the community. Unlike the free speech frame, this calls on us to be more caring in how we engage

with each other. And that’s just not consistent with the very legalistic free speech framework that people are often trying to bring into these discussions.

**LK:** I agree that the free speech frame doesn’t sufficiently take into account the dignity of the person and the way we speak with each other and the way we live with each other.

And so I think the value of ongoing reflection, which is emphasized in the Jesuit practice of the Examen, can be mobilized for the sake of more effective disagreement, learning, and intellectual growth. We can reflect persistently on how relationships of trust and how the centering of the human person and how the emphasis on the dignity of the person in community—how these things can both create deep discomfort, but also might help us grow closer to the truth.

So, what else might you see as practices or habits that could help us in these ideologically divided times?

**VR:** Building on that point about discernment, we are engaged in an educational project that ultimately centers that practice. This is an important gift of the Jesuit tradition, and I believe that with Jesuit institutions, we are adding something very distinctive and very important to the scope of higher education in this country.

In a society where there's a lot of noise, a lot of short-term thinking, a lot of social media which really is designed to undermine reflection and produce quick emotive responses, we are responsible for handing on this practice of discernment to young people. I'm convinced discernment will help with the larger problem of ideological conflict because, if they haven't even been self-reflective and they haven't done any kind of personal discernment, people are going to be more likely to join these forces of negativity surrounding them.

So, even encouraging students just to take the time to be at peace alone—this is something we can do. We can also encourage and support them in being in a setting where it's quiet, where there are no electronics, and where they actually come to engage with and know other people without distraction.

**EP:** Within the Spiritual Exercises, there's also the use of imagination and the deep consideration of possible alternatives that is involved in the imaginative work of true discernment. There's the spiritual practice of imagining yourself in those various alternatives, which can be good practice for engaging imaginatively with others' perspectives.

And tying all this together is the imperative to find God in all things. I think the Jesuits have

always followed that to its logical conclusions—going anywhere, engaging with anyone and everyone. They're very clear about who they are and what they stand for, but the openness of their spirituality is really what I think is so distinctive and is something we need to develop amid really heated ideological and political battles. Social media definitely primes you for emotional responses that prompt you to ridicule the people you disagree with—and this certainly cuts across the political spectrum.

But the idea that God might be at work among the people we're disagreeing with, amid the perspectives that we find appalling—the kind of openness behind this idea is challenging in a good way. And I'm not exempting myself from struggling here. But the notion of finding God in all things is a tool that we can use as leaders of Jesuit institutions as we encourage members of our communities to engage more productively with one another and, really, with people outside of our campus communities in the end.

**LK:** I would add one more kind of practice from the Jesuit world, which is accompanying those on the margins and those who are suffering. In the context of ideological diversity and debate, this means factoring in and making sure everybody is heard. This includes our diverse students and our alumni who

might have a different mindset than our current students, and it particularly means those who've been hurt in our campus communities.

In the end, I think the skills of accompaniment are what we need to be teaching our students, and accompaniment is what we need to be developing in our faculty and staff so that our institutions can move toward true openness and discernment and a true willingness to engage deeply with one another in the pursuit of a common good which serves us all.

**VR:** One final thought.

Ultimately, we need to learn to live with difference and tension and even conflict because these things will always be present—and particularly so in a diverse society.

And being at peace amid all of this, while also having some level of sophisticated understanding of the fact that there's value in this dynamic of disagreement and in our diverse society—I hope we can continue to grow in that direction. There are going to be times when our differences and conflicts will make things very difficult. But if Jesuit institutions actually do the work we've been talking about, our whole society can reap the benefits of what they have to offer.

## *Detroit Mercy* *A strong union and mission* *combine to build leaders*

By Ron Bernas



**University of Detroit Mercy** is the only institution of higher education in the world that can boast having both the Jesuits and the Religious Sisters of Mercy as its founders.

Separately, the two religious orders have impressive histories of providing education to all people, service to the underserved and leadership in the community. Together, they support and enhance each other to create a unique, Catholic-centered education for a diverse group of students from

metro Detroit, across the United States and around the world.

The Society of Jesus has a history in Detroit that dates to the 1600s. In 1877, at the invitation of Bishop Caspar Henry Borgess of Detroit, the Jesuits established Detroit College. Located on a bustling stretch of Jefferson Avenue in downtown Detroit, the college quickly expanded into the University of Detroit. In 1927, under the guidance of Fr. John P. McNichols, the University moved many of its programs to a

sprawling campus at Livernois and Six Mile Road, which is more commonly known in Detroit as McNichols Road, named after the forward-thinking former university president.

In 1940, the Religious Sisters of Mercy, headed by Mother Mary Carmelita Manning, R.S.M., established their Detroit Province also in west Detroit. Mercy College opened its doors in 1941 to prepare young women for careers in nursing and teaching so that they might contribute intelligently and effectively to the welfare of society. Over the years, it expanded into a comprehensive liberal arts college that served both men and women.

The Jesuits and the Sisters of Mercy established their institutions separately to improve the lives of men and women through higher education. They were also committed to the city of Detroit which, at the time, was a rapidly expanding urban center. Students would benefit from learning in a dynamic urban community and gain valuable experience that only a major metropolitan area could offer. At the same time, Detroit and the region would benefit from the talents and skill of graduates.

In 1990, University of Detroit and Mercy College of Detroit combined their resources and operations to form University of Detroit Mercy, a

Photos courtesy of University of Detroit Mercy.





consolidated institution with the same driving forces. This consolidation allowed the University to both maximize and expand academic effectiveness, while improving efficiencies in administration. This consolidation has been widely recognized as an effective, creative response to the challenges that faced and continue to face private higher education.

Today, Detroit Mercy has seven schools across four campuses, three of them in Detroit. Undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs are located at the McNichols Campus. Detroit Mercy Law and Detroit Mercy Dental have their own campuses nearby and a new campus in the Detroit suburb of Novi houses some health professions and criminal justice programs. In addition, partnership with Aquinas College in Grand Rapids provides a Detroit Mercy Nursing degree to students on Aquinas' Grand Rapids campus. Graduates of the University are seen in leadership positions in industries from the automotive field to business to communications to the law and dentistry.

Detroit Mercy's Engineering programs are well-known. The University had one of the first co-op



programs in the country and attracts students from across the United States. Each year, students from the College of Engineering & Science and the McAuley School of Nursing students work together to create a device to help improve the lives of people with disabilities in the Detroit community. This capstone project puts real people at the center of design issues and is just one of many ways the University helps the community. Our College of Health Professions & McAuley School of Nursing offer many programs from Nurse Anesthesia to Health Services Administration to Doctor of Nursing Practice to Clinical Nurse Specialist. The Physician Assistant program was the first in Michigan and celebrates its 50th year in 2022.

In addition, the Theatre program has produced national-award-winning productions for more than 50 years and our alumni can be seen on stage, and in movies and television regularly.

In 2019, the University completed its most successful campaign ever, raising more than \$115 million for scholarships, faculty and programming, facilities and unrestricted operational funds.

In 2020, the University announced a major campus renovation project that will modernize and upgrade nearly every building on its flagship campus and includes a complete re-imagining

of its student union, which is set to open this year. The project will provide greater efficiency and sustainability and eliminate buildings for which maintenance was becoming too costly.

Students are responding to this energy on our campuses: The fall 2022

freshman class was the largest the University welcomed in the last 12 years; one third are first-generation college students.

This energy and momentum, that started under President Antoine M. Garibaldi, is what the University's 26th president Donald B. Taylor expects to build on. He took office July 1, 2022, saying "Everything is in place to take the next step to be the university of choice for metro Detroit and beyond."

*Ron Bernas is director of communications for University of Detroit Mercy and editor of Conversations in Jesuit Higher Education.*

# Learning in Conflict: Ignatian Dialogue in a Polarized America

By Julie Schumacher Cohen

**It has become** axiomatic to observe that the United States is highly polarized.

In a 2020 Pew Research Center poll, eight in ten registered voters in both political camps said “their differences with the other side were about core American values.” Not only is the public divided substantively about policy issues, but it is marked by what political scientists call “affective polarization,” with increased distrust and dislike impacting social relationships. In addition to these tensions, the country is also not immune to political violence, as was displayed during the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

As future leaders, college students are an important part of our civic reality; this national context is the environment in which they are learning. The 2016 American Freshman survey called that cohort of incoming students “the most politically polarized” in its history.

In 2017 at the University of Scranton, a team of faculty and staff colleagues began a program called *Bursting our Political Bubbles: Dialogue Across Differences*. Through co-curricular dialogues on such topics as immigration, the NFL kneeling protests, guns, and cancel culture, we seek to help students better understand others’ perspectives, and what values, experiences and motivations undergird them. We have worked with nonprofit partner Essential Partners to incorporate their reflective, structured methods.

In keeping with intergroup “contact theory,” the dialogue groups are designed to foster “equal status” with a communication agreement that sets time limits so that no one voice dominates, allows participants to “pass” if they are not ready or do not wish to respond, and clarifies that “civility does not mean lack of dissent,” to make space for necessary disagreement.

Such dialogue is not new. Back in the 15th Century, St. Ignatius of Loyola provided his own guidance to the Jesuits attending the Council of Trent, urging the Fathers to “understand the meaning, learnings and wishes of those who speak” and to express views with “humility and sincerity.” Communication across difference has also long been promoted by political theorists, such as Jurgen Habermas, John Stuart Mill, and Hannah Arendt, as beneficial to citizens in a democracy.

So what does such dialogue yield? Working with faculty partners Teresa Grettano (English & theatre) and Jessica Nolan (psychology), we designed a mixed-methods approach to assessing the effectiveness of political dialogues.

Our goal was not to change anyone’s attitude about a particular topic, but rather to shift participants’ attitudes towards the “other” and about engaging around contentious issues. Our results to date have shown that participation in a single dialogue session can increase participants’ willingness to engage in dialogue across

differences going forward; it can also result in a lowering of the perception that political dialogue is a “waste of time.”

The latter was underscored by March 2022 dialogue participants who conveyed that despite widening political differences which make dialogue harder than ever – due to COVID-19, contentious elections, and the murder of George Floyd – the surfacing of inequities and tensions does create an opportunity to address longstanding American problems.

Students completing post-dialogue essays have also revealed more about their learning, which may be understood in terms of three categories offered by education scholar Rachel Wahl: “hermeneutic” where it deepens understanding of other people; “deliberative” where it increases understanding of political issues; and “process” where it builds capacity for difficult conversations.

We see “hermeneutic” learning in a student who shared that the dialogue “helped me to know

[my peers] beyond their name/major/hometown.” “Deliberative” learning can be observed in another student’s assertion that, “If we stay in our political bubble...we aren’t learning anything. When we engage in dialogue with those we disagree with, it challenges us not only to defend our own opinion but to also consider the other side of the issue.” Students wrote about the dialogue “process,” sharing that they “enjoyed how there was no back and forth arguments,” giving space for reflection. Articulation and listening were also key themes. One student concluded that most participants “could effectively communicate about social issues even when they disagree, which is truly thrilling.” Another underscored how “just simply listening has a profound effect on the way we hear and understand people.”

The learning benefits of dialogue are significant for institutions of higher education, particularly Jesuit institutions. At the same time, it is not a panacea. For instance, my colleague Dr.



Michael F. Tunney, S.J., *Risen Christ and Oscar (The Breakfast Room Plant)*. St. Ignatius Jesuit Community, NYC.



Grettano urges participants to “keep in mind the ‘Ignatian presupposition’ or ‘plus sign’ to the extent possible”; suspending judgment of another can risk downplaying problematic behaviors or prejudices. Further research around dialogue and depolarization is also necessary and ongoing. Some political scientists have pointed out that reducing partisan conflict in the American past “has sometimes come at the expense of the rights of, and justice for, marginalized minority groups.”

While it seems obvious, and necessary, to want to bring down our political temperatures, some amount of disruption and confrontation is often essential for societies to reject and overcome oppression. As the University of Pennsylvania’s Diana Mutz has written in *Hearing the Other Side*, there is an “inherent tension between promoting a society with enthusiastically participative citizens and promoting one imbued with tolerance and respect for differences of opinion.”

Can we dialogue to decrease intolerance and foster better understanding and still take principled stands against our political opponents through activism and advocacy? If we seek a future with nonviolent approaches that address longstanding injustices, it’s clear that the practice of dialogue is one important, though not exclusive, educational component.

As Pope Francis wrote in his most recent encyclical *Frattelli Tutti*, “Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved in conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest and patient negotiation.”

College campuses remain important places for such opportunities.

*Julie Schumacher Cohen is assistant vice president for community engagement and government affairs and chair of the community-based learning board at the University of Scranton. She is also a doctoral student in political science at Temple University.*

Left: Arturo Araujo, S.J., *Until We Meet Again*. Seattle University.

Right: Ben Dunkle, *16 Kiev Icons*. Canisius College.



AP

16 Kiev Icons

BD22

# Fundraising Can Be a Spiritual Work

By Amy S. Turbes

***“We must be both mission-driven and donor-centric.”***

I often use this simple tag line to spark discussion about fundraising. Despite its simplicity, embedded within it is an important tension: The truth is that what donors may want is not always aligned with being true to an institutional mission.

Institutions of higher education are under scrutiny for the high cost, and the need for more resources to limit those costs has never been greater. But despite this challenging context, Jesuit colleges and universities are, or ought to be, animated by mission in every area of their operations. Everything they do should serve the ultimate goal of forming “people for and with others,” and this should be no less the case among those responsible for cultivating donors as it is among teachers and mentors, campus ministers, or student affairs professionals.

In fact, the work of fundraising is the work of expanding the circle of those who are responsible for mission. In his book, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, beloved spiritual writer Henri Nouwen put this beautifully: “Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission.”

So, what happens when donors want to participate, but their ethical compass or personal motivation aren’t mission-aligned? Some argue it’s better to accept funding and use it for good rather than risk the money being used elsewhere for something less noble. Others say we should draw the line at taking funds from someone whose public and private life, or how they made their money, aren’t aligned with mission.

I want to suggest that there are no simple answers to this question. The ethics of fundraising

to advance an institutional mission can be complicated, and individual cases call for careful reflection. But fortunately, Jesuit institutions have some ready tools that can help in discerning the best answer in each particular case.

One such tool is the Mission Priority Examen (MPE) process in which each U.S. Jesuit college and university is now invited by the Society of Jesus to participate every five years. The MPE offers a valuable opportunity to think critically about current donation acceptance policies and due diligence procedures, and it affords institutions a chance to ask serious questions about how donors may either support or impede mission. Unfortunately, such evaluations have historically been conducted by a select few institutional leaders. But if we undertake them as part of our institutional MPE—inviting students, faculty, mission integration leaders, and others to help fundraising professionals in discerning how best to support mission—institutions have a powerful accountability mechanism at the ready.

Of course, everyone who thinks about these questions must understand that, even though we work in the not-for-profit sector, higher education has been becoming more business-like, a development which requires fundraising departments to be data-driven. Using data in fundraising is a good thing because it often provides a clear focus in our work and allows us to be better stewards of limited resources.

At the same time, something is lost when we dwell on the numbers. In Jesuit higher education we boast that our students are more than a number. We recruit on the belief that our students are individual persons with innate human dignity and are educated to see others in the same way.

Yet even in Jesuit institutions, fundraising is singularly evaluated on numbers: unrestricted operating funds raised, alumni participation rates,

number of donors retained, or scholarships or endowed chairs funded. Such categories make it easy to see donors in dehumanized terms: million-dollar-level donors, members of a particular donor society, LYBUNTS (those who gave Last Year But Unfortunately Not This Year), SYBUNTS (those who gave Some Years But Unfortunately Not This Year), and other such abstract groupings.

I should state that I believe in employing data-driven fundraising efforts and segmenting donors into recognizable categories. Having worked in this field for almost two decades, I know that introducing these practices has improved our work, allowing us both to do more with our resources and to better serve our mission. But we should never use abstract data at the expense of honoring the humanity of everyone our mission touches, including our donors.

Though his example is one from a very different historical time and place, we can look to St. Ignatius for some help. He was, in the true sense of the word, a fundraiser, and he was a good one. Ignatius cared deeply for his benefactors; he prayed for them, not for their resources. What we can learn from Ignatius, I think, is that fundraising is best understood as a ministry, the purpose of which is to allow others to serve God and humanity.

Inspired by Ignatius, fundraisers should create opportunities for meaningful dialogue with donors, listening deeply to discern what greater good they seek to serve. Theirs is the work of trying to match individual passions and aspirations for the greater good to institutional mechanisms for reaching the good.

Ignatius would further challenge fundraisers, though, by asking them to examine how their work serves donors. Tax breaks, family legacies, the opportunity to invest in a beloved institution—these are the standard benefits we think of today.

But Ignatius would undeniably ask fundraisers to think beyond these standard categories and to ask: What about the benefit to the donor's soul? If fundraisers take that question seriously, they will have to consciously give up an approach based simply on racking up the numbers and expanding the resources. They will have to love donors as human beings who are valuable beyond the resources they can provide.

Again, Nouwen said it best: "We must have the courage to go to the rich and say, 'I love you, and it



Littleton Alston, St Ignatius – cloisters. Creighton University.

is not because of your money but because of who you are.' We must claim the confidence to go to a wealthy person knowing that he or she is just as poor and in need of love as we are... We do not need to worry about the money. Rather, we need to worry about whether, through the invitation we offer them and the relationship we develop with them, they will come closer to God."

And yes, as hard as it is to hear, there are times when helping someone draw closer to God might mean not accepting their resources.

Taking a cue from Ignatius, fundraisers at Jesuit institutions should aim, above all, to become ministers of fundraising. They can and should be more than relationship managers, more than stewards, more than solicitors. They can and should be people who provide a pathway for donors to draw closer to God by identifying and supporting that greater good which they seek to serve. Doing this will help make our institutions truly mission-driven and donor-centric.

*Amy S. Turbes is senior director of principal gifts operations at Creighton University.*

# Forum: What is ‘Mission Drift,’ and How Can We Avoid It?

By Christopher Kaczor, John Cecero, S.J., Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, and Michael P. Murphy

**Leaders in Catholic** higher education and beyond have long spoken of “mission drift,” something that happens when the core values and goals inherent in an institution’s mission are neglected. If we can be more specific about the various forms that mission drift takes, we might be better situated to recognize it and to consider possible remedies.

Jesuit institutions tend to define their mission in terms of the service of faith, the promotion of justice, and the education of the whole person. With this in mind, I propose that we can distinguish five senses of mission drift: inattention, reduction, dilution, segregation, and discrimination. I further propose that we can identify five corollary remedies: mindfulness, comprehensiveness, depth, integration, and affirmation.

## **Mission inattention vs. mission mindfulness**

Mission inattention, perhaps the most common form of mission drift, takes place when an institution’s mission is forgotten in practice. Two examples of this are when no one thinks to ask a candidate for a faculty position how they would contribute to mission, and when the “best practices” of secular institutions are uncritically adopted, regardless of whether such practices enhance or detract from mission.

By contrast, I want to suggest that mission mindfulness involves making no major administrative decision without asking, “Does this action enhance our mission?” Mission mindfulness

further takes into account the institution’s values and goals in all areas, from hiring faculty to the shape of student life, even in the speakers invited to campus. One way to frame the issue is to ask, if the institution formally abandoned its Catholic and Jesuit mission, what, if anything, would change? If nothing would change in a particular area of the institution, then that area is already functionally dead in terms of contributing to the mission.

## **Mission reduction vs. mission comprehensiveness**

Mission reduction typically leaves unmentioned the service of faith, passes lightly through the education of the whole person, and focuses almost exclusively on the promotion of justice. This is a wide and easy road to mission drift.

Since no reasonable person is opposed to the promotion of justice, using promotion of justice solely to define a college or university as Catholic or Jesuit is virtually meaningless. Take this example from a state university’s website: “As a community of students, faculty and staff, we at California State University San Marcos are committed to respecting and reflecting the diversity of our region within a context of social justice.” If commitment to justice is all that is needed to connote a Jesuit mission, it will be easy even for state institutions to claim a Jesuit mission.

As a remedy for such mission reduction, I propose a mission comprehensiveness that emphasizes all three parts—faith, justice, and education of the whole person. Under mission

comprehensiveness, job candidates, as well as faculty being evaluated for tenure or promotion, might be asked to articulate how they would or do contribute to all three pillars of the mission, not just that one part of the mission that all persons of goodwill already accept. Further, no student should graduate from a Jesuit university without a basic understanding—whether they agree is up to them—that faith and reason are in harmony according to the Catholic tradition.

## Mission dilution vs. mission depth

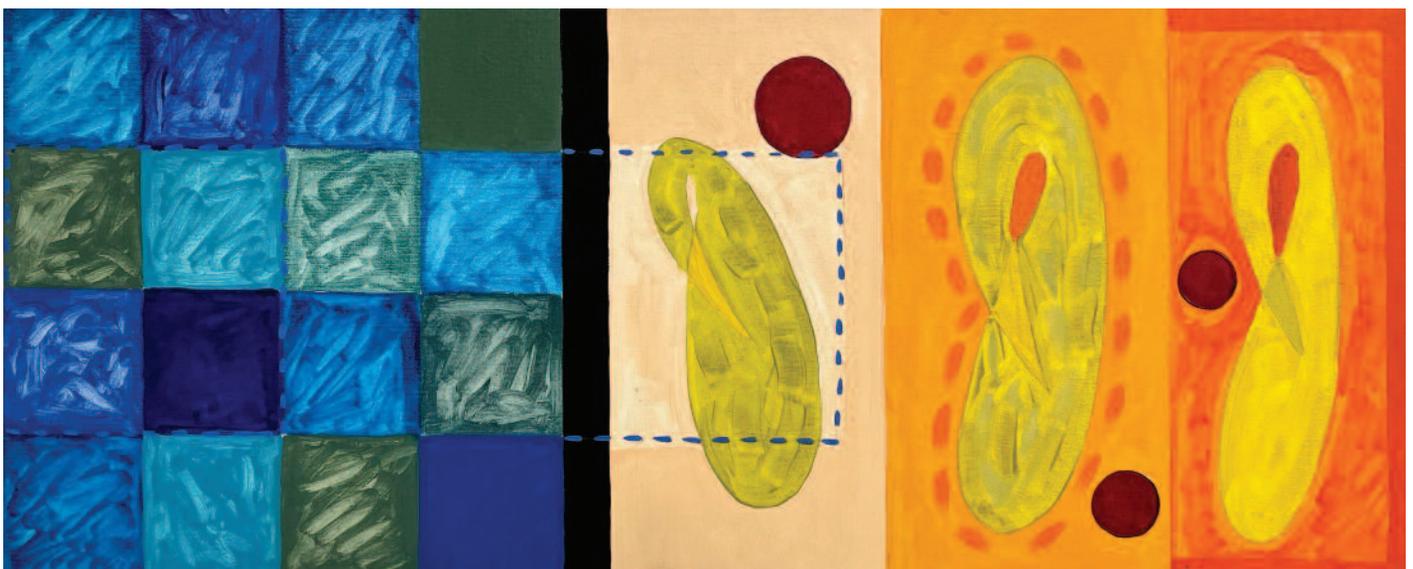
Mission dilution takes place when faith, justice, and education of the whole person are understood in empty ways. “The mission means whatever you want it to mean,” a dean once told me. Such mission dilution transforms the red wine of a distinctive mission into the water of the least common denominator.

What does mission dilution look like? Think, for example, of the libertarian capitalist, the totalitarian communist, and the faithful Catholic, all of whom cheer for justice in the abstract, but have radically different understandings of it in the particular. In the same vein, if the promotion of

justice as understood in a college or university has no meaningful content, it cannot meaningfully advance mission.

When mission dilution has set in, the rich tradition of Catholic thought on justice is flattened out or neglected in the curriculum. Further, questions about ultimate meaning and about the content of faith are subordinated to career preparation. The exploration of the age-old Christian tradition of engagement between faith and reason devolves into an anodyne conversation that simply affirms that faith is not the opposite of thinking. Finally, when mission dilution has set in, the education of the whole person—a person with a soul and a vocation, called by God to live a good and virtuous life—gives way to the transmission of knowledge with little concern for the cultivation of wisdom and the promotion of spiritual and moral growth. Such a context allows for a certain kind of “caring for students,” but not one that has any particular purchase on mission in the Catholic and Jesuit sense.

By contrast, I propose that institutions adopt a program of mission depth which encompasses faith, justice, and the education of the whole person. An institution embracing mission depth not only has a strong campus ministry program and plenty of volunteer service opportunities, it



Beatrice Mady, *Not the Color of Moon Dust*. Saint Peter's University.

also finds ways to ensure that these things are integrated with the curriculum such that they can have a powerful impact on all students—such that, alongside students’ academic studies, the riches of the spiritual life, particularly Catholic spiritual life, and a dedication to serving others provide opportunities for growth in virtue. Mission depth, in this sense, becomes a means for ensuring that the mission can make a true and lasting imprint on students, far beyond their narrow intellectual and professional development.

## Mission segregation vs. mission integration

Colleges and universities are composed of various units, such as academic departments, student services, and athletics. Mission segregation happens when people and their particular units act in a way that presupposes that the institution’s Catholic and Jesuit mission is someone else’s job: “I’m not in campus ministry or in the theology

department. They take care of that.” Even within a department—philosophy, for example—with a natural connection to the mission, someone might think, “Well, we’ve got my colleague who teaches the Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan, so we’ve got that box checked.”

By contrast, an institution with a vibrant Catholic and Jesuit mission does not practice mission segregation, but mission integration. What does mission integration look like when it comes, for example, to research and teaching? Novelist and sociologist Andrew Greeley put it this way:

“Catholic colleges should strive to do what they are either uniquely or best qualified to do—explore the Catholic tradition. ... At the research level, there should be (not exclusive) emphasis on Catholic topics—for example, Catholic social theory, the effects of Catholic education, American Catholic history, Catholic literature, Catholic spirituality, the history of Catholic art and worship, 20th-Century Catholic thought, Vatican II, Catholic ethnic groups, the spirit of Irish (name the ethnic group of your choice) Catholicism. ... My

contention is not that this is the only kind of research that should be done at Catholic universities, only that Catholic research should be a rich opportunity that the universities would want to pursue.”

Such a research focus should be complemented with a teaching focus, not just in theology, but in all departments. That includes not only the arts and humanities, but also the STEM disciplines and professional schools. Though the connections may not be immediately obvious to all, the full range of disciplines can be in fruitful conversation with the Catholic intellectual tradition. In the end, if research and teaching simply mirrors that of a typical private or state schools, it is hard to see how an academic unit is serving mission.

It is important to note that this approach can be open to people of any faith or no faith, so long as the individual has an understanding of and respect for the Catholic intellectual tradition. At the same



Wanda Sullivan, *Artificial Rose of Sharon*. Spring Hill College.

time, without a substantial number of researchers and teachers who know and love the Catholic intellectual tradition in every academic department and school, an institution will be unable to engage with that tradition in an integrated way.

## **Mission discrimination vs. mission affirmation**

A final sense of mission drift involves discrimination against those within a college or university who profess religious faith. Indeed, sociologist George Yancey has argued that “politically—and, even more so, religiously—conservative academics are at a distinct disadvantage in our institutions of learning, threatening the free exchange of ideas to which our institutions aspire and leaving many scientific inquiries unexplored.”

What does mission discrimination look like? Historian James Hitchcock noted that, “People have been denied tenure, lost their jobs, were never hired in the first place, or were otherwise penalized for upholding Church teaching.” Beyond these things, mission discrimination happens when whole classes of people are simply marginalized for what they believe or study. It also happens when colleagues and coworkers make cruel jokes or snide remarks about religious beliefs, practices, and leaders. For example, I have been repeatedly called a “fundamentalist,” a term I consider marginalizing, stigmatizing, and ostracizing, by a university administrator even after I made requests never to be called this offensive term. When an otherwise qualified person with the religious beliefs of Pope Francis is not hired or is looked upon as outlier or an oddity to be excluded from important positions, mission discrimination has taken place and equal opportunity has been denied on the basis of religion.

To avoid mission discrimination, a university should practice mission affirmation in hiring, promoting, and retaining otherwise qualified faculty who hold religious, and particularly Catholic, beliefs and commitment. Such faculty

contribute to diversity of thought on campus rather than simply reinforcing what a recent faculty climate survey at Loyola Marymount University called a “majority secular liberal point of view.”

## **Conclusion**

If an institution is to avoid mission drift, it requires a positive focus on mission mindfulness (vs. inattention), comprehensiveness (vs. reduction), depth (vs. dilution), integration (vs. segregation), and affirmation (vs. discrimination). Jesuit institutions that take care to ensure that their mission is comprehensively applied, consistently instantiated, and authentically engaged with the Catholic intellectual and spiritual tradition need not worry about mission drift.

Jesuit universities that do not, however, will sooner rather than later cease being Jesuit universities.

*Christopher Kaczor is professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University.*

## **In Response: Polarities don't move things forward**

While Christopher Kaczor's observations and warnings on mission drift are, or should be, of great concern to anyone in Catholic and Jesuit higher education who cares about preserving and strengthening mission awareness and implementation, it seems to me that the remedies offered, and the examples used to illustrate them, are less than promising as strategies for real improvement. At the conceptual level, they may make eminently good sense, but how to communicate their rationale with our colleagues who may be less than sanguine about Catholic and Jesuit mission is lacking in this essay.

For example, Kaczor proposes mission comprehensiveness as a remedy for a virtually

exclusive focus on the promotion of justice, at the exclusion of faith and the education of the whole person. He proposes that faculty up for hire, tenure, or promotion be asked how they would contribute to all three aspects of mission. What should happen if the person can only respond to one or two? Should they not be hired, or denied tenure or promotion? And what about the faculty persons who are interviewing the candidate, if they neglect to ask about all three?

In other words, it may not be enough simply to

assert that a given question must always be asked; instead, it may be more fruitful to explore how to engage the candidate or the faculty interviewer about what they may be thinking, and if there are real reservations about one of these areas, to engage them in a fruitful dialog in order to explore their assumptions, concerns, and hesitations. The assumption in my framing here is that Catholic and Jesuit institutions are themselves mission territories that require patience, empathy, and creativity on the part of those who are committed to the effective communication of mission.

With this in mind, one promising path to a more fruitful approach to mission drift and its remedies may be found in the thought of Pope Francis on conflict resolution. In his 2020 book, in collaboration with biographer Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, the Pope alludes to the work of the theologian and philosopher Romano Guardini, who frames apparent opposites as contrapositions instead of as polarities. Unlike polarities which invite conflict and stalemate, contrapositions foster creative tension.

Take, for example, Kaczor's concern with mission dilution with respect to the curriculum, where questions of faith are subordinated to career preparation. The contraposition in this instance might be between an emphasis on an intrinsic understanding (a humanistic, Catholic one) versus an instrumental understanding (a job training or return-on-investment approach). Instead of merely being posed as conflictual, these might be creatively engaged by proponents on either side, not with a focus on achieving consensus, but with a focus on a better understanding and creative implementation of one contraposition as enhancing the other contraposition within the curriculum.

Kaczor might object that it's already too late for this process to succeed. On the other hand, this kind of engagement may end up strengthening mission in ways not yet imagined or conceived.

*John Cecero, S.J., is vice president for mission integration and ministry and associate professor of psychology at Fordham University.*



Littleton Alston, *Flame East View*. Creighton University.

## In Response: Invite all into the mission discussion

Christopher Kaczor not only names concerns that many committed to Catholic higher education share, but also offers useful categories for understanding the complex challenge of mission drift. I can call to mind specific examples in my experience that instantiate Kaczor's categories. For these reasons, I find myself sympathetic to much of what he writes. Still, precisely because of my real life experiences, I wonder about some elements of Kaczor's approach.

For example, when it comes to mission dilution and its remedy, mission depth, I question whether Kaczor ultimately goes deep enough. For him, mission dilution is described as a "flattened out" understanding of mission which emphasizes justice in the curriculum to the exclusion of other mission-related values.

But from another angle, a Jesuit mission that is, in fact, deeply embedded requires that the concerns of justice, equity, and inclusion are not only infused throughout the curriculum, but also throughout the entire institution. True mission depth requires that these concerns are evident in all administrative decisions and structures, not just in the curriculum or any other particular department or area. From the perspective of justice, equity, and inclusion, mission segregation, another of his categories, remains a real problem.

In dealing with the real life situation of faculty, staff, and administrators, I also wonder if there's more of a bright side than Kaczor recognizes. Even at institutions where the imperatives of "professionalization," rather than "mission literacy" or "mission fit," has already determined the makeup of the faculty, staff, and administrators, I would contend that opportunities to encounter and understand mission with greater depth can be a critical first step in remedying mission drift. The solution is not just in hiring people committed to the Catholic tradition (though, I agree, this is important), but in inviting those already among us to make the mission their own.

Here is where our commitment to justice can be of particular help. A shared commitment to justice—however different the definition of this may be—is an invaluable entry point for colleagues to learn more about the Catholic intellectual tradition, specifically Catholic Social Thought.

Further, hiring leaders among faculty, staff, and administrators who bring diverse expertise, lived experiences, and perspectives—people who are open to engaging with the mission, even if it is at first only understood as a commitment to justice—has played a critical role in enabling Jesuit institutions to make real the long-standing goal of the "service of faith and the promotion of justice" in our own changing social contexts. We have seen this play out dramatically in recent years as our institutions have had to contend with the reality of their participation in the systemic exclusion of persons because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. Look at all the work that has been undertaken, in part due to the commitment of this diverse community of leaders, to articulate and support the AJCU commitment to be anti-racist and thereby to live up to the mission-based call to justice, equity, and inclusion.

In the end, hiring those who understand an institution's mission simply as commitment to justice only becomes problematic if they are not provided with rich opportunities to learn about the evolution of the understanding of justice in the Jesuit tradition and invited to think critically within the framework of Catholic Social Thought, in which justice is always profoundly linked with faith.

That's why programs that invite colleagues to bring their disciplinary expertise and lived experience into conversation with Catholic and Jesuit commitment to social justice are so effective. Such programs not only deepen the understanding of mission among colleagues previously unfamiliar with it, but they also provide those already well-versed in the Catholic perspectives with new opportunities to make a greater impact in the world we are called to serve.

*Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, a theologian, is vice president for mission integration at Seattle University.*

## In Response: Innovate in the Catholic tradition

University of California chancellor Clark Kerr famously observed in 1957 that higher education is best described as “a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over car parking.” Humorous as this is, Kerr’s insight is also a serious one—and it serves as an anchor upon which to tether this brief response to Christopher Kazcor’s analysis of mission drift in Jesuit colleges and universities.

The symptoms and corresponding remedies Kazcor names are astute and well imagined. There are many reasons for mission drift—from the fiscal

caution of “no margin no mission” on the one hand, to something Dorothy Day might utter on the other: “Don’t associate me with university mission. I don’t want to be dismissed so easily”—a sentiment that will sound familiar to those who work on the ground in mission integration. To be sure, there are also scores of examples of fruitful mission initiatives and integration alive today at AJCU schools, but there would not be such a widespread call for new upper administration roles in mission leadership were it not for the tacit recognition of crisis.

The expressions of mission drift are manifold: to ride the metaphor fully, those who spend time on the water know well that when one thing drifts out, something else fills the void. As Kazcor suggests, mission has been subtly subordinated to other values and often replaced with cheaper versions of it—corporatism, managerialism, credentialism, consumerism, among others — adulterated approaches to education that are often contrary (and occasionally hostile) to Catholic intellectual, spiritual, and social teaching traditions, the dynamism of which have been a compass and a “way of proceeding” for 480 years.

This is the elephant in the room in mission world: that the Christian humanistic tradition that undergirds the Jesuit and Ignatian approach to higher education is being sold off by the pound—and often from the inside. Catholic higher education, as Kazcor observes, is becoming increasingly indistinguishable from its secular counterparts. To diagnose more pointedly here, the Catholic, Jesuit university is in danger of becoming just



Left: Rachel Mindrup, *Derrick Living Rugby*. Creighton University.

Right: Arturo Araujo, S.J., *God Called Your Name*. Seattle University.

another neoliberal product—a series of knowledge corporations that sell goods of technical “know-how” bound together not by the common good (articulated in Catholic Social Thought), but, to riff on Kerr, attenuated by all too common values dictated by the techno-capitalist demands of contemporary culture.

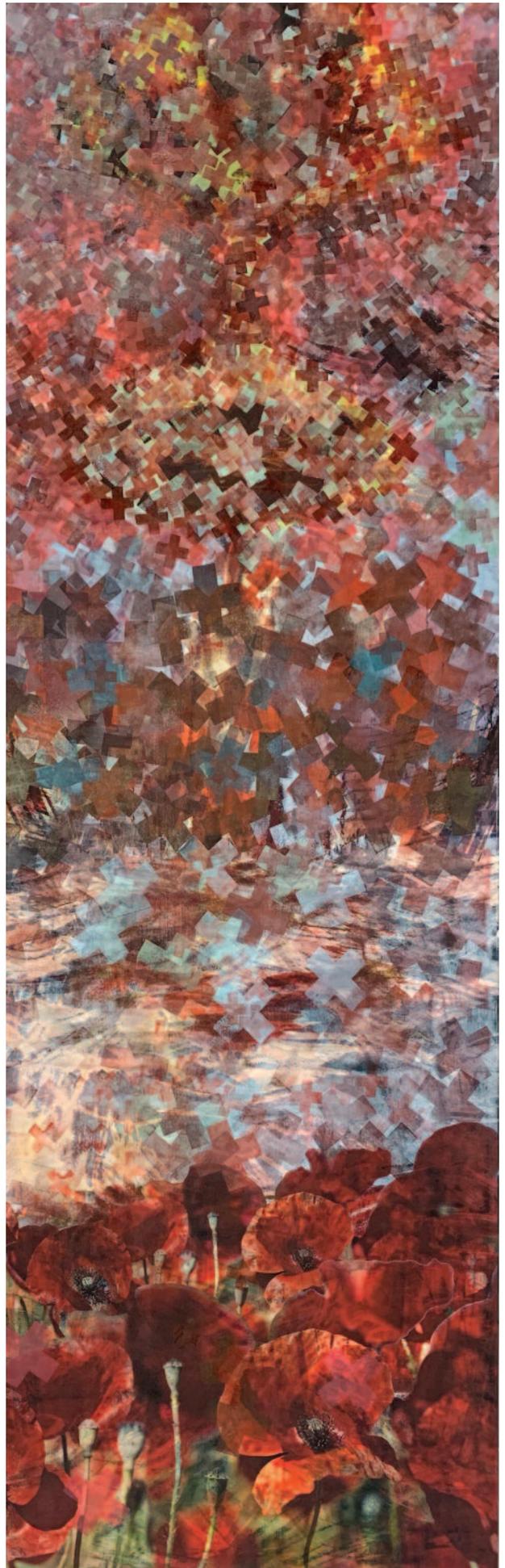
Many faculty—no matter their discipline or faith—feel the burn here; and colleagues who might normally stay safely “anodyne” between the finer points of faith and reason, are united today by creeping concern about a common antagonist: neoliberal and technocratic forces that are impeding our fragile educational project (not to mention eating our students alive).

It is precisely here where AJCU schools can offer another constructive remedy: establishing programs in faculty engagement that innovate precisely from the Catholic, Jesuit intellectual tradition.

This was the hope at Loyola University Chicago (LUC) when we created *All Things Ignatian: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Justice, and the Common Good*. This incentivized, semester-long seminar—launched in 2016 and led by Loyola faculty—focuses on the Catholic intellectual tradition as a resource for institutional thinking and being. The seminar anticipates Kazcor’s remedy of cultivating “researchers and teachers who know and love the Catholic intellectual tradition in every academic department and school” and puts flesh on it. Over 250 faculty from across LUC schools and disciplines have participated in the seminar, and there is a version for staff as well. As one would expect with conversations centered on disputed questions in faith, reason, and justice, the seminar is a place of both tension and transcendence—and, as often, I am happy to report, a place of both personal and intellectual renewal.

Programs like the faculty seminar are the connective tissue that unite our communities, not around private issues like car parking but around a shared, living tradition, one that Kazcor puts before us so well: a mission of mindfulness, comprehensiveness, depth, integration, and affirmation.

*Michael P. Murphy, a literary scholar and theologian, is director of the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition at Loyola University Chicago.*





# Becoming a Prodigal Pedagogue

By Conor M. Kelly

I **never understood** what the word “prodigal” actually meant when, as a child, I heard it associated with the Gospel “parable of the prodigal son”—the story of the younger of two brothers who, after asking his rich father to liquidate half his estate so that the son can enjoy a lavish lifestyle, wastes his inheritance and returns to beg his father to take him back so that he can at least eat a decent meal (Luke 15:11-32).

Now, as an adult theologian, I’ve learned that, first, prodigality is all about extravagance—like spending your inheritance with reckless abandon—and second, as the Presbyterian pastor Timothy Keller points out in his book *The Prodigal God*, prodigality is just as applicable to the father in the story as it is to the reckless son.

This second aspect of prodigality has transformed not just my understanding of this familiar story, but also of my sense of my own vocation. Over the course of the pandemic, the vision of generosity at the heart of the Gospel story has helped redefine what it means for me to be an educator.

It was the late Boston College theologian Michael Himes who helped me see the link between prodigality and generosity, for he argued that this parable is about the father’s extravagance rather than the son’s repentance.

As the second-born child in a society governed by the norms of primogeniture, the younger son not only has no right to ask for an inheritance from his living father, but no right to an inheritance at all. The father’s prodigality manifests early in the story, then,

when he dismisses all sense of decorum and voluntarily gives the “impertinent son,” as Himes called him, far more than he merits. When the son later tugs on his father’s heartstrings in the hope of securing a job, the father’s prodigality is underscored again: he interrupts his son, embraces him, and welcomes him back with a party.

Seen from this vantage, the whole point of the story becomes the absurdity of the father’s actions. The father, who represents God, is prodigal with his love in a manner that seems just as reckless as his son’s thriftlessness. The stark difference, though, is that the son expends a finite good, whereas the father gives of his very self. While the first kind of prodigality leads to bankruptcy, the latter restores broken relationships and opens new opportunities to pursue a brighter future together.

So, how has prodigality informed my work as an educator in these hard times?

As we all know, students have been pushed to their limits in recent semesters. Early in the pandemic, when extenuating circumstances collided with the conventional norms of a standard semester, I found myself asking how much latitude I should give for late assignments, or how I should enforce an attendance policy. And I felt conflicting impulses: I wanted to be as compassionate as possible; yet I still felt beholden to official policies and questioned how much leeway I had to diverge from them.

Somewhere in this tension, I returned to prodigality and my qualms about fidelity to the letter of the law quickly became replaced with a



Wanda Sullivan, *Yellow/Green Ginkgos*. Spring Hill College.

much more pertinent question: Who am I to be stricter than God?

This brought the freedom to be the caring and understanding professor that my students needed and still need, and in the process, helped me rediscover that this was the person I longed to be. If theologian Frederick Buechner is right that our vocation is found in “the place where [our] deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet,” then there could not have been a clearer calling in this moment than the call to prodigality, for I was deeply gladdened to be there for my students in this way.

Yet for me, the most important revelation was that, rather than adapting to the unique problems of the pandemic, I was actually adjusting to the challenges of being a student today. As I lived out a new form of generosity toward my students, I eventually realized that even under “normal” circumstances, our students’ real lives repeatedly smash into our course expectations.

COVID-19 did not change that reality; it merely raised my awareness of it.

So, the question became: How will I operate now that I have seen the truth of what it takes to be a student today? In answering this question, I came to the conviction that I am called to become prodigal pedagogue, one that leaves the door open as wide as possible in the hopes that every last one of my students will make it to the (metaphorical) banquet at the end of the semester, no matter where they started—or where they diverted—along the way.

In order to explain what this prodigal pedagogy means in practice, I turn to another of Jesus’ parables, one seldom associated with

prodigality: the “parable of the sower,” which is presented in three slightly varied forms in the Gospels of Matthew (13:1-9), Mark (4:1-9), and Luke (8:4-8).

A farmer heads out to sow seeds one day and scatters the seeds across four different types of soil, producing four different outcomes. The seeds that land on the path do not get buried deep enough to grow; instead, they are eaten almost immediately by birds and therefore bear no fruit. Those that fall among the thorns eventually arrive at the same fate, because the thorns choke them. The seeds that fall on rocky ground fare only slightly better, sprouting but withering in the sun because they could not draw enough moisture from their environment. Only the seeds that fall on “good soil” (Matthew 13:9) survive to bear fruit, and they do so with abundance.

After finishing the story, Jesus explains the parallels between the seeds sown on different soil types and the different reactions of those who hear

his parables. Some never ask the questions they need to understand and therefore have their potential insights taken from them before their comprehension can emerge, just as the birds eat the seeds on the path before they can grow. Others like what they hear, but eventually find that “the cares of the world and the lure of wealth” (Matthew 13:22) surround and strangle them.

Those who mirror the rocky soil, meanwhile, are the ones who hear Jesus’s teachings with excitement, but do not undertake the reflection necessary to develop deep roots in their new faith. Consequently, “when trouble or persecution arises...that person immediately falls away” (Matthew 13:21). Finally, those who receive the teachings, like the good soil, are, of course, the ones who hear and internalize the message so that it can transform their lives and bear much fruit.

Ultimately, this parable has been just as influential as the parable of the prodigal son in my new understanding of the educator’s call to prodigality. Why? Because, as Jesus’ explanation of it underscores, the parable is all about the relationship between the teacher and the student, and we who are educators are invited to look at the parable from the sower’s perspective. Reading the parable this way, we arrive at a startling discovery: This person is one crazy farmer! Who tries to plant crops along a path, or among thorns, or amidst a bunch of rocks? But if we persist and move beyond this initial reaction, we can come to see the sower as someone who wants to give every patch of land a chance to bear fruit. After all, the sower must know that the seeds on the path are unlikely to make it, but they toss seeds onto the path anyway.

In a word, the sower is truly prodigal. And it is only because of that prodigality that any lessons get conveyed.

I have taken heart from this vision and tried to make a similar type of prodigality the hallmark of my teaching. Much like the sower, I have begun to pitch my lessons more expansively, so that they land on all kinds of soil. Students still come to my courses with varying degrees of investment and preparation, but I have stopped trying to ascertain in advance which ones are going to cultivate deep roots and

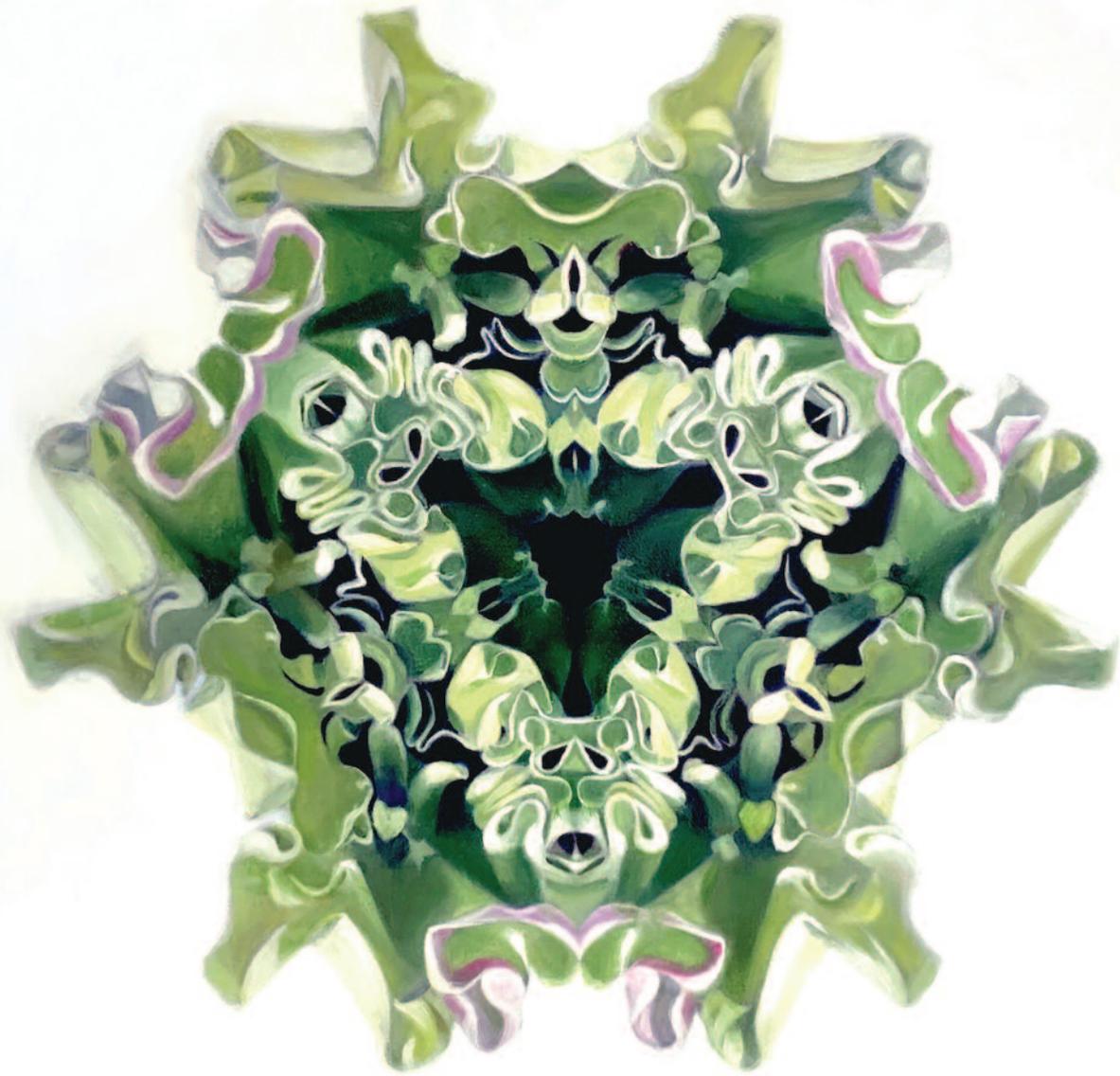
which ones are going to get distracted by the thorns. Instead, I have worked to provide every student with an equal opportunity to decide that this is the day they are going to put in the effort to grow real fruit.

This strategy is fairly easy on the first day of the semester, when I have little knowledge of my students. It is much harder on the last day, when their previous participation and engagement have given me a pretty good idea of who has done the work to show up with receptive soil and who is sitting on a pile of rocks. It’s then that I channel the sower and remember the prodigal choice to cast seeds on ground that looked to every reasonable observer like an inhospitable path. The only way I can make sense of that decision is with the conviction that the sower believed the path could become the loam, even if the evidence pointed to the contrary. Ninety-nine times out of one hundred, that evidence is probably right, and the seed will die. But the sower spreads the seed nonetheless, preferring to wait and see if this is the one time out of one hundred the unexpected occurs.

The ongoing challenges of these past semesters have led me to the conviction that I have no business trying to guess who that one student holding rich soil on an apparent path will be. I have seen too clearly that I do not know enough—I cannot know enough—about my student’s lives beyond the classroom to make this determination. I can only cast my teaching wide and give all of them the freedom to decide how they will engage each time we meet. That way, I have a better chance of becoming the teacher and person I am called to be.

And in the end, I’m left with the task of figuring out how to let this lesson in prodigal pedagogy burrow deeper roots in me, because the next semester is coming, and I am still worried that I am unwittingly not representing the rich soil, but the dusty path.

*Conor M. Kelly is associate professor of theology at Marquette University. This essay is an edited version of a longer chapter from On the Vocation of the Educator in this Moment, edited by Jennifer S. Maney and Melissa M. Shew.*



Wanda Sullivan, *Gladiolus/Sky*. Spring Hill College.

<b>Georgetown University</b> <i>Washington, DC, 1789</i>	<b>Santa Clara University</b> <i>Santa Clara, 1851</i>	<b>University of Detroit Mercy</b> <i>Detroit, 1877</i>	<b>University of Scranton</b> <i>Scranton, 1888</i>
<b>Saint Louis University</b> <i>Saint Louis, 1818</i>	<b>Loyola University Maryland</b> <i>Baltimore, 1852</i>	<b>Regis University</b> <i>Denver, 1877</i>	<b>Seattle University</b> <i>Seattle, 1891</i>
<b>Spring Hill College</b> <i>Mobile, 1830</i>	<b>University of San Francisco</b> <i>San Francisco, 1855</i>	<b>Creighton University</b> <i>Omaha, 1878</i>	<b>Rockhurst University</b> <i>Kansas City, 1910</i>
<b>Xavier University</b> <i>Cincinnati, 1831</i>	<b>Boston College</b> <i>Boston, 1863</i>	<b>Marquette University</b> <i>Milwaukee, 1881</i>	<b>Loyola Marymount University</b> <i>Los Angeles, 1911</i>
<b>Fordham University</b> <i>New York, 1841</i>	<b>Canisius College</b> <i>Buffalo, 1870</i>	<b>John Carroll University</b> <i>Cleveland, 1886</i>	<b>Loyola University New Orleans</b> <i>New Orleans, 1912</i>
<b>College of the Holy Cross</b> <i>Worcester, 1843</i>	<b>Loyola University Chicago</b> <i>Chicago, 1870</i>	<b>Gonzaga University</b> <i>Spokane, 1887</i>	<b>Fairfield University</b> <i>Fairfield, 1942</i>
<b>Saint Joseph's University</b> <i>Philadelphia, 1851</i>	<b>Saint Peter's University</b> <i>Jersey City, 1872</i>	<b>St. John's College</b> <i>Belize, 1887</i>	<b>Le Moyne College</b> <i>Syracuse, 1946</i>

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