

10-1-2001

The Role of Presidents Promoting Catholic Identity at Jesuit Universities

Timothy R. Lannon, S.J.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Lannon, S.J., Timothy R. (2001) "The Role of Presidents Promoting Catholic Identity at Jesuit Universities," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 20, Article 7.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol20/iss1/7>

The Role Of Presidents Promoting Catholic Identity At Jesuit Universities

Timothy R. Lannon, S.J.

This article about presidential leadership at Jesuit universities examines how three presidents have promoted Catholic identity at their universities in the midst of the changing meaning of being a Catholic today and the competing values of American higher education.

Introduction

He is pushing the Catholic dimension, maybe too strongly. Some people are calling him 'church-lady.' (A Jesuit about the school's Jesuit president, 1996).

It is tough to find God here (Two sophomores at a Jesuit university, 1997).

The Jesuit mission is to serve. That is straightforward. Catholic is tougher. There is a problem with being Catholic. Some define Catholic on the basis of orthodoxy. I don't want to put myself or the university in that position. To be Catholic, must you have full allegiance to Rome? (A trustee of a Jesuit university, 1998)

Forty years ago these statements would seem preposterous to anyone knowledgeable about Catholic higher education in the United States. Since the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), however, American society, the Catholic Church, and Catholic higher education have changed significantly. With the election of John F. Kennedy as president and the diminution of the historic anti-Catholic sentiment in the country, American Catholics felt that they had finally entered the mainstream.¹ Many Catholic educators saw less need to educate Catholics in order to defend the faith and a greater need for Catholic institutions to come into the mainstream of American higher education.² In order to be recognized as prestigious, Catholic universities sought academic excellence.³ Catholic universities paid little, if any, regard in the hiring practices to their candidates' commitment to the school's Catholic identity, nor did

they promote Catholicism in the many other aspects of institutional life.⁴

In recent years, however, many leaders in the church and in Catholic higher education have questioned whether Catholic colleges and universities have become too secular.⁵ In three case studies of Catholic institutions,⁶ Burtchaeff asserts that these schools have abandoned "their calling to be ministries of the Catholic Church."⁷ Gleason maintains that the debate over Catholic higher education illustrates a larger cultural discourse about what it means to be a Catholic in the United States.⁸ At issue then is what it means to be a Catholic university today. The president of a Catholic university is in a pivotal position to define that meaning and to either accentuate or downplay the institution's values, such as Catholic identity.⁹ In so doing, the president must constantly negotiate a broad continuum of coalitions, from the most conservative to the most liberal Catholic constituents and faculty members, from gay and lesbian student groups to conservative faculty groups, and from speculative (sometimes dissident) theologians to the local bishop.¹⁰

Three presidents participated in a study in 1998: Paul L. Locatelli, S.J. then of Santa Clara University, Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J. of Fordham University, and J. A. (Al) Panuska, S.J. who was the president of the University of Scranton at the time of the study.¹¹ The three institutions share common characteristics and face unique challenges in regard to issues of Catholic identity. The common characteristics are that the presidents refer to their respective institutions as Catholic, they espouse "affirmative action" in the hiring of Jesuits, and they promote the hiring for mission of lay faculty. Each university also faces unique challenges about its Catholic identity as suggested by the following examples. Fordham

Timothy R. Lannon, S.J. is Vice President for University Advancement at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

University had refused to recognize a gay and lesbian student organization, whereas Santa Clara University has recognized such a group. The president at the University of Scranton has been challenged by a group of faculty for not adequately promoting the school's Catholic identity, which has resulted in the Vatican's intervention. At Santa Clara, there is disagreement about the president's rhetoric used to describe the University's Catholic identity.

Locating the Balance Point: Similar Challenges But Dissimilar Responses

The three presidents led institutions with significant contextual differences, even though located within a larger common genre of Jesuit institutions. These differences in sociopolitics, geography, and religious sensitivity gave rise to dissimilar responses with respect to Catholic identity. All three presidents attempted to make the Catholic identity of their institution more prominent, while also being sensitive and alert to the values of academic life, including respect for academic freedom, faculty authority over curriculum, collegiality, and institutional autonomy.

Although the particulars of the presidents' decisions differed across institutions, ultimately all three presidents found themselves in the very same position. They tried to locate a balance point for their institution between too sectarian and too secular, between diverse and often conflicting volatile ideological beliefs, between the pressures and desires of powerful individuals: the bishop, trustees, alumni, members of the faculty, and community leaders. Each president found himself in a unique context in which he had to find the political equilibrium, the degree of Catholic identity that was right for his institution in order to keep the ideological see-saw in balance. Not one of the presidents watched from a safe distance; each one sought, whether through persuasion, ambiguity, or compromise, to find this balance point.

The challenge for these three presidents, and for all presidents of Catholic universities, was determining which aspects of Catholic identity should not be compromised. As these case studies reveal, such decisions are less clear-cut than might first appear. There are varying opinions about what it means to be a Catholic today in the United States and, in turn, how Catholicism can or should be manifested on the

campus of a Jesuit university. The president must be cognizant of the different demands of the multiple constituent-groups: progressive, traditional, and disenchanting Catholics, the local bishop, and non-Catholics. These differences are seen most dramatically in issues relating to the role of women in the Catholic Church and the church's teachings on sexual mores. Such teachings include promoting the dignity of each individual human life and therefore opposing abortion, unconditional acceptance of gays and lesbians as human persons worthy of love and respect but the condemnation of homosexual activity, and the prohibition of the use of artificial contraception and the support of sexual abstinence until marriage. Many Americans, including Catholics, hold views opposed to these teachings, but at the same time, other Catholics judge a Catholic university's stand on these issues as the litmus test of its Catholic identity.

The bishop, of course, has the ultimate say about the university's status as a Catholic institution. The United States Catholic bishops in "*Ex Corde Ecclesiae: An Application to the United States*," recognized that Catholic universities enjoy institutional autonomy; however, Canon Law grants the local bishop the

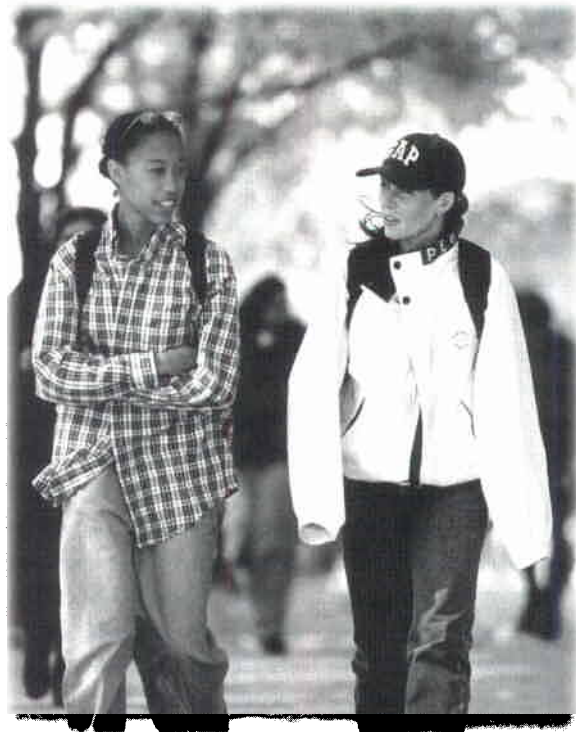


Photo by: Marquette Office of Communications

authority to determine whether any college or university is a Catholic institution. All three presidents in this study cooperated with their local bishops and kept them informed about events and issues related to Catholic identity, but none deferred university decisions to an ecclesiastical authority. Although not fully disclosed in the data, one could reasonably surmise that Father Panuska and Bishop Timlin cooperated with each other in order to avoid a showdown with the Vatican and its seemingly intended intervention over *Health Care Ethics*. That textbook, used in philosophy classes, was deemed by some to offer positions contrary to the Church. Father Panuska and Bishop Timlin agreed to adopt a moratorium on the use of the textbook.

Negotiating Catholic Identity

What aspects of Catholic identity are negotiable? The three case studies provide data that may offer responses to that question. Catholic identity appears to be negotiable when competing with: institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and pastoral sensitivity. In the area of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, with the exception of the moratorium on the use of *Health Care Ethics*, Catholic identity did not always prevail. That is, all three universities required courses in theology or religious studies, but the content of these courses did not necessarily reflect Catholic teachings and tradition. Father O'Hare seemed more willing to compromise Catholic identity than to compromise academic freedom and the relationship *between the faculty and the curriculum* by not insisting on a particular content for those courses. On an issue related to the Church's teachings, Father Locatelli recognized the Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) out of a pastoral concern for gay and lesbian students with the risk of being viewed by some as endorsing homosexual activity.

One remaining issue about the president's promotion of Catholic identity persists: On what aspects, if any of this identity, did the three presidents insist? An examination of the case studies elicits five aspects of Catholic identity that all three Jesuit presidents pursued and/or promoted: (1) calling the university Catholic, (2) maintaining a good working relationship with the local bishop, (3) requiring courses that reflect the university's Catholic identity, (4)

assuring an active sacramental life on the campus, and (5) promoting social justice among students and other constituents.

Each president described his university as being Catholic. Each president maintained a good working relationship with his local bishop as suggested by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. In all three cases, the relationships were characterized by good communication with the bishop, especially about any issues that were controversial in light of the university's Catholic identity. The presidents respected the role of the bishop and his responsibility to assure the university's Catholic integrity, and the bishops respected the role of the president and his responsibility to sustain the university's autonomy.

All three universities had requirements in theology/religious studies and philosophy/ethics, highlighting a characteristic of Catholic higher education. The Jesuit presidents consistently stressed the importance of theology and philosophy in the curriculum, but again, left the content of the courses up to the faculty.

The three Jesuit presidents were actively involved in the sacramental life of their campuses as priests. Many universities, including state universities, have Catholic chaplains who serve the sacramental and pastoral needs of Catholic students, faculty, and staff; however, the Jesuit presidents promoted a central role for campus ministry to play at their schools. Furthermore, the presidents were personally involved in ministry and other sacramental and pastoral activities. Father O'Hare referred to himself, for example, as the pastor for the Fordham University community.

Lastly, the commitment to social justice and service of others is a common characteristic of Catholic university life and is part of the cultural fabric of the three Jesuit universities. Although this commitment to service is a significant part of the Catholic identity at the three universities, what was negotiable was how this is linked or not linked to the Gospel or the teachings of the Catholic Church. In the data collection, no such explicit link was consistently offered by Santa Clara University in promoting the university's commitment to serve others.

These five aspects of Catholic identity, promoted by all three Jesuit presidents, are teetering between being continued and being compromised. All of this

suggests the delicacy of the equilibrium at the three Jesuit universities, and how the presidents balance the promotion of Catholic identity with the competing values of American higher education.

Presidential Leadership

The three presidents have much in common with their peers at secular universities. The three Jesuit universities, like secular universities, are process-driven, collegial, and consultative in nature even on issues related to values and beliefs. Presidents at Jesuit schools are as much bound to these norms of American higher education as are presidents of secular universities. All university presidents must find, within the context of their institutions, a balance between diversity, institutional outreach, and social justice. In the balancing act, the three Jesuit presidents, like other presidents of Catholic universities, must also take into account promotion of Catholic identity on their campuses.

In the midst of promoting Catholic identity, the three presidents had to be concerned about the politics of the possible. Consider, for example, the president's decision at Santa Clara to engage the University in a contract with Nike. Father Locatelli effectively persuaded the University community to support this contract in spite of the Catholic Church's teachings about unfair labor practices and the University's commitment to social justice. Locatelli asked his constituents to accept what they perceived as tainted money, while he promised to convince a multinational business to change its employment practices.¹²

This research supports Schein's assertion that as organizations mature, subcultures will form and "some of these subcultures will be typically in conflict with each other."¹³ Schein's comment describes the culture and the rival subcultures at all three Jesuit universities: "the gang of seven," a group of faculty members who objected to the practice of hiring Jesuits by creating new lines just for the Jesuit candidate and those who supported hiring Jesuits at Fordham University; the members of *Ruach*, a group of faculty members that desired to strengthen the University's Catholic identity, and the constituents who supported the Special Jesuit Liberal Arts program at the University of Scranton; the liberals and the conservatives at Santa Clara University. Similarly, this study confirms Sergioanni's assertion

that "to administer the university requires that one deal with the web of conflict and tension which exists as several subcultures try to protect their way of life."¹⁴

Although these presidents faced conflict within the culture of their organizations, these case studies support the research contention that leaders can use symbols to create shared meaning.¹⁵ The three presidents, all of whom were pastorally and sacramentally active, promoted the meaning of their university's Catholic identity by their lives as priests. Chaffee's research asserts that through symbolic leadership, constituents come to a better understanding of the organizational identity, including its traditions, history, and vocabulary.¹⁶ The presidents as priests used the sacramental symbols of Catholicism in order to maintain a Catholic identity, such as presiding at funerals for students who had died or leading prayer services for students who are seriously ill. During the 1996-1997 school year at Fordham University, five students had died and Father O'Hare was described as being everywhere with those families: at the hospitals, the funeral homes, and the funerals.

The leadership styles of these three presidents reflect different research models of leadership. Father O'Hare fits Whetten's description of a charismatic leader.¹⁷ He was persuasive in leading constituents to see things his way. That was certainly the case with the decision about the Gay Rights Organization for Unity and Participation (GROUP) and the merger of the two Fordham Colleges. Father O'Hare prevailed despite the support for GROUP and the lack of support for the merger. In both cases, O'Hare's leadership exemplified the research of Fisher and Koch because he made decisions that he judged to be right, but "not necessarily what is popular."¹⁸ Against considerable opposition, O'Hare achieved the merger of Fordham College by influencing the process and in turn pushing the balance point more toward Catholic identity, mostly by persuasion. Clearly, he possesses Whetten and Cameron's three distinguishing characteristics of a coalition manager: "politically astute, pragmatic and [a] skillful bargainer."¹⁹ Moreover, demonstrating the theory of Eckel et al. that change results if senior administrators or influential faculty are involved in the process, O'Hare insisted that the University's academic vice president devote his energies to the merger process by being attentive to it and leading it to the desired outcome.²⁰

Despite his conflict with members of *Ruach*, Father Panuska's actions resembled the model of leadership described by Bennis and Nanus: "the conductor of the orchestra" who brings together the disparate parts to make a whole.²¹ Whetten described a similar type of leadership as catalytic. That is, the president facilitates the emergence of common objectives among the constituents. Panuska forged a vision rooted on attributes that most of the constituents embraced. Panuska's leadership also reflected the research of Kouzes and Posner, who assert that the "leader's primary contribution is in the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system in order to adopt [such ideas]."²² Panuska exemplified the first two attributes, but he seemed generally reluctant about the third -- challenging the system. He also affirmed Bensimon's research finding that the faculty is less influenced by the president, unless the president assumes the thinking of the faculty.²³ Panuska certainly inquired about what the faculty was thinking, but he also encouraged the members of the faculty to dream with him in making The University of Scranton an even finer University. His dream was rooted for the most part in the values of American higher education. He exerted significant influence in creating a climate in which people believed they could accomplish great things as described in Bennis' findings.²⁴ Panuska empowered the constituents to act by placing great trust in them. However, he was not able to limit the conflict and settle disputes, at least in the case of *Ruach*, in order to prevent what Kerr describes as *certain groups from* gaining the upper hand.

Like Father O'Hare, Father Locatelli also manifested Whetten and Cameron's distinguishing characteristics of a coalition manager. Furthermore, in the midst of disagreements, both presidents took the time to inquire about the position of others and advocated their own positions, resulting in discussion and consultation.²⁵ Such presidential leadership resulted in less acrimony and a greater willingness to accept change. Unlike O'Hare, though, Locatelli built a strong coalition of influential constituents who supported his efforts of promoting Catholic identity. Locatelli's coalition building mirrored Whetten's position that central administrators need "to assemble a winning or

THE ISSUE FACING BOTH THE
LEADERS OF AMERICAN CATHOLIC
HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE
BISHOPS IS LOCATING A BALANCE
WHERE THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
IS FAITHFUL TO BOTH THE VALUES
OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY.

dominant coalition that will support proposed actions."²⁶ He was so successful with this coalition building that he muted most opposition to his way of promoting Catholic identity and was able to bring about sustainable change at Santa Clara University. Clark maintains that a president can bring about enduring change if "ranking and powerful members of the faculty become committed to it . . ." ²⁷ That appears to have been the case at Santa Clara with the faculty coalition that Father Locatelli has built through influencing veteran faculty leaders and hiring faculty who embrace his view of Catholic identity for Santa Clara.

Conclusion

Fathers O'Hare, Panuska, and Locatelli have faced a myriad of challenges in promoting Catholic identity at their universities. In his April 29, 1996 letter to The University of Scranton community about the use of the book, *Health Care Ethics*, Panuska describes this challenge: "We share in the vigilant effort, at times even a struggle, to keep a balance between appropriate freedom of inquiry that leads to knowledge and our integrity as a Catholic institution of learning."

The struggle of balancing autonomy, academic freedom, and Catholic identity is intensified by Jesuit universities and colleges as they pursue recognition as both outstanding academic institutions and Catholic universities. Furthermore, what it means to be a Catholic university in the United States today is in a state of flux, for several reasons: the ambiguity about Catholic identity; the resentment toward the church for resorting to authority rather than debate, dialogue, and persuasion in resolving controversial issues; and the continuing debate, fueled by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, about the relationship between Catholic colleges and universities and the church's hierarchy.

"*Ex Corde Ecclesiae: An Application to the United States*," encourages the United States bishops and the representatives of Catholic universities to adopt a mutually agreeable process to review and evaluate the implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and its application. Such collaboration should be the standard for the working relationship between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the leaders of Catholic universities in the United States.

The issue facing both the leaders of American

Catholic higher education and the bishops is locating a balance where the Catholic university is faithful to both the values of American higher education and Catholic identity. This will require compromise by both groups. A successful collaborative effort is in the best interest of Catholicism and higher education in the United States.

Another issue facing Jesuit higher education is the preparation of Jesuits and lay people to lead our universities and colleges. They must not only be good citizens of the academy, but capable administrators who know and embrace the Ignatian vision of education and are committed to the promotion of Catholic identity. Both the leaders of the Society of Jesus and the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities must assume the responsibility that leaders are indeed being prepared to serve our universities and colleges as presidents.

St. Ignatius of Loyola had a brilliant insight when he suggested that Jesuit education must be adaptable. This requirement for adaptability will continue into the future so that Jesuit university presidents, whether Jesuits or not, and their colleagues can provide an educational opportunity that will support both the values of higher education and the university's Catholic identity in serving the needs of their students to prepare them to be men and women for others "who will live not for themselves but for God."²⁸



Photo by: Marquette Office of Communications

ENDNOTES

- 1 Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995);
David J. O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).
- 2 John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life," *Thought* 30 (Autumn 1955): 351-88;
Richard M. Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts 1945-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 3 William P. Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America: Catholics, Jesuits, and Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).
- 4 Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church*.
- 5 James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998);
George M. Marsden, "What Can Catholic Universities Learn from Protestant Examples?" in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
- 6 The three schools in Burtchaell's study are Boston College, the College of New Rochelle, and Saint Mary's College of California.
- 7 Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 563.
- 8 John J. Pauly, "Mission Talk and the Bugaboo of Modernity," *Conversations* 12 (Fall 1997): 24-29.
- 9 Robert Birnbaum, *How Academic Leadership Works: Understanding Success and Failure in the College Presidency* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992);
Barbara K. Townsend, *Creating Distinctiveness: Lessons from Uncommon Colleges and Universities* (Washington, D.C.: ASHE-ERIC, 1992).
- 10 Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991);
Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995);
Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations* (Marshfield, MA: Pitman Publishing Inc., 1981).
- 11 This article, for which the data was collected in spring 1998, is drawn from the author's dissertation: Timothy R. Lannon, S.J., "Catholic Identity at Jesuit Universities: How Do the Presidents of Jesuit Universities Promote the Schools' Catholic Identity?" (Ed.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2000).
- 12 Promises had been made to Santa Clara University by Nike to change certain policies and practices. The University has ended its relationship with Nike, since there was a lack of progress in changing those policies and practices.
- 13 Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 14.
- 14 Thomas J. Sergiovanni, "Cultural and Competing Perspectives in Administrative Theory and Practice," in *Leadership and Organizational Culture*, ed. Thomas J. Sergiovanni and John E. Corbally (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 8.
- 15 Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*; Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1982);
Susan H. Frost and Theresa W. Gillespie, "Organizations, Culture, and Teams: Links Toward Genuine Change," in *Using Teams in Higher Education: Cultural Foundations for Productive Change*, ed. Susan Frost (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).
- 16 Ellen Earle Chaffee, "Successful Strategic Management in Small Private Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 55 (March/April 1984): 212-41.
- 17 David A. Whetten, "Effective Administrators: Good Management on the College Campus," *Change* 16 (November/December 1984): 38-43.

- 18 James L. Fisher and James V. Koch, *Presidential Leadership: Making a Difference* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, Oryx Press, 1996), 50.
- 19 David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron, "Administrative Effectiveness in Higher Education," *The Review of Higher Education* 9, n. 1 (1985): 35-49.
- 20 Peter Eckel, Barbara Hill, Madeleine Green, and Bill Mallon, "Reports from the Road: Insights on Institutional Change," in *On Change* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1999).
- 21 Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 31.
- 22 James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 10.
- 23 Estela M. Bensimon, "The Social Process through which Faculty Shape the Image of a New President," *Journal of Higher Education* 62 (November/December 1991): 637-60.
- 24 Warren Bennis, "Transformative Power and Leadership," in *Leadership and Organizational Culture*, ed. Sergiovanni and Corbally.
- 25 Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method and Practice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996).
- 26 Whetten, "Effective Administrators Good Management," 40.
- 27 Burton R. Clark, "The Organizational Saga in Higher Education," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17 (June 1972): 178-83.
- 28 Pedro Arrupe, "Men for Others," speech presented at the International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, Valencia, Spain, July 31, 1973, printed in *Foundations*, comp. Carl E. Meirose (Washington, D.C.: The Jesuit Secondary Education Association, 1994), 124.

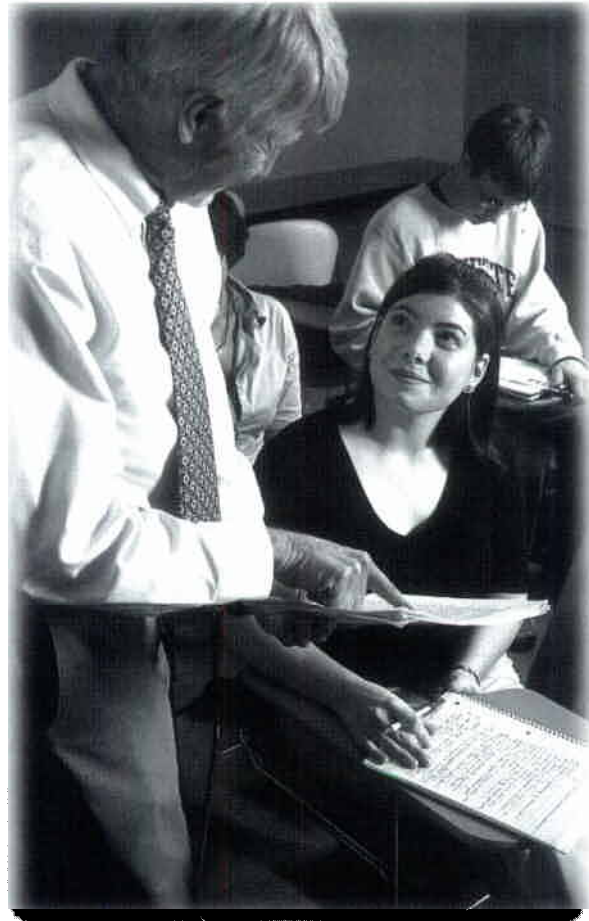


Photo by: Marquette Office of Communications