

## The Five W's of Engaging Faculty in Mission

By Debra K. Mooney

*Debra K. Mooney, Ph.D., is assistant to the president for mission and identity, and founding director, Conway Institute for Jesuit Education, at Xavier University in Ohio.*

**A**t Xavier University in Ohio, the mission is central in the professional lives of our faculty because we are cognizant of the following five W's:

**WHY:** *A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.* —Mahatma Gandhi

The Catholic mission and identity of a college or university is expressed throughout the campus in ways both tangible and intangible, with the greatest illumination in the classroom. While it has been said that mission is carried in the curriculum, it is more accurate to state that it is carried within the faculty, given their influence on the curriculum and on course content, as well as their direct interaction with students. Thus, meaningful engagement in mission by faculty is imperative.

**WHAT:** *The identity of an institution lies not in what anyone says about it from time to time, but in what everyone does about it every day.* —Jeanne Knoerle

Supporting teacher-scholars in embracing the mission within their daily activities of teaching, research, and service goes far in connecting with faculty. Mission officers enable faculty to relate with the Catholic identity in ways that are specific to them—reflecting on their discipline, personality, and faith/spirituality. To be more engaging than simply offering resources and presentations, mission officers must foster opportunities for mission-focused curricular development (or *redevelopment*), research grants, and retreats. Underscoring how the university's identity adds meaning to their day-to-day activities can vitalize the spark that drew them to their vocation. As the proverb reminds, "Involve me and I will understand."

For instance, Xavier University offers second- and third-year faculty the opportunity to participate in the yearlong Ignatian Mentoring Program (IMP) in which they are paired with a senior tenured faculty member to facilitate the assimilation of the Ignatian Catholic vision into their teaching and scholarly work

early in their careers. This is a cornerstone program for new faculty. In a five-year follow-up, the impact on two faculty members was described this way:

*I find that in all courses I teach, I am more apt to bring up social, ethical, and religious values, and encourage students to think of others around them, not just of themselves. Integrating moral principles into even the most 'scientific' courses I teach has become one of my teaching goals.*

*Being involved in the IMP has provided an anchor for my research. It has provided the incentive to focus on areas of social concern and make it a significant part of my research... [Also,] the experience demonstrated to me how I can extend my research focus into my teaching.*

**WHO:** *A mentor is someone whose hindsight can become someone else's forethought.* —Author unknown

In my experience, the most effective mission guide is a peer mentor. Thus, the role of the mission officer is to serve as a catalyst for peer support and mission engagement. The added gem is that faculty-mentors have the opportunity to become mission leaders.

The benefits were underscored by an IMP participant, who said:

*The establishment of the mentor relationship seems to have been the real value of the IMP. Our conversations about Ignatian spirituality, classroom ideas, book recommendations, etc. will last beyond this first semester. . . . This is something that would not have begun [for me] without the IMP.*

**WHEN:** *If you keep waiting for the right time, it may never happen. Sometimes you have to make the most of the time you have.* —Priya Ardis

Meaningful faculty engagement is a career-long process. However, other than a brief overview at a general orientation meeting, deep engagement with mission and identity is all too often delayed, presumably to allow time for new academics to develop courses and research programs. Unfortunately, their professional identity develops with mission-specific components on the periphery or, worse, absent mission consciousness. If mission engagement emerges later, it is often as an add-on.

*Continued on page 8*

# Engaging Faculty in University Mission

Continued from page 7

By contrast, engagement can be thorough and career-long when braided with academic expectations and support, as articulated this way:

*[Participating in the IMP] encouraged me to devote time to considering and reading about how I would engage the Jesuit Catholic identity, especially in my teaching of core curriculum classes. I'm not sure that I would have done that otherwise—certainly not so early in my time at Xavier. Having a mentor to walk me through the process was important, intellectually and socially as well.*

**WHERE:** *What we want to create here is an elegant ambiance.* —Jerry Burns

Mission officers are keenly aware of the importance of place and space. Certainly the location and feel of a university's office of mission affects faculty connection; at Xavier, we recently learned this firsthand. In 2012, our office moved into the center of campus, occupying space on the first floor of a new residence hall, across from the main dining commons that seats 700 diners. The office suite, adorned with original, contemporary Ignatian-themed artwork created by an alumna, includes a 12-person conference room and an adjacent 30-person executive conference room. Both rooms are open for scheduling any university-related meeting and have been very popular for faculty gatherings, including the Faculty Committee and the Core Curriculum Revision Task



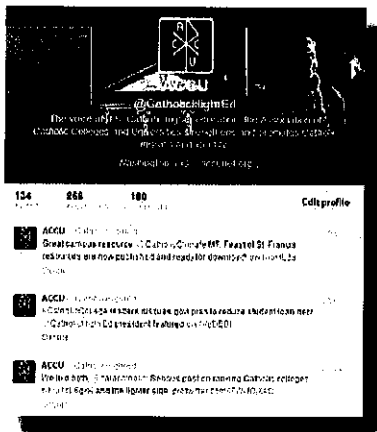
*Faculty Committee chair Dr. Lynda Kilbourne solicits opinions in the Fenwick Executive Conference Room. Paintings portraying Ignatian spirituality, by alumna Holly Schapker, decorate the walls.*

Force. The conference rooms and the dining facility provide a wealth of incidental interactions and have “placed” mission, quite directly, in the everyday experience of faculty. In other words, mission is more likely to be metaphorically central when it is literally central.

In summary, attention to the five W's of faculty engagement can ensure that institutional mission, heritage, and traditions are sustained and animated in Catholic higher education. □

## We like leaders . . . and followers!

Follow ACCU on Twitter and stay up to date on association news and events.



Plus, ACCU follows all its member campuses on Twitter—and happily retweets Catholic mission-related posts. Be sure your mission office, campus ministry, public affairs, and other offices connect with us!

Join the conversation—follow ACCU @CatholicHighEd

