**Excerpts: 2017 Report of the Provincial Assistant - Cabinet**

**TO:** Brian Paulson, S.J.

**FROM:** Dan McDonald, S.J.

**DATE:** December 21, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Annual Visit to Xavier University

**Prenote:** The visit took place between November 29 and concluded on December 5. Besides the usual interviews and conversations, this visit included an invitation by the Mission Committee of the BOT. Barbara Howard attended a good deal of that committee session.

**Summary Evaluation**:

I continue to evaluate Xavier in the first tier of Jesuit Higher Education institutions for M&I and it is the best model for ongoing evaluation of the mission and its programs. While other institutions such as Boston College and Santa Clara have targeted significant monies into the area of Jesuit Identity and Catholic Studies, what Xavier has attended to is the way M&I lives in the university and is expressed easily by everyone I met, except one. The bearings of the latest study “*Assessing the Understanding of Mission among Faculty, Staff and Administrators in Jesuit Catholic Institutions: Xavier University Results”* (11/10/2017) bear out this reality. Xavier has moved forward with increasing mission presence in 19 of 20 areas registered in the study and “higher mean scores on all questions in the 2017 survey results compared to the 2013 survey results”(Appendix 1).

Repeating from last year’s report, “. . . . among the six institutions of the Upper Midwest Province, it is clear to me that Xavier has the most embedded sense of M&I among its BOT, administrators and staff. While students are a particular focus for embedding the mission with results seen farther out from their experience, it is still very interesting what the student population picks up while here. It bears repeating from last year that the good foundations upon which George Traub placed AFMIX is, perhaps, the most generative program at Xavier and has been engaged and built upon over and over by administrators and staff. This is connected with the ongoing leadership of Mike Graham and Debra Mooney as they continue to seek new ways of incorporating Mission in what already exists. They do this alongside new questions important to the developing culture of Xavier. This continues to make M&I both part of the tradition and something fresh at Xavier. For example, building on its tradition of AFMIX, the Women’s Salon was generated as an important development of M&I. This year Mooney created a workbook entitled ***Leadership Mastery and Moxie in 31 Days***.

It is important to note that the Salon was also part of a development out of GC34 Decree 14 and applied to Women’s Ignatian Leadership. The Jesuit Conference took up this same idea in their discussions (workbook number 5W) and indicated that there were opportunities to keep moving forward with placing women in positions of leadership. The workbook is a practical application of what was discovered in both experiences of women across higher education and what happens in the Salon. The ongoing reflection and development of M&I areas at Xavier show regular creative application of what the Society is promoting and the translation into the culture of Xavier and beyond. This part of the report, highlighted in blue, is something which remains strong. The Board Chair, Barbara Howard, is actively engaged in the Salon, e.g.

The new Trustee Orientation Book continues to evolve the idea of what it means to be a BOT member and requires engagement and commitment on the part of BOT members. (Cf Appendix)

Again, all aspects of M&I continue to advance. Xavier is never content to leave things at “good”. “Better” and “best” must follow in the ways they think, develop and engage the Mission.

Xavier has not wasted any time taking the Examen priorities into actualization and development and is in the process of direct engagement in its self-analysis and what Rome affirmed for development.

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Several things struck me this year. One is that when people on campus speak about Mission and Identity they also are adding Diversity and Inclusion to the conversational mix, generally saying: “Mission and Identity and Diversity and Inclusion”. This indicates that in little over one year, the campus has embraced diversity as part and parcel of the narrative of the university and those in the Xavier University community see this as something needed for the Mission and Identity to move forward. What is more striking is that when adding inclusion to diversity talk, those promoting diversity have placed a high premium on the values of retention, presence and engagement. As we know, the idea of diversity is preserved in these three notions. It means creating a geography in which diversity becomes part of the landscape. It is not sufficient to hire and admit students for diversity but equally important are the ways in which the atmosphere retains and includes diversity in every aspect of the university.

The second thing I noticed this year is that across the university administrators and staff desire to be at Xavier. In the past people wanted this same thing, but now with a difference. They want to be known as an institution which values and promotes ethics and Ignatian values. They want to be active supporters of this. So regularly is this referenced that the effects of the formal structures for M&I are said to have created an atmosphere for this as a Xavier reality. Are all on board; no, but this is now such a significantly referenced attitude that it reinforces the Mission as embedded in those who are. It is important to realize how much this is making a difference in the campus discussions, the narratives addressed, etc. Hardly an event passes without commentary about elements of *The Xavier Way*.

The third item I noticed was that people struggle to make service more living among the students. My sense is that just as service is part and parcel of the tenure process, it might be good to insert as an expectation (requirement?) in the student experience. When attracting students to Xavier and later advising students, such an approach may get more student participants on board to this aspect of Xavier so that it is not just relegated to a majority of female students on campus. While I believe that every student would see her/himself as serving in student organizations and clubs, the idea of doing service projects connected to faith and justice is not as easily accessed in discourse or action. As an unintended outcome, such engagement in service might also help student retention. The more students feel part of and engaged in an institution, the more they absorb the sense of community.

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**President’s Cabinet and Direct Reports**

I believe that the best way I can report on this area is the way they work together, discuss, strive for transparency and believe they model Mission and Identity behaviors for those working in their areas.

While each engaged the questions about how they experienced the M&I embedded in their areas and the ways they promoted M&I, there was a larger sense I had about what they are striving for as a deliberative body. Some of the following are areas that might be explored more; some are just questions and not criticism.

1. They need an ongoing vision to integrate all areas of the University. (I think what might have been meant was that they need to present the vision more regularly.) They have the Mission, the Identity, the Strategic Plan, the Xavier Way and all of these are good and powerful. What they registered was making these more intentional in each area.
2. There is a need to have staff better understand the priorities of the university.
3. There needs to be a sharper focus in every area on how the plans match the mission. Not everyone understands how some decisions are made, so more communication about this would help.
4. Do we need to look at how we transition students into the university? Can we better determine if they ‘get’ the Ignatian values?
5. Where are the philosophical differences about the budget and can we be clearer about these areas?
6. How do we send the M&I messages to students and are there ways of doing that better?
7. We probably need to evaluate the number of strategies we employ for embedding the M&I. Do we have enough? Which ones might be focused more?
8. There was a sense that in the past we worried about the legal implications of our faculty and staff. Now we are asking: what is the right thing to do?
9. How can we better put mission into job descriptions?
10. We are getting better at diversity. Now we need to look more deeply into all of this.
11. One area has a formal conversation on Mission and that is helpful for the area.

Almost each area indicated areas for reflection. Perhaps the most interesting one which was symbolically charged was the reflection coming from the VP for Facilities, Bob Sheeran. He told the story of a stone carver who did his work, but that work was to build a cathedral. He said that whatever we do, we do for the Mission.

Asking the groups what was important to model for those working with them, the following made up a nice quilt of possibilities and are worth further reflection.

* Inclusivity
* Social justice
* Care for people (most repeated modelling behavior)
* MAGIS – that we are all capable of doing more
* God, faith and religion – I want people to grapple with thee three in the service of the Mission
* The common good as it is linked to cura personalis
* I give people permission to be high performers
* I model the process of how to get from where we are to the mission.

**Faculty**

I will now turn to conversations I had with two groups of faculty and individual conferences.

Faculty noted that the M&I staff is important for them. In that space, faculty receive help from them to be able to work with students and to interact with staff. Such events as the Mission retreat are important for faculty formation.

As faculty engage the idea of cura personalis, they turn their attention to their work with:

* Student success coaching – each student has a coach,
* Student success with a career coach, and
* Student success with a financial coach.

During the first year, students experience 6 sessions which insure a baseline of help for study skills, mental health issues to learning how to create interaction with faculty and staff.

Faculty seem encouraged by the new six week DeepMIX program which is available for people after they have attended AFMIX or other formation programs. It builds on and further incorporates what was learned in AFMIX. This year 50 – 60 came and people are asked to reflect more deeply on the Gifts of St. Ignatius and their vocation in life.

DASHBOARD is another tool which faculty can use to their advantage. They see this as part of their formation and seem to like it. While I am not familiar with this computer program, faculty can use as a primary and secondary website for application of student project, teaching and learning exercises and other computer programs.

Faculty still register some regret that they are not hiring well for diversity, but there is the realization that this is needed. They want better preparation for the more nuanced parts of this – how do I evaluate the way I participate in hiring to mission? What conversations does the university community need to have about diversity and our particular difficulties in hiring and retaining? We know we need to change the culture, but how do we do that?

One faculty member highlighted that Xavier was uneven with the M&I of the university engaging the students. When I offered that student engagement with the mission might come later and there are markers for remembering the mission and embracing it at various life transitions. He became more insistent that the Student aspiration I mentioned earlier is really not lived at all; in fact he maintains that they see a business model as determining the understanding of students at Xavier. What students think is that “Xavier’s identity was basketball and business”. While in part Xavier is certainly known for that and the students are probably proud of that side of the university, I would want to know to what level is this an accurate read of the university. When I asked the student group about this, they did not see basketball as the defining identity of Xavier. I place this here in the report as something the university might want to check on, especially in light of the advances indicated which were made by Faculty, Staff and Administrators in the AJCU assessment of mission understanding at Xavier. My sense was that this individual was an outrider.

The faculty interviewed see that the Mission and Identity Office exists now to provide opportunities to engage by faculty, staff and administrators. They make sure that the values of the university live and have meaning. What was highlighted were the following:

* They are a counterbalance to superficiality on campus
* The Mission Animators provide a large opportunity to reflect each year on important issues facing the campus and the city.
* They like having Jesuits as guest speakers.
* The mission signs on campus are important.
* They continue to make sure that classes are connected with the Ignatian values.
* As diversity grows, we are further challenged to see how we will live the mission.
* They keep reflection in front of us.
* One professor mentioned the art department and how it helps the campus reflect on culture.
* We are intentional with the mission.
* Retreats are effective.
* The hiring to mission is important and inclusive as a process.
* They help us reflect on the student problems and how to promote what Xavier offers.
* Finally, diversity was mentioned as it is modeled for the students.

**Students:**

I met with 20 plus students in the Xavier Scholars Lounge. I am not sure of the exact number since some were arriving and others departing. The group was lively and had a range from honors students to “just regular’ students as several indicated.

My problem with this meeting was that the ambient noise in the room restricted hearing for me and I did not pick up some of the most important comments. I say this because many of the comments resulted in other students nodding in agreement. There were three with particularly soft voices but these seemed to be key to generating nods by the rest of the group.

On whole the students are very happy with their university, though one thought it would be good to do an audit of certain issues like diversity and students that might get lost in the process. Mentioned also were non-resident students.

The comments made about Xavier were the following:

* Students want to come here.
* There is a strong sense of identity here
* Not having Greek life is a positive and reduces structured inequality
* Great resources
* Great financial aid
* Xavier reaches out to students
* Xavier has a good physical plant life
* Competitive
* CANVASS (?)
* Four Day Introduction to Xavier (Fr. Graham is awesome!)
* You can engage the faculty.
* There is an attempt to communicate with us about things across the campus.
* Encouraging. If you miss something, people will help you understand.
* Professors will talk with you.
* We are family; not just friends as at other schools, but family. Community is big. We are family with other students, advisors, faculty, those engaged in service work.
* There is a felt investment on the part of the University, engagement in clubs, immersion trips, expanding our world.
* Terrible things are the Pizza ATM machine, sometimes it feels like a business, we need more help to reflect on the Mission.
* We need more help with diversity here. We are not a diverse campus as we would like. There are still race issues.