

Introduction



Xavier University is a community of students, teachers, staff, alumni, and local partners. We are a Jesuit Catholic University committed to the cultivation and development of the whole person. As a University, we are a community united by a concern for the truth, for its discovery and revelation, its dissemination, and its preservation. As a Catholic institution, Xavier aims to cultivate graduates who pursue their passions in the world by leading lives that embody love of the good, of God and of their neighbor. As a Jesuit Catholic institution, Xavier brings together the love of God and of the truth in its commitment to humanistic learning guided by the traditional values of the Jesuit order, embodied most directly at the undergraduate level in our Core Curriculum and at the graduate level in our development of highly ethical community serving professionals.

At the time of its founding in 1831 and for much of its history, Xavier's students were primarily undergraduates who gathered at our Cincinnati campus. Over time, we significantly expanded our graduate offerings in areas that complement our focus on undergraduate education. And in recent years, we have offered online courses and programs to students across the country. Whether they are enrolled as undergraduates or graduates, in Cincinnati or beyond, we take a special concern for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of every one of our students.

The previous ten years have been eventful ones for our University. Following our most recent visit from the Higher Learning Commission, we invested significant energy in revisiting our University mission statement. Campus stakeholders collaborated in authoring a new mission statement in 2011-2012, and the refreshed group revisited their work in 2016-2017, affirming and renewing the commitments of the first version. This work in clarifying our mission has borne fruit in a number of areas. In addition to the benefits of shared reflection on our mission and values for renewing our collective sense of the distinctive character of our institution, the mission statement has played an important prioritizing role in decision-making at the highest levels about the investment of academic, personal, and financial resources.

Beginning in 2012, we undertook a significant revision to our undergraduate Core Curriculum. This revision was the product of a genuinely collaborative process, undertaken under the leadership of faculty from all of the University's extant colleges, and drawing on the feedback and insights of faculty, students, and staff across the University. Our new Core Curriculum's goals and student learning objectives are structured around a set of six traditional Jesuit values. While the new Core requires fewer credit hours to complete, it possesses a sharpened focus. In addition to receiving a broad education in the liberal arts, students also work to develop a set of specific skills, and focus on areas and issues of moral significance. As part of the Core, all first-year students complete a sequence of courses designed to introduce them to academic inquiry and life at the University, to core Jesuit values, and to the question of their life's vocation. And we have developed devoted pathways through the Core for transfer students, ensuring that they are immersed in the questions and values at the heart of humanistic education, while providing them a path to graduate in good time.

We have also made the assessment of curricular and co-curricular effectiveness a priority in the design, revision, and implementation of degrees and programs. This priority is evident in the work of our Core Curriculum Assessment Committee, whose members have worked hard to design effective exercises that assess student performance on each of the new Core's student learning objectives. The results of their assessment work are reported to the Core Curriculum Committee, which exercises oversight over the Core as a whole, and the continued fruitful collaboration of those groups will ensure that the Core retains its high standards, and that it adjusts in light of the results of assessment activities. While assessment activities have been central to the revision and implementation of the Core Curriculum, stakeholders across each of the University's four colleges and in co-curricular units have invested significant energy and attention to the implementation of rigorous assessment procedures. Area Assessment Committees coordinated by the Director of Assessment through the Administrative Assessment Group ensure the effectiveness and efficacy of assessment activities, working, in particular, to translate the results of those activities in program improvements and appropriate resource distributions.

The University has also taken great care during this past decade to establish the structures necessary to ensure the flourishing of our post-graduate and off-campus programs. At the graduate level, we introduced a new administrative position, the Dean of the Graduate School, who oversees graduate programs across the University's four colleges. Our graduate programs are subject to continuous assessment and review. The University has also developed a new Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, with online coursework, and on-site labs and clinical placements across Ohio. We have supported our efforts to grow our offerings beyond the range of our undergraduate programs with the administrative structures that will enable those programs to embody the central mission of the institution, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of all of our students.

We have taken great strides in transforming significant governance structures across the University so that they are more inclusive. We have made changes to some of the most important formal governance structures in the University, in particular to include the voices of staff, for example in the establishment of the Staff Advisory Committee, but also in revisions to the membership of the University Planning and Resource Council. The Faculty Committee has recently worked collaboratively with the Provost and Chief Academic Officer, and with the faculty whom they represent, to update the Faculty Handbook. The University has also worked to promote open communication across the entire institution, from the University-wide "Today at Xavier" mailing to the development of new communication strategies in the individual colleges. The Assurance Argument itself provides an excellent example of the sort of cooperation for which we aim in all of our endeavors. It is the product of the work of over eighty faculty, administrators, and staff working across every division of the institution, and has been reviewed by students and the Board of Trustees.

In the past decade, Xavier has increasingly focused attention and allocated substantial resources to ensure that "We prepare students for a world that is increasingly diverse..." as called by our Mission. Guided by our Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, we have strengthened structures, curricular requirements, student life experiences, and faculty/staff professional development opportunities to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. These undertakings support a vibrant justice-centered learning environment that prepares

students to become informed active agents in a multicultural society. Most recently, and due to the national protests and racial unrest of the Summer of 2020, Xavier has targeted strategies and efforts towards racial justice and anti-racism. This renewed focus fully aligns with and furthers our Jesuit Catholic commitment to promoting social justice.

Like all institutions of higher education, Xavier has striven to respond to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning with a shift to remote learning during the second half of the Spring 2020 semester. To be sure, the pandemic has created a range of challenges for students, faculty, and staff. Loss of revenue has created difficulties for the University's budget that have been felt across the institution. And the need to make and communicate difficult decisions in a rapidly changing landscape has sometimes strained the spirit of collaboration that otherwise animates our practice of shared discernment. However, throughout the pandemic, we have endeavored nonetheless to live out the values of our mission. Faculty and staff from across the institution scrambled to effect a transition to remote learning for our students that was as seamless as possible, volunteering to place calls to every undergraduate student and make personal contact with every graduate student to ensure that every student had the resources they needed to succeed in the new circumstances. Faculty have worked tirelessly to create an effective and engaging online learning environment. Our concern for every one of our students has been at the heart of our response to the crisis. As we prepared to resume in-person classes in Fall 2020, our COVID-19 Task Force, whose membership is drawn from across the University community, undertook the challenging and important work of ensuring that the return to on-campus instruction promotes the safety and well-being of all the University's community members, while retaining the high standards of academic quality characteristic of a Xavier education. Their work, which draws on input and insight from stakeholders and individual members across the institution, provides another instance of the collaborative and cooperative approach that we take in responding to shared challenges.

In 2021, Xavier is preparing for a smooth presidential transition. Father Michael Graham, SJ, who has served a successful tenure as President for over twenty years, will retire from the presidency effective June 30, 2021. Xavier is preparing to welcome Dr. Colleen M. Hanycz, PhD, who will serve as the 35th President of Xavier University, starting July 1, 2021. Dr. Hanycz will become the first lay and first female president in Xavier's 190-year history.

As we consider the future of our University in the lead-up to its bicentennial in 2031, we know that we will face the same range of challenges that institutions across the higher education landscape will. Our work in these past ten years, however, positions us to persevere through those challenges, and indeed to flourish. We are confident that our shared commitment to our academic and spiritual mission, embodied in the care that we take for every one of our students, will carry Xavier through these times of immense trial and promise.