

Executive Summary

Saint Peter's University Mission Examen Self-Study:

**A Journey of Gratitude and
Recommitment to Catholic and
Jesuit Identity and Mission**



Saint Peter's
UNIVERSITY

The Jesuit University of New Jersey

Saint Peter's University

Examen Journey

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

As part of the Mission Examen process of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), Saint Peter's University (SPU) participated in a year-long "Examen Journey" to determine how the campus community can maintain and bolster its Catholic and Jesuit identity and mission. This executive summary provides a synopsis of the self-study process, its findings and the mission priorities that the University community has identified to continue its growth and development as a Catholic, Jesuit institution.

The "journey" theme was selected for the self-study to acknowledge the process as an integral milestone in the University's overall journey, including its upcoming sesquicentennial anniversary in 2022, nearly 20 years as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, 10 years under the leadership of the institution's first lay president, and five years with university designation. During the Examen year, the President introduced the theme *Mission in Action* to underscore the process of active reaffirmation of our Catholic and Jesuit identity. Three core values important to SPU served as lenses for the Examen Journey: the commitment to the extraordinary diversity of our student body, the focus on student-centric education and the value of community engagement and broad-based participation. In fact, community involvement in this Examen was extraordinary — from students serving on the self-study team and high level participation in a campus-wide survey to discern our Jesuit identity, to the student-planned Community Day to welcome Archbishop of the Newark Archdiocese, Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., to the campus as the highlight of the Examen year; and from the Board of Trustees devoting Ignatian formation moments in its meetings, to holding special fusion committee sessions between the mission and ministry committee and the Board's finance, enrollment, athletics and student life committees. Indeed, no one has traveled alone on this journey; the journey has been a team effort at Saint Peter's University.

Furthermore, the process was strongly influenced by the University's more recent ecclesiastical journey that began in 2011 with the Archdiocese of Newark to transition the neighborhood parish church of St. Aedan's into St. Aedan's: The Saint Peter's University Church. The University Church serves to strengthen the Catholic identity of Saint Peter's and as the cornerstone for a reinvigorated emphasis on ministry and mission.

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Established in 1872, SPU educates the most diverse student body among the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, while pursuing the mission to prepare graduates "to excel intellectually, lead ethically, serve compassionately and promote justice in our ever-changing urban and global environment." The main campus is in Jersey City, New Jersey, often cited as the most diverse city in the nation, and just two miles from Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. The University has a proud and a long history of making higher education accessible to low- and moderate-income individuals, and educating immigrants and their children and the minority community. As of Fall 2017 the student body totals 3,524 students: 2,308 traditional undergraduates, 329 adult and non-degree undergraduate students and 887 graduate students. In the undergraduate population approximately 62% are low-income, 25% are non-native English speakers, 50% are first-generation college students, and 70% come from minority backgrounds (40% Hispanic, 23% Black and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander). By serving a diverse community of learners and a diverse parish community in an economically challenged area, SPU provides educational and service opportunities to move people to achieve their highest potential.

Saint Peter's University also has relatively few Jesuits, and has among the smallest operating budgets and endowments among the institutions of the AJCU. Yet, remarkably, the University tightly manages its limited resources to advance its mission and support student success. From tuition scholarships to university funded work study positions; from programs for the underprepared to the honors program; from internships to study abroad; students enter a world of scholarship, research and service steeped in the Jesuit tradition on their journey to graduation. SPU's focus on the underrepresented and underserved reflects an institution-wide commitment to Catholic social teaching, particularly solidarity and the option for the poor in an educational context.

MISSION EXAMEN OUTCOMES

As recommended by the mission examen guidelines from the AJCU, the Saint Peter's community utilized the document, *Seven Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education*, to gain greater awareness of how Saint Peter's University carries out its Catholic, Jesuit mission. A summary of the findings from the process are outlined according to these characteristics.

CHARACTERISTIC 1: LEADERSHIP'S COMMITMENT TO THE MISSION

Throughout the self-study, the community interpreted its goals and objectives as a Catholic,

Jesuit institution in light of our institutional mission to prepare graduates “to excel intellectually, lead ethically, serve compassionately and promote justice in our ever-changing urban and global environment.” Through the University’s leadership, the entire campus community shares responsibility for advancing this mission and its Catholic, Jesuit values. The mission statement is inspired by the 470-year-old tradition and principles of Jesuit education. The University undertakes wide-ranging and deep efforts to involve the campus community in discussions of and formation in the Catholic, Jesuit tradition. SPU is blessed with a Board of Trustees, president and lay leaders who are committed to ensuring that its policies, programs and decisions support our Catholic, Jesuit identity.

CHARACTERISTIC 2: THE ACADEMIC LIFE

The vibrant academic life of the University is driven by the Catholic and Jesuit mission commitment to intellectual rigor, academic exploration, integrity, and lifelong learning. Inspired by *The Spiritual Exercises* and the Ignatian educational charism, the faculty, administrators and staff walk in solidarity with the diverse population of students to guide them in achieving their fullest potential within the spirit of generosity and service that culminates in career paths inherently meaningful in this world that edifies all creation. Through its core curriculum, students address issues intrinsic to a humane education through a liberal arts program committed to the pursuit of knowledge in its fundamental unity, intelligently appreciative of a common cultural heritage, conscious of social and moral obligations, and respectful of the traditions of the Judeo-Christian value system and of Jesuit education. The University offers expanding opportunities for faculty to advance their teaching and research that support the development of the whole person, *cura personalis*, the *Magis*, discernment, men and women for and with others, and other Jesuit principles. Saint Peter’s sponsors a rich array of institutes and centers that focus on societal concerns, particularly social justice. Throughout the year there are many opportunities, on and off campus, to develop and participate in initiatives that support the ideals of the Catholic intellectual life and enhance the understanding of what it means to be a Catholic and Jesuit university.

CHARACTERISTIC 3: A CATHOLIC, JESUIT CAMPUS CULTURE

The Catholic, Jesuit campus culture at Saint Peter’s University is robust. SPU is a faith-based community and offers a comprehensive suite of programs and activities for all members of the campus to explore, develop and strengthen their own spirituality, faith and service. From the first moment new students join the university, Saint Peter’s strives to invite them formally and informally into the campus culture that values our Catholic, Jesuit identity and supports the core values of the institution: spirituality and faith, excellence, student-centered, leadership for justice, diversity, global, and engagement. Wellness, leadership and engagement are pillars of the student life and development curriculum. The extraordinary diversity of the campus lends itself to opportunities to having open, inclusive and non-alienating discussions, and to building a community culture characterized by openness to diversity of thought, solidarity and respect for others.

CHARACTERISTIC 4: SERVICE

Saint Peter's University seeks to develop solidarity among its community and with others through common interests, purposes and responsibilities. Comprehensive action-based service and community engagement initiatives, coupled with reflection, advance the Jesuit mission on campus and with our local, regional and global communities. As a Carnegie Community- Engaged Institution, SPU values collaborations that enrich teaching and learning by preparing students to be educated, engaged citizens who will address critical societal issues. Ignatian pedagogy is infused into many aspects of the Saint Peter's educational experience. Through faculty and staff development, targeted support programs, service learning, community-engaged courses, and volunteerism, the University community attempts to integrate this didactic model, as well as the Jesuit concern for the service of faith and the promotion of justice. In recognition of the diverse backgrounds of our student body, our educational approach features heightened emphasis on context and the experiences of our students, and the communities we serve, so we can meet them where they are and make them feel at home on our campus.

CHARACTERISTIC 5: SERVICE TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Saint Peter's University occupies a unique and exceptional space in Hudson County, one of the most diverse and densely populated counties in the nation. It is a university (a place for excellence in teaching and research); it is Jesuit (a place where discernment and dialogue are valued); and pastorally it serves the local community through its church (St. Aedan's: The Saint Peter's University Church), where people of faith can gather. Saint Peter's provides an intellectual, thoughtful and moral component to the community because of its focus on the longer term social justice goals that are inclusive of many voices, in particular marginalized voices. Through open and meaningful lines of communication between the University president and the local Archbishop of the Newark Archdiocese, the University sponsors many activities that serve the local church. Moreover, many curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular programs demonstrate the University's role in preparing Catholic intellectual leaders in an environment that respects academic freedom, Church traditions and Catholic social teaching.

CHARACTERISTIC 6: JESUIT PRESENCE

The Saint Peter's Jesuit Community is multi-apostolic, working at the University, Saint Peter's Prep, local parishes and in interreligious dialogue and social justice advocacy of various kinds. In collaboration with the Jesuits, lay members of SPU have embraced responsibility to advance and carry on the institution's Jesuit, Catholic mission. SPU hopes for a continued active presence of Jesuits to support the exemplary ways in which Saint Peter's carries forward the Catholic, Jesuit mission. The University's positive relationship with the Society of Jesus is reflected in its interactions with the Provincial, the AJCU, and in more limited ways, in collaboration with Jesuit institutions around the world. Various University efforts also support the Jesuit community to offer programs that promote vocations, including those to the Society of Jesus.

CHARACTERISTIC 7: INTEGRITY

Saint Peter's University continues its journey to foster a community that seeks to "live lives of honesty, integrity and concern for the common good," as called for by Pope Francis. This commitment is fulfilled in the people, policies, leadership, programs, and places at the University and supported by the goals of the strategic plan, *Pathways to Distinction*. The alumni are proud of their Jesuit education and enthusiastically support New Jersey's only Jesuit University. Through ethical decision making, fair and equitable human resources policies, leadership formation, and environmental sustainability practices, the integrity of Saint Peter's University is uniquely inspired by and aligned with its Jesuit heritage.

JESUIT MISSION PRIORITIES

The Saint Peter's University community has identified four overarching Mission Priorities — invitations for growth — over the next five years, to foster our Catholic, Jesuit identity and mission. Possible pathways to achieve these priorities are included in the full report. Under the leadership of the president, the University commits to these priorities.

1. Ensure that the resources for Mission and Ministry effectively and adequately support Ignatian formation and programming for the campus laity, the student body and the parishioners at St. Aedan's: The Saint Peter's University Church.

Throughout the Examen, the campus community indicated appreciation for the existing formation programs provided by the University, but also called for intensified and continuing orientations. There is a need for the University to provide adequate funding and resources for Mission and Ministry to expand these programs and to support the area's goals overall. Over the years, the Jesuit community has generously contributed to mission programs and Ignatian spirituality development. With the decline in the number of active Jesuits on campus, the University no longer can rely on the financial contributions of the Jesuit community and must identify other sources of support to ensure the resources needed by Mission and Ministry to fulfill its critical role.

2. Develop a proactive recruitment and retention plan to foster a more diverse workforce that advances the Catholic, Jesuit Mission.

Throughout the history of Saint Peter's University, and also now evidenced in this Examen, our unique mission has been advanced by talented and dedicated community members in collaboration with members of the Society of Jesus. The shrinking number of Jesuits makes it clear that the University's Catholic and Jesuit identity will depend almost exclusively on lay people. Saint Peter's has been blessed with lay colleagues who have taken up the challenge of maintaining the University's Jesuit traditions. As we have grown and become more diverse, we need to welcome and invite all members, Catholic or not, to know about our character and mission. Therefore, an ongoing priority will be the hiring, retention and support of lay colleagues to understand and take ownership of our mission and to perpetuate the integrity of Saint Peter's as a Catholic, Jesuit institution.

3. Integrate more effectively, and articulate more clearly, Ignatian values across all parts of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum and student experiences.

At the heart of our Catholic, Jesuit mission and identity is the ministry of education. Since the introduction of coeducation and the diversification of the student body and the workforce, colleagues from Catholic and non-Catholic faith traditions have successfully taken up the challenge of imparting the Ignatian philosophy and passing on the University's Jesuit heritage. Furthermore, while many students express an appreciation for the Jesuit liberal arts curriculum and how it contributes to the development of the "whole person," they also identified service as an essential component of the Saint Peter's experience. The University commits to improving the integration and articulation of Ignatian values across the entire student experience — curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum.

4. Strengthen our links to both the local Church and the Northeast Province of the Society of Jesus.

The Saint Peter's community greatly values the Jesuits that have served over generations. While we are cognizant that diminishing Jesuit vocations will mean that the number of Jesuits we had in the past will likely not be seen again, our fervent hope and prayer is that Saint Peter's University will continue to have a Jesuit presence. The vision and charism of the Society has been a continuing source of inspiration, particularly forming men and women for others and seeking to live a faith that does justice. Our partnership with the Archdiocese of Newark, especially through our nexus with St. Aedan's parish, has been enriching and challenging. For these and other reasons we are very much committed to updating and continuing the bonds with the US Northeast Province of the Jesuits and the Archdiocese of Newark.

CONCLUSION

The Saint Peter's University community is grateful for the graces that flowed from our contemporary journey of the Institutional Examen. With our Jesuit companions, we have determined that our destination remains steadfast: to live faithfully the Catholic, Jesuit mission through education that prepares students to "excel intellectually, lead ethically, serve compassionately, and promote justice."

THE SAINT PETER'S UNIVERSITY JOURNEY CONTINUES!

This Institutional Examen has been a blessing for the community of Saint Peter's University as we have recalled so much good received and recommitted ourselves to improving the way we live out our Catholic and Jesuit mission and identity.

**GO FORTH
AND SET
THE WORLD
ON FIRE.**

Saint Ignatius of Loyola

