

The Story of the Jesuit Commitment and Becoming an Ignatian Scholar

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High school is a time for trying new things. Jesuit Portland offers many students their first opportunity to run cross-country, try lacrosse, audition for a play, strum a guitar at Coffeehouse, lead an Encounter, start a club, or go on a homeless immersion. As our alumni know, Jesuit is often a student's *last* chance to participate in these activities.

For freshmen, however, the first days of high school are not a likely time to take a risk and try something new. Freshmen tend to look around to see what "everybody else" is doing. Remember the feeling, "Are any *cool* people going to the game, the dance, the retreat? If everybody else is going, I'll go too." Thus the perpetual question facing parents, faculty, counselors, and administrators, "How can we help Jesuit's freshmen get involved in the life of the school?"

In 2008, we came up with an idea that would encourage freshmen and sophomores to become more deeply involved in school activities and, at the same time, provide upperclassmen an incentive to become leaders and reward them for their participation in school activities. The Jesuit Commitment/Ignatian Scholars program was born.

Interested students "commit" to engage in meaningful activities on campus and in the broader community. Specifically, students agree to: join a club; learn about other cultures; attend brownbag luncheons, coffeehouses, school plays and ball games; work on behalf of the environment; do service work; go on a retreat or two; read a book; and meet a few times with a faculty mentor.

The Jesuit Commitment program is best described in this way: "We want to help our students see how the fabric of their Jesuit education is woven from many threads: academics, campus ministry, Christian service, and co-curriculars. We also want our freshmen to find a home, become involved, and feel welcome. And we want all Jesuit students to learn more about our world and become leaders. "

Students who sign up for the elective Jesuit Commitment/Ignatian Scholars program are assigned a faculty mentor. The students gather in a group session led by the mentor a few times during the year, to make sure they have met the progressive set of expectations aligned with the student's age and development. For example, freshmen are expected attend at least two Chapter One faith-development sessions, attend one play, one brownbag lunch session, one or two ballgames; go on a retreat and to a Coffeehouse; read a book about a non-American culture; and do two hours of service to their neighborhood or place of worship.

Whereas freshmen simply have to *attend* one of the many brownbag lunch sessions during the year, seniors are asked to *lead* such a session, and to take on other advanced levels of leadership. Students who fulfill all of the requirements of their Jesuit Commitment program earn one semester of "pass credit." Students who participate during all their years at Jesuit High School will

be recognized at graduation and awarded the Ignatian Scholar white cord in honor of both their commitment and St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order.

Openness to Growth

In its inaugural year, we thought 100 or so students would sign up for the Jesuit Commitment. So imagine our amazement when over half of Jesuit's students signed up for this brand-new program. Explains one sophomore, "The JC/Ignatian Scholar program has led me to try a lot of different activities. Through this program, I have met new people and joined some great activities that I thought I would never try. The Ignatian Scholar program has helped me grow into a more open person."

This year, when the freshmen look around to see if anyone else is joining Link Crew, or Model UN, or going to a brownbag lunch, or on the freshman overnight retreat, they realize that *everyone is doing something*. Jesuit students have signed up for clubs and activities in record numbers, making it more likely that they will make friends, expand their horizons, and really find a home in the Jesuit High community. This growth is directly attributable to the Jesuit Commitment, or the "JC effect."

As one freshman says, "Signing up for the Jesuit Commitment has pushed me to become really involved with the community, and I greatly appreciate it. I have become part of the celebrations at Mass by performing with the Liturgy Band, and that is awesome. I feel a greater connection with the school because I am getting to know it from a variety of angles, and getting to see more of what Jesuit offers."

Liturgy Band is one of the activities that fulfills part of the "Jesuit Commitment." This year, like the Link Crew and Ambassador programs, the Lit Band's membership, and thus its harmonies, have soared. The JC effect is spilling over to other clubs as well. Model United Nations, Mock Trial, Robotics and student faith-support groups have also welcomed dozens of new members.

For upperclassmen already heavily involved in activities, the Jesuit Commitment/Ignatian Scholars program helps to frame their experience, and offers them credit for their devotion to the school. As energetic senior Ben explained, "I don't know that the Ignatian Scholars Program prompted me to join any new activities, as I was already involved up to my neck in all that is Jesuit. However, the program serves as a good reminder why those activities are important to the community, and what students can receive from involving themselves in every aspect of the Profile of the Graduate at Graduation. The program also serves as good motivation to stay motivated, if you know what I mean."

In addition to leading clubs, Ben and his fellow junior and senior "Ignatian Scholars" are asked to attend an international film, help out with Multicultural Week or other Unity Club activities, and assist the alumni office in outreach to those who have gone before them.

Living Jesuit values

One of the other benefits of the Jesuit Commitment program is that it encourages students to explore important Jesuit values which do not fit neatly into existing departments and programs. For example, in recent years Jesuit High has been called by world events and the Society of Jesus

to increase students' knowledge of and concern for the environment and international affairs. The JC program provides a structure for them to do so.

As part of the Commitment, students read a book from a published list and write a reflection on how that book has changed their life. One young man read *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, the story of Dr. Paul Farmer, a physician who does volunteer work in Haiti. The student wrote, "Before the Commitment, I believed that I couldn't change the world because I was a powerless teenager from Beaverton, Oregon, but now I realize that all my actions make a difference and it's my responsibility as a human being to make them positive."

In addition to joining activities and reading a book, students who sign up for the Jesuit Commitment are expected to provide two hours of service to their parish or neighborhood as freshmen and two hours to their school as sophomores. Juniors provide four hours of service to the environment and seniors, four hours to a community event. All service is in addition to other Christian Service requirements and is designed to help students remember that service can begin right here at home. Students get to choose their service, which could mean serving as a member of Jesuit's Green Team, collecting recyclables, coaching CYO, leading a retreat at their parish, pulling ivy at a local park, or helping with the Race for the Cure or the Children's Cancer Society Walk.

If you visit Jesuit any weekday afternoon or weekend, you will run into young people building robots, playing the stock market game, filling food boxes, creating origami, playing hoops, building sets, or heading out to retreats and immersions. Thanks to the Jesuit Commitment/Ignatian Scholars program, even more of our students are getting to experience these uniquely Jesuit activities, thereby enriching their high school experience and giving them a deep sense of what it means to have a truly *Ignatian* education.

There is an ancient meaning of the word "heart." It is the place where intellect, emotion, and spirit converge in the human self. The Jesuit Commitment/Ignatian Scholars program speaks to the heart of our school and of our students. This year, we will hope to touch the hearts of the many students involved in the program, and perhaps, in those young people, intellect, emotion, and spirit will converge and they will become Ignatian Scholars.