

Notre Dame, Its Mission, Its Faculty

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Universities are among the most important institutions of any society. They exercise a formative role as centers of teaching, learning, and research, with excellence at all levels as their goal. Originally, religion informed the structures, people, and practices of the university. Over time, most universities became secular centers that abstracted learning from the religious dimension of the human experience. The University of Notre Dame, however, continues to spring forth from the Catholic mission that created it.

This document seeks to articulate the University's expectations of how its faculty contribute and will contribute to realizing its contemporary academic ambition of being a truly preeminent and truly Catholic university. The University of Notre Dame flourishes because of the academic achievements of men and women of faith and all seekers of truth: faculty members, both Catholic and those of other faith traditions, have supported and strengthened its Catholic mission; generations of students have received an education of body, mind, and spirit; and learning in service of social justice and human solidarity has thrived. As a vibrant, religiously-inspired university, Notre Dame aims to achieve academic preeminence in both teaching undergraduates and in graduate education and research. Because Notre Dame is committed to attaining greater academic excellence as a Catholic university, fully realizing its religious character and mission is imperative.

The Education of Students

“Education,” said Blessed Basil Moreau, C.S.C., the founder of the Holy Cross Order, “is the art of bringing a young person to completeness.” Notre Dame is committed to the flourishing of the whole person—intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual. Teaching and learning here seek to foster in students the disciplined habits of mind, body, and spirit that characterize educated, skilled, generous, free human beings. Notre Dame wants to educate and inspire its students to be moral citizens within their communities and the larger world, to use their talents to the best of their ability, and to develop the generous sensibilities needed to relieve injustice, oppression, and poverty in all of their manifestations.

The Fundamental Dialogue Between Faith and Reason

Essential to Notre Dame’s mission is its commitment to sustaining a dialogue between faith and reason across the disciplines. The conviction that there is ultimately no conflict between the truths of faith and those discovered by reason underlies our work as a Catholic university. Indeed, the discoveries of reason enhance our understanding of faith, just as faith enhances our understanding of what reason discovers. Within the academy today, there exists widespread incomprehension of—even hostility toward—the conviction that religious and theological perspectives can speak to and enrich reasoned analysis. The resulting vacuum provides the University of Notre Dame with an opportunity—some might say the responsibility—to even more strongly support the

efforts of its students and faculty to explore the intersections between faith and reason, pursuing both as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive.

In order to achieve this difficult but critical goal, and consistent with the Catholic intellectual tradition, Notre Dame must remain committed to free inquiry and open discussion, always informed by Catholic thought, of all legitimate achievements in the arts, humanities, sciences, professions, and every other area of human scholarship and creativity. Questions concerning faith and reason, religion and discovery, the ethical dimensions of human life and works, and the integration of knowledge can arise in many venues, including the classroom, informal conversations between faculty and students, research and creative arts, and deliberations in departmental meetings or in committee discussions. Teaching and learning occur in countless ways in every university. At Notre Dame, the academic enterprise contains numerous opportunities for a fruitful dialogue between faith and reason.

The Role of the Faculty

Notre Dame therefore continues to embrace the challenge of being and becoming a preeminent research university, committed to educating its students, and truly Catholic. In innumerable and essential ways, all faculty members at the University contribute to realizing this vision, each of them able to contribute uniquely out of his or her own beliefs, experiences, expertise, and talents. Working together, all faculty members at

Notre Dame must ensure that an ever-wider range of scholarly interests, cultural heritages, social backgrounds, and viewpoints are present and thriving at the University.

The characteristics of universities that set them apart from other types of institutions are educational. For Notre Dame to maintain its commitment to being a Catholic university and not simply a Catholic institution in a broader sense, the educational life of the university must be richly and diversely Catholic. Faculty members are the core of every university's academic community, sustaining and directing the intellectual dialogue that occurs within this community.

Engaged with all faculty in a common pursuit of truth, Catholic faculty bring to their teaching and research a faith commitment and an intellectual formation that enable them to relate issues in their respective disciplines to the beliefs, practices, and unresolved questions in the Catholic tradition. Along with their primary responsibility of providing the highest level of research and instruction, Catholic faculty members also contribute to the holistic education of their students and the cultivation of their faith. Providing living examples of the legitimate diversity of adult Catholicism for their Catholic students, Catholic faculty offer counsel, engage in conversations relevant to their faith, and help students develop a faith that is informed, mature, and reflective. Catholic faculty members also have a special responsibility to explore the possible relationship of their Catholic faith with their own research and teaching, as well as to promote a more holistic form of education, in their informal interactions with other faculty and students. To fulfill Notre Dame's commitment to be such a Catholic

educational community, the University seeks, in the words of its mission statement, “the continuing presence of a predominant number of Catholic intellectuals.”

The University also needs the contributions of faculty members of other faiths. For Notre Dame to be truly Catholic, it must be truly catholic, home to the rich diversity of human thought, experience, and belief. Faculty members of other faith traditions enrich Notre Dame by sharing both their academic expertise and accomplishments, and their diverse perspectives. Such faculty members also provide examples of lived faith and exhibit the virtues that Notre Dame wants to instill in its students. They can foster in them a respect for other religious traditions and a commitment to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, both of which are now critically needed in the world and essential to the success of a genuinely Catholic and catholic university.

In addition, all seekers of truth are vitally important to the furtherance of the dialogue between faith and reason, a foundational aspect of Notre Dame’s academic mission. Such faculty members enrich, broaden, and advance the conversation between faith and reason so that this dialogue is truly inclusive and complete rather than a self-deceptive and narrow monologue.

Thus faculty members of diverse faiths and all seekers of truth are indispensable in multiple ways to achieving the goals and fulfilling the mission of the University of Notre Dame. Different faculty members will make different contributions. Every faculty member is likely to make varied contributions at various points in her or his career. It is

through these combined, diverse contributions that academic excellence will be achieved, a continuing dialogue between faith and reason will be sustained, and the development of the whole person—intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual—will flourish.

Conclusion

Notre Dame aspires to be a preeminent research university, with a commitment to the complete education of its students, and a distinctive and defining Catholic identity, character, and mission. Our unique educational aspiration demands that we remain true to our heritage and mission by combining the best of the secular and the religious traditions, the highest level of inquiry and ethical reflection, and the commitment to educating and enriching the whole person. The contributions of all faculty members to the University's mission are at once informed by their unique beliefs, talents, experiences, and expertise and vitally important to Notre Dame's academic achievement and Catholic character. Only if Notre Dame is home to a community of scholars committed to educational excellence and the pursuit of truth in all of its manifestations, will it be true to its history and realize its aspirations for the future.