

Remarks delivered Mission Day, April 7, 2022.
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This feels like a difficult time to reach for a grand vision.

To be the most innovative and progressive Jesuit and Catholic university. Right now. As we are still grappling with the pandemic. And with new manifestations of systemic racism. And as we are—especially in Seattle--painfully aware of growing economic inequality. As climate change continues. As we see horrors in Ukraine.

It is a hard time to dream big. Right now, it feels like a hard time to simply keep on conducting “business as usual,” as the ground seems to continually shift beneath our feet. And to add insult to injury, the Seattle Times reminded us last weekend that we live on a fault line—and they didn’t mean metaphorically.

And yet here we are, together, finally, with students who keep showing up in spite of it all, hungry to learn.

Being unsettled is nothing new for Seattle U. It was at a very unsettled time—1931, the Great Depression, financial crisis, that this university undertook one of its most RADICAL INNOVATIONS: coeducation.

Leading from the margins of Jesuit education, Father James McGoldrick began educating women alongside men in 1931. Despite the opposition of Jesuit and Catholic leadership at the time. And he persisted, until nearly two decades later, in 1948, the Society of Jesus formally accepted coeducation.

That is Seattle U, humble, but sure of its vision, scrappy, and leading from the margins.

What does that vision mean for us today, in 2022?

Five suggestions:

- 1) It means we need to double-down on the excellence of our core undergraduate education in the liberal arts, ethics, and social justice. Fight back against the “globalization of superficiality” with depth. This means taking a hard look at our undergraduate core. This means more faculty in classrooms, teaching—as a university, we have a knack for creating programs that take teachers out of classrooms and turn them into administrators.
- 2) It means loudly emphasizing the Jesuit-ness of our professional programs--the way our professional programs center ethics and values as a “both-and” proposition--not as a substitute for technical acumen.
- 3) It means building our values into our institutional structures—expanding the work done under the Advance grant and the efforts to value the contributions of staff and term faculty.
- 4) It means budget transparency and moral transparency—particularly around the costs and rationale for Division 1 athletics.

- 5) It means real and authentic community engagement—building and rebuilding ties to our urban setting—grappling with the implications of inequality on the ground, not just “admiring the problem” from the safety of our classrooms. And not forgetting the extraordinary gift of being able to engage in higher education in the richness of a dynamic urban setting.

It means to keep on leading from the margins, scrappy, humble, transparent, and with a vision.