



Teaching with the University's Mission in Mind

By Dr. Erin Bell, Assistant Director of Educational Development

The University's Mission is foundational to all the critical endeavors taking place within our community but bears particular significance to curriculum design and the work that faculty and students accomplish in face-to-face and virtual classrooms. The Mission is often referred to and cited in communication and messaging across many sectors of the University, but because of the Mission's significance to the student body, it is beneficial for instructors to make time to reflect on its specific wording, especially as they wrap up one semester and begin planning for the next.

The University of Detroit Mercy's Mission states that the "University of Detroit Mercy, a Catholic university in the Jesuit and Mercy traditions, exists to provide excellent student-centered undergraduate and graduate education in an urban context. A Detroit Mercy education seeks to integrate the intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development of our students." Faculty play a critical role in promoting and forwarding this Mission, and as such, the CETL recently spoke with Erin McDonald, CSJ, University Minister for Service and Justice, about how faculty can incorporate the Mission into their teaching practices.

One important component of promoting the Mission, according to McDonald, is that faculty members are well-informed of the Mission and University's identity so that they can model it for students. "What really resonates with students is when there is a genuine sense of authenticity that the faculty share values and an understanding of the Mission, and that this transcends being Catholic," states McDonald. "I think that's an important distinction because here at campus ministry we work with students from all religious traditions. Many of these values [in our Mission] contain good connection points with our other world religions."

According to McDonald, faculty can identify the components of the Mission and identity that most resonate with them and really "make those aspects their own" by integrating said components into their curriculum. "Faculty may, for example, be conscientious of how our Mission and identity calls us to be anti-racist, to walk with the excluded, and how it calls us to be doing the work of justice, among other key values" notes McDonald. Focusing on such aspects in tandem with course content can allow faculty to create reading lists, assignments, and frameworks that amplify diverse voices and create nuanced reflection points.

McDonald notes, for example, that "One of the Apostolic Preferences is walking with youth

toward a hope-filled future. What does that look like if you are using that as a lens for how you are choosing readings and crafting assignments, and where are the places that you could integrate that theme more?" As McDonald suggests, the Mission and identity can be integrated throughout an entire course schedule, rather than being something that is separate from or in a discrete unit on its own.



With current events and the current political climate in the United States in mind, McDonald suggests another important consideration for faculty is how to model modes of discussion and dialogue with those who may have different points of view than their own. "The polarization in our country right now can give young adults a lot of sense of hopelessness; there are feelings of paralysis when it comes to engaging with divisive topics," notes McDonald. Learning how to engage in healthy, respectful debate and dialogue is also something that the Mission calls us to do.

Another important facet of the Mission and vision is *cura personalis* (translated as "care for the person"). *Cura personalis* is demonstrating concern and care for the personal development of the whole person, and as McDonald states, while this approach certainly includes aiming for academic excellence, it also espouses a more holistic definition of student success. "Obviously, we want students to have command over the material,



concepts, theories, and critical thinking,” notes McDonald, “but from the perspective of campus ministry, that’s not the only definition of success. In our coursework and class explains McDonald, we can also focus on growth and development beyond the intellectual “Are we forming young adults to be *real* citizens that are both discerning and reflective, that have self-awareness, and are able to engage in meaningful dialogue,” asks McDonald. “To be able to be empathetic, like to be not just leaders and successful, but to be moral, to have a conscience, to be people who aren’t solely focused on financial wealth but other forms of success.”

Faculty that would like to learn more about teaching with Mission can visit the Office of Mission Integration in person (in the Student Center Building at the McNichols campus) or visit the following web resource for more information:

<https://www.udmercy.edu/about/mission-vision/office/living-mission.php>