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***The program participants keep in touch through e-mail and newsletters both during and after the program.***

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However, the VU's attempt to expose the participants to liberal arts curriculum oftentimes has an immediate negative impact on the academic lives of students. Until recently, most higher education institutions in the region focused on professional and vocational training aimed at reproducing the labor force required by the government's economic planners. Unchanged from the soviet times, many Eastern European universities continue to devalue the liberal arts approach to education. As a result, credits from the academic year spent in the United States are not accepted by many Eastern European higher education institutions and do not count toward degree requirements in students' home universities. Thus, many VU alumni have to study one year longer for their bachelor's degrees than their peers who did not participate in the program.

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Failure to recognize liberal arts education reflects a heated debate in Eastern and Central European academe regarding the value of liberal arts as opposed to professional preparation. The opponents of the liberal arts approach argue that it prevents students from being successful in the labor market, whereas the proponents emphasize its value for strengthening Eastern Europe's fledgling democracies by instilling civic values, critical thinking, and reflective action in young people. The VU exchange program brings this debate to the classroom by providing student-participants with the possibility to experience American liberal arts education, compare it to traditional education in their home countries, and share experiences with their peers and professors in their home universities.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>The VU evaluation report (Silova, 1997) examined the academic and professional development of VU alumni after their return to home universities. For a free copy of the report, please write to lstrashko@sososny.org.

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## Latin American Jesuit University Education Is Alive and Well

**Charles J. Beirne, S.J.**

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**T**wenty-one Latin American universities and their branch campuses share a common heritage: the Society of Jesus has some responsibility for them. This relationship varies from one institution to another; some are pontifical universities; others describe themselves as universities of Christian inspiration. But they all belong to the *Asociación de Universidades Confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina* (AUSJAL) whose rectors or presidents meet every two years, most recently (April 14-16, 1997) in Guatemala.

Each rector put aside the usual concerns of keeping the institutions open and turned to wider questions such as the effects of neoliberalism on the vast majority of Latin Americans, how to translate and integrate into their institutions the decrees of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Jesuit Order—its highest legislative body—and the integral formation of faculty and students to prepare them to transform societies in crisis. In this regard, the delegates cited their 1995 seminal document, “*Desafíos de América Latina y Propuestas Educativas*” (Challenges of Latin America and Educational Proposals) which called attention to the irony of the “individual success of many of our alums within shipwrecked societies.”

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In the 1960s many universities felt they had to “protect” themselves from the advocates of the “social apostolate” who pointed the finger at institutions that they blamed for failing to react to the plight of the majority who live in misery. Then in the mid-1970s the Thirty-Second General Congregation singled out the “service of the

faith of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement” (Decree #4) as a benchmark for all Jesuit works. This caused some universities to circle the wagons even closer for more protection. But the most recent general congregation—the 34th in 1996—reaffirmed the faith/justice challenge and integrated into it a profound concern for culture as the environment in which faith and justice are lived out. Valentín Menéndez, S.J., the assistant to the superior general of the Jesuits for northern Latin America spoke to the rectors about how this faith/justice/culture theme should influence the universities entrusted to the Jesuit Order: serious research, dynamic teaching, and a significant impact on the societies the universities serve.

A complementary theme—the August 1996 letter of the Latin American Jesuit provincial superiors on the effects of neoliberalism—was developed by Francisco de Roux, S.J., the coordinator of social concerns for Northern Latin America. He challenged the universities to go beyond the clichés that simply attack neoliberalism and propose viable alternatives.

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***Unlike what might have happened several decades ago, the rectors responded with enthusiasm to the challenge and, as an example, advanced an ongoing AUSJAL project on the nature of poverty, its causes, and proposals for solution.***

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Unlike what might have happened several decades ago, the rectors responded with enthusiasm to the challenge and, as an example, advanced an ongoing AUSJAL project on the nature of poverty, its causes, and proposals for solution. Each university will encourage its scholars to tackle the problem in different ways and then pool their results for continent-wide solutions. It was clear to the delegates that an unbridled market without ethical norms would lead to further gaps between the tiny rich minority and the vast poor majority, and the measurement of economic growth on the basis of financial speculation instead of increased production and employment.

Several rectors mentioned that this integration of efforts by the universities and the social apostolate is a sign of the maturing of the Jesuit Order itself—an indication of the ability of its institutions to see their purpose as lying outside themselves and in the community beyond its walls. Preparation of personally successful professionals will not guarantee that the universities will have achieved their mis-

sion; success will be measured by the impact these professionals have on “shipwrecked societies.”

Although most of the rectors are Jesuit priests, they clearly affirmed the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation decree on the laity as crucial colleagues in a joint task. They stressed the idea that the laity are not merely helpers in a Jesuit “mission”; some even said that the role of Jesuits was to help the laity in their role. By sheer numbers we see that the institutions for which the Jesuits are given responsibility are administered and staffed largely by lay women and men. Although the rectors hoped there would be more Jesuits available for the university vocation in the future, there was no pining for the good old days of the “long black line” or seeing the laity as a “necessary evil” that had to be tolerated because of the diminishing number of Jesuits. But real involvement of the laity in integral responsibility for the universities is still a goal of the future in some institutions that tend to identify Jesuit “power” as a prerequisite for Ignatian “influence.”

E-mail will guarantee that the dialogue on common projects will increase over the next few years—especially the faith/justice/culture challenge, a greater role for lay women and men, and programs in Ignatian spirituality. It will be important to study the development of these significant trends over the next few years to see what happens on the ground. Will lofty ideals be confined to mission statements or will they lead to the transformation of universities which will truly transform societies?

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## A Training Program for Teachers at the Royal University of Phnom Penh

### A Joint Project among Jesuit Universities

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#### GENERAL BACKGROUND

There are 10 institutions at the tertiary level in the Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania. Two of these are colleges and the others, universities. Of the latter, two—Sophia in Tokyo and Elisabeth University of Music in Hiroshima—are on the island of Honshu in Japan. Sogang is our university in Seoul, Korea. Fu Jen University—near Taipei in Taiwan—is jointly run by the Society