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## Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy 2023

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Last year, the Lasallian Region of North America (RELAN) celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Huether Lasallian Conference. To mark this occasion, Christian Brothers Conference (CBC) organized an inaugural higher education colloquy. Hosted at the Q Center in Saint Charles, Illinois, over the three days in November 2023 alongside Huether, the higher education colloquy attracted faculty, staff, and administrators from all six Lasallian colleges and universities in the United States.

This was the first such gathering of the higher education colloquy, although there have been similar events over the years such as the International Lasallian Research Symposium. The theme was intentionally broad and the speakers and participants diverse. Topics included Lasallian pedagogy, faculty formation in the Lasallian charism, opportunities for collaborative inquiry across Lasallian campuses, and Lasallian spirituality. The distinctiveness of Lasallian practice was an oft-visited topic: a point of arrival and departure alike for a number of other discussions. As one colloquy participant asked, "Is this simply a case of equifinality in which all roads lead to a holistic and person-centered education environment? (Even if the road paved by De La Salle is a more direct route?) Is it possible, alternately, that Lasallian educators still have a unique gift to share even in an educational landscape that (ideally) already recognizes the full humanity of its students?" Colloquy participants were both energized and challenged as they considered what it means to be *authentically* Lasallian.

Grounding the conversation in the reality of the changing landscape of American higher education, Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, facilitated the first seminar "Lasallian Higher Education's Uncertain Future: A Shared Conversation." On an operational level, Brother George suggested, the factors that influence the success of Lasallian Catholic universities are little different than those of other colleges and universities in the United States. The purpose of this session was to identify common concerns and bring forward previously dormant insights from our Lasallian educational heritage that will allow us to proceed with tempered confidence and prudent innovation.

The success of any university includes the contribution of its faculty. Sue Hines, Ed.D., vice president of academic affairs at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, presented "Awakening, Nurturing, and Empowering Lasallian Educators through Faculty Development." The foundation of this seminar was an article by Dr. Hines printed in these pages: "Evaluating Faculty Development: Looking to the Past to Improve the Future." As a colloquy participant reflected, "The Lasallian educator understands that the teaching of students does not begin and end with a specific assignment. It is not simply the 'giving of grades.' Rather, the Lasallian educator offers a holistic approach to teaching students, one that focuses on short-term and long-term gains that

a *good* education provides.”

Several sessions emphasized the importance of Lasallian spirituality as the foundation and core of Lasallian education and pedagogy including the seminar facilitated by Brother Daniel Gardner, FSC. After this session, a colloquy participant reflected, “The early stories of De La Salle and his transformative schools seem to speak to a deeper connection with a spiritual understanding of the work at hand. The approach modeled in those early schools appears not only holistic but deeply *incarnational*, recognizing that earthly physical realities participate somehow in the transformative work of the Spirit. The relational and communal nature of the educational process is neither an additive feature nor a vestigial remnant of an old practice. It is at the core of the Lasallian understanding of how teacher and student alike are transformed in the sacred work of education. *We are in the holy presence of God*, indeed, but uniquely so when we are forming ourselves together and being formed in this educational community.”

How to move from educational theory to actual day-to-day practice in our schools was yet another topic of conversation, which was especially emphasized by three colleagues from Lewis University who shared the ongoing work of their task force on Lasallian pedagogy. Michael Cherry, Ed.D., professor of organizational leadership, said, “Over the past year, we have attempted to define qualities of a Lasallian educator for our campus. Our hope is that our definition provides a ‘north star’ and we plan to create developmental opportunities to assist in the formation of our Lasallian educators. We recognize that these qualities are integrated, and critically linked, with the disposition of the Lasallian educator and this was confirmed through our time with colleagues from all six of our Lasallian higher education institutions.”

A second higher education colloquy was once again held in conjunction with the Huether Lasallian Conference, which took place November 21-23 in Baltimore, Maryland. The theme for the 2024 higher education colloquy is “the vocation of teaching,” which is the 2025 Huether theme. Going forward, it has been decided that the theme of the higher education colloquy will match the Huether theme for a given year, so that the colloquy can study the theme in service to the Huether Conference.

All faculty, staff, and administrators of Lasallian colleges and universities are invited to apply to participate in the higher education colloquy. As a participant of the inaugural cohort affirmed: “It is a fundamental act of hospitality in a pluralist world to make space at our tables for a wide array of students and educators, and discussions at the colloquy repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of creating an inclusive educational community. The challenge before us, it seems, is to develop (or rediscover) a praxis that both honors the sacredness of the educational process and also affirms the inclusion of a broad community.”

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Ministry, she helped establish the *Lasallian DEIB Institute for K-16 Educators* professional development series. She participated in the 2023 IALU Rome Program and was a co-convenor of the inaugural Lasallian Higher Education Colloquy.