

From Protest School to Campus: San Francisco's Campion College

By Tim Drake

SAN FRANCISCO – The University of San Francisco might argue about how its next-door neighbor, Campion College, came into being, but there's one thing it can't argue about: Campion's student-teacher ratio.

Fresh into its second semester, with 25 students and 13 faculty members Campion can boast of having the best student-teacher ratio of any Catholic College in the country.

Campion was born only one year ago in response to the restructuring made to the University of San Francisco's St. Ignatius Institute. The university fired former Institute director John Galten, leading to the resignation of several former institute staff and the creation of Campion. Galten now oversees Campion as president.

"Considering that Campion was started last February and that we had only six months to get things up and running, I would say that we have been outrageously successful," said Mark Brumley, vice president of the college. "We received more students than we expected, and the crop of students that we have is phenomenal."

Modeled after the original St. Ignatius Institute, Campion is a two-year college with an integrated Catholic liberal arts/great books curriculum designed to prepare students to transfer into a four-year university or to pursue other educational options. The curriculum comprises 64 units, providing students with a foundation in philosophy, theology, and Western heritage.

From the outside it might appear little has changed between the former Ignatius Institute and Campion. The professors and the curriculum remain much the same. Yet on the inside, the differences are noticeable. Campion does not have a campus per se. Its seminar and lecture classrooms are located in the McAllister Street neighborhood of Ignatius Press. Furthermore, the male and female students reside in separate gender-specific households blocks apart but also located in the neighborhood. Formed into small ecclesial communities, the students often study, eat, socialize and pray together.

Although Campion is not yet formally accredited, it has established affiliation agreements with Ave Maria University, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, and the pontifical International Theological Institute in Gaming, Austria, whereby graduates will be accepted for transfer at those institutions. They are also working to pursue similar agreements with other institutions.

Campion has received support from prominent Catholics such as Cardinal Christoph Schonborn, Father James Schall and Father Benedict Groeschel.

"The founding of Campion, as a number of Catholic colleges in this country, is the beginning of the reform," Father Groeschel said. "Campion will provide a foundation amidst the cultural wasteland that we are in."

The First Class

"The University of San Francisco has changed the St. Ignatius Institute in such a way that most of the students that would be attracted to Campion would not be attracted to the revamped institute," Brumley said.

That is certainly true for freshman Margaret Perry. She had hoped to attend the St. Ignatius Institute prior to the restructuring. Instead, following the controversy, Perry

attended Thomas More College of Liberal Arts in New Hampshire. Originally from Napa, Calif., she transferred to Campion last fall.

Surprisingly, the college's first class drew students from across the United States.

"We expected that most would have come from California," said president John Galten. "Instead, the majority have come from elsewhere. They're from as far away as North Dakota, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Arizona and Texas. We only have three or four from California."

"To start something like this requires a pretty big leap of faith," Galten admitted. "All I could promise the students was a good education and an adventure. Their cooperation and sacrifice has set a wonderful tone for the other classes that follow."

The college's faculty includes St. Ignatius Institute veterans Ray Dennehy, Stephen Cordova and Kim Summerhays, as well as a host of additional scholars. All serve as adjunct faculty members, teaching only one course per semester.

Cordova, who teaches part time at both Campion and in the philosophy department at St. Mary's College of California in Moraga, said he has been impressed by the enthusiasm of the students.

"Last semester, while reading of the death of Hector in Homer's *Iliad*, four of the female students came dressed in black veils mourning the loss of Hector," Cordova said. "These students, if anything, want more reading assignments rather than fewer. Their desire for reading, and to know things, is compelling. It makes me want to go to work every day."

Hurdles

As a first-year school, Campion has faced some hurdles. It continues to struggle for accreditation, and at one point last September six of the male students were crammed into a home with a nun, who works with the college, while renovations were being made on the men's house.

"These are the troubles that you expect in any new situation," Galten said. "The most difficult hurdle has nothing to do with anything material. It's the question of doubt. One must face that and react with faith that this is something that the Church wants and that the Church can use."

While some outsiders worry that the school is too small, Campion students and faculty disagree.

"We are in the middle of a fantastic city," Perry said. "There is so much culture and so many opportunities here."

The city serves as the students' classroom. Last semester students attended World Series baseball games, the symphony, the San Francisco Opera, the San Francisco Jazz Festival and Strictly Bluegrass in the Park.

"Because we're students we can get \$175 tickets for just \$15," Perry said. "There is always something to grab our attention."

"I think that one of Campion's strengths is the guarantee of a small class size," Cordova added. "We know each student and have a direct and personal commitment to them."

In addition to the prominent intellectual pursuit, the spiritual component also plays a vital role at Campion. Cordova, for example, begins each class with a prayer, and Mass is offered throughout the week.

Student Nick Schneider described the Catholic culture of the school as its highlight.

“Four evenings a week we have Mass at the great Spanish mission-style Carmelite chapel,” said Schneider, who came to Campion with a music degree from the University of Mary in Bismarck, N.D., “We’ve had Franciscan, Carmelite, and diocesan priests. It’s wonderful to see the charisms of the different orders.”

“In addition,” he explained, “every first Friday we have all-night adoration, and once a month we have evenings of reflection where a priest comes to give a talk and hear confessions.”

“There is something unique and beautiful about living in community life with a group of people that are living an active Catholic life,” Schneider continued. “Recently, the sister of one of the male students was going in for surgery on her heart. We gathered and prayed the Liturgy of the Hours and the rosary for her. It’s nice to be in an environment where that flows and happens naturally.”

Tim Drake writes from St. Cloud, Minnesota. This article appeared in the March 2-8 issue of National Catholic Register