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Admissions for the greatest generation

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Recommended Citation

Hemesath M. 2016 Feb 8. Admissions for the greatest generation [blog]. Quad 136. [Accessed 2017 June 14]. <http://blogs.csbsju.edu/mhemesath/2016/02/08/admissions-for-the-greatest-generation/>.

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Quad 136

Admissions for the Greatest Generation

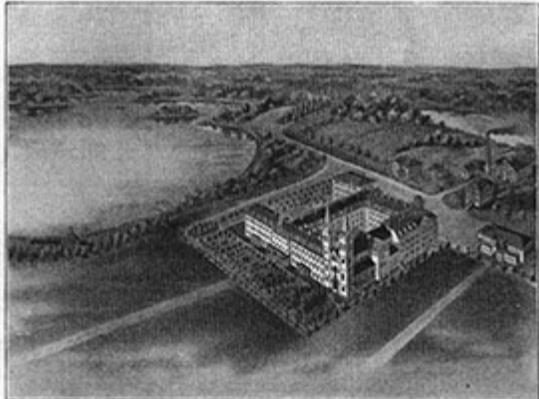
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Admissions for the Greatest Generation

64 THE BULLETIN OF THE DIOCESE OF FARGO 1909

Catholic Parents

know it is their duty to give their Boys a
Good Catholic Education in a Good Catholic School.



St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.

is a Thoroughly Progressive, Up-to-date, Catholic College. Ideal Location on the Banks of two Lakes amidst wooded Hills—85 miles northwest of St. Paul. Conducted by Fathers of the Order of St. Benedict. Can offer the best equipment at the Lowest Rates—only \$220 per annum. Unexcelled opportunities for outdoor Sports: large Gymnasium. Courses are: Short-hand and Typewriting, Telegraphy, Music, Drawing, Preparatory, Commercial, Scientific, Classical, Philosophical, Theological.

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 The Very Rev. Rector.

In a recent blog post I wrote about the changes in the admissions process between the baby-boomer era and the environment faced by millennials today. Recent conversations with several alumni reminded me that earlier generations had their own unique admissions experiences—and that the changes in admissions are very often just a reflection of the changes we see in the broader world.

When visiting alumni, I almost always ask them how they came to Saint John's. Not surprisingly, many talk about family connections. "My dad is a Johnnie." "My brother was there, so I went, too." "I come from a long line of Johnnies."

But for first generation students that, of course, cannot be the story. In these cases, the stories vary widely, but I have noted a common thread for alumni from what is often called The Greatest Generation—those who grew up during the Great Depression, many of whom fought in WWII, and raised families in the 50s and 60s. For these Johnnies, the Catholic identity of Saint John's was central to their decision. Many have told me that it was a parish priest who directed them to SJU, in some cases even driving them to campus for a visit and helping with the admissions process. In other cases, the Catholic identity was not part of the student's decision—because it was not their decision! I

recently had an alum tell me that he had not wanted to go to Saint John's, but it was the only school his Catholic mother would allow him to go to. During his first year he roomed with a cousin who was at SJU for exactly the same reason. Both ended up transferring, not because they were unhappy, but because they wanted to study engineering. Both remain loyal and generous non-degree alumni.

This conversation reminded me of an advertisement that I was given a year ago. As you can see, it comes from the Bulletin of the Diocese of Fargo from 1909. It confidently asserts, "Catholic Parents know it is their duty to give their Boys a Good Catholic Education in a Good Catholic School." Clearly, in that era, it was assumed that parents were largely making the educational decision for their sons and "duty" to the Church was a powerful determinant in such matters.



Today we know from our internal research that students and their families make decisions rather differently. First, students have a bit more say in the process. Second, while our Catholic identity still matters for many, in the 21st century a simple reference to “duty” to the church is hardly sufficient to fill an entering class. Third, there is more Catholic competition. The University of Mary in North Dakota, St. Scholastica and St. Mary’s were all founded after 1909 and that little school on Summit Avenue, the University of St. Thomas, is no longer the upstart it was in 1909. These additional options all make our Benedictine character and monastery an important point of differentiation, beyond being Catholic. Finally, today our residential and liberal arts academic model is well articulated and important to our Catholic and non-Catholic students, in a way that a Catholic mother of yesteryear may not have fully understood when her son tried to explain that SJU did not have the engineering program he wanted.

Students today are looking for a constellation of characteristics in their college. Being Catholic may be a plus factor for some, but it is not deterministic in the way it may have been for mothers of an earlier era.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | February 8th, 2016 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).