

St. Joseph's University Case

Executive Summary:

Dr. Cheryl O'Connell, President of St. Joseph's University, must determine how to respond to the opportunity to merge with the University of the Sciences. The merger of a secular and a faith based institution will pose significant challenges. Dr. O'Connell must navigate the negotiations while managing alumni, current students and staff concerns. She must also plan for the more robust programming that will be available if the merger takes place.

Background:

Cheryl O'Connell, Ph.D., leads St. Joseph's University with a commitment to the Jesuit tradition of holistic education. The university, established in 1851 in Philadelphia, emphasizes a student-centered approach that nurtures intellectual, spiritual, and personal growth.

With only 27 Jesuit institutions in the U.S., St. Joseph's stands out by fostering a community where students are encouraged to engage reflectively and actively, both academically and within their communities. This model inspires students to pursue the greater good, cultivate purpose, and recognize the divine in everyday life, aligning with the Jesuit mission of service and educational excellence.

With recent changes in higher education, St. Joseph's University had the opportunity to merge with the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. While both committed to academic rigor, the various stakeholders raised concerns about potential conflicts in the merging of a Catholic mission with a secular one.

The situation surrounding the proposed merger of St. Joseph's University with the University of the Sciences posed a complex challenge for Dr. O'Connell and her counterparts at USciences. Navigating the differing priorities and concerns of all of the institutions required a thoughtful and strategic approach.

On one hand, members of UScience's alumni, faculty, and staff voiced apprehensions regarding the compatibility of faith-based values with rigorous medical standards highlighted the potential for conflict in the merger. Ensuring that reproductive rights and medical practices aligned with contemporary scientific standards was paramount for faculty and students from the University of the Sciences. The skepticism about whether a religious institution could maintain these standards reflected a broader concern about the potential impact on academic freedom and medical ethics. Some stakeholders preferred a merger with another secular university in the region.

Conversely, members of the St. Joseph's University community were understandably protective of their religious identity and values. The fear that merging with a secular institution could dilute their faith-based mission created anxiety among students, faculty, and alumni. This concern emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong sense of community and values, even amidst the potential benefits of collaboration.

Both institutions had a great deal to consider. As a university seeking to grow, St. Joseph's recognized the potential in merging with a school that had complementary programs. In the event the partnership advanced, programs in the liberal arts and operational offices (enrollment, finance, facilities, etc.) were likely to have too many faculty and staff. USciences leadership recognized that merging with another secular institution with well-established, robust offerings of science majors could put many of their programs and faculty at risk due to redundancy. Staffing needs and streamlining of offices called for all parties to consider the best possible model while minimizing faculty and staff cuts.

In addition to these internal concerns, the role of inaccurate media reporting added another layer of complexity. Misinformation could exacerbate tensions and misunderstandings between the communities, making it crucial for Dr. O'Connell to establish clear and open lines of communication among all stakeholders involved.

Case:

Given the complexity of the merger, should Dr. O'Connell push forward with the merger, or should she re-evaluate the needs of St. Joseph's University and pause the merger?

The University of the Sciences Mission Statement:

The University of the Sciences (USciences) mission is to provide a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and research-oriented learning environment that cultivates future leaders in science, technology, and health professions, fostering innovation and responsible citizenship.

The University of the Sciences Mission Statement is provided because it may not be available online.