The History of Rockhurst College

ACUBE 1998 Meeting Site

The Spirit behind Rockhurst College was born in 1521, when a Spanish soldier took a cannonball in the leg at Pomplona. That soldier, later to be known as St. Ignatius of Loyola, used his recovery period to develop his spirituality and approach to life. The new spirituality led to the formation of the Society of Jesus. The subsequent Jesuit tradition of service to others through a liberal education has been renowned worldwide for more than 450 years.

The Ignatian spirit was expressed in Kansas City in 1910 with the founding of Rockhurst College and High School. A charter from the state of Missouri empowered “Rockhurst University” to offer degrees. The construction of Sedgwick Hall in 1914 allowed the opening of high school classes in 1914; college classes began in 1917. Small in numbers but infused with the Jesuit spirit, the first Rockhurst College students were all taught by the Rev. Alphonse Schwitalla, S.J. Just as the Jesuit order grew from the calling of one man into a worldwide force, so Rockhurst has grown from the dream of a small, hardy crew of priests, into an institution with national reach.

A commitment to academic excellence and community service has marked Rockhurst’s path. Today the College serves approximately 3,000 students at the main campus in Kansas City’s cultural district and at the Ignatius Center of Rockhurst College/Saint Louis University, located in suburban Kansas City. Both undergraduate and graduate degree programs feature the lifelong liberal arts learning approach that is a hallmark of Jesuit education. Through a subsidiary, Rockhurst College Continuing Education Center, Rockhurst is also the nation’s largest nonprofit provider of adult continuing education.

Currently, Biology is the second largest major at Rockhurst with 128 students in their junior or senior years. About 2/3 of them are looking towards graduate work in Occupational Therapy Education or Physical Therapy Education. Another 15-18 are pursuing pre-professional degrees in pre-medicine, pre-dentistry, pre-optometry, or pre-veterinary medicine. About 8-10 are planning to do graduate work in biology.

During academic year 1997-1998 there were 8 full-time faculty slots including a morphologist, a microbiologist, a geneticist/entomologist, an invertebrate zoologist, a botanist, a person for anatomy and physiology, and an environmental physiologist, (The eighth slot this year was covered by two part-time instructors). This fall we have a new microbiologist, replacing Ed Kos who retired, and a new molecular biology slot. With the addition of about 27 adjunct hours we are able to cover most of the standard spectrum of biology curricula, though we lack any courses in the “ologies” (ornithology, mammalogy etc.) We do sometimes provide these courses as reading courses or for small senior groups on demand.

August 1998 will see us entering our third full year in our new Richardson Science Center, which for the most part is electronically state of the art for teaching and consists of 12 laboratories, four computer labs, three classrooms each of which will seat over 60 students, and three seminar rooms. Come to Rockhurst and see the new facilities and join us for what we hope will be a very exciting 42nd annual meeting of the Association of College and University Biology Educators (formerly AMCBT).