The value of the core curriculum or specialized signature program found at any institution of higher learning comes in the establishment of a distinctive focus and subsequent quality of the course offerings presented. This viewpoint is subject to differing degrees of personal interpretation and popular perception. Whenever a new plan is introduced, or revisions made to an existing scheme there will always be debate concerning what should be included or excluded altogether. Usually these concerns follow the broad-based areas of one’s own academic interest or major field of activity. This phenomenon has much validity and is fairly commonplace from college to college, but with thousands of schools across the land offering similar courses this often limits content creativity. Therefore, a healthy balance of traditional study and innovation can help enhance institutional identity immeasurably. This could be achieved with the introduction of a unique module, course or program which bonds somehow to the mission, founding principles, connected personalities or centered around a special collection of materials owned by a university can yield significant educational dividends as a result.

Other schools around the country have already taken this course of action in various ways. For example, St. Bonaventure University, founded in the Franciscan tradition has a multi-semester program entitled Clare College based on centuries old ideals fostered by the Friars Minor. Guilford College of North Carolina, a Society of Friends affiliated school has a concentration on the specific themes of Integrity, Simplicity, Equality, Peace and Community based on the principles of Quaker doctrine. An interdisciplinary program at Grinnell College is
devoted to study of the American Prairie in relation to its geographical location in Iowa. Plus, such logical connections as the Robert E. Lee Research Program at Washington & Lee or the semester-long course on Flannery O’Connor as part of both the English and Women’s Studies Departments at Georgia State University; and even such exotic offerings as a look at Alfred M. Landon’s 1936 Presidential Bid as part of a Public Policy/Mathematics assignment at the University of Kansas and a recent class section featuring “Tokyo Rose” and Civil Liberties sponsored by the UCLA Asia Institute highlights interesting alumni-institution combinations in a larger academic context. With the possibility of separate classes, specialized programs or a more intensive core curriculum; the potential for Seton Hall to follow this particular path of local linkage is manifest.

Seton Hall was founded in 1856, and is the first Catholic college in New Jersey and the largest diocesan institution in the nation. These particular attributes hold much promise for the introduction of a one-of-a-kind learning experience. The evolution of Seton Hall taken in context with the development of geographic and educational history can be traced through the five major stages in school history. These include the foundation and division of college/prep divisions along with local awareness (1856-1897) leading into the attainment of Middle States Accreditation and regional recognition growth (1898-1932) as enrollment figures more than triple and University status is attained (1933-1950) with the establishment of schools and centers and an emergent national prominence resulted (1951-1968) along with the wider growth of graduate education and furthering of global reach (1968-present) has made the school what it is today. (Seton Hall University Fact Book, 4-8) Moreover, Catholicism as the religious affiliation of Seton Hall seems to be the focal point of the current work being done in relation to crafting new signature and specialized programs. Whether the interpretation centers upon Catholicism in
a theological context or a wider, non-religious circumstance as touched upon during this seminar show that knowledge and a healthy respect toward both declarations makes for a truly universal and well-rounded approach to learning. Therefore, the forces that shaped Seton Hall and how Seton Hall products have helped to shape the world make for a mutually beneficial tandem.

Breaking down course structures from an institutional perspective can also be taken further to include individual contributions of note. In retrospect, the history and lore of Seton Hall includes various alumni, administrators and faculty who have distinguished themselves in a wide-range of endeavors over the last several decades. There are three figures of consequence depending upon reader perception that come to mind in particular when evaluating their respective intellectual pronouncements. This trilogy includes Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton, Orestes Brownson and Will Durant. Each has an important story to tell which translates into a valid means of study through developed ideas, written legacy and personal example. Moreover, each has some connection to Seton Hall not only from a guiding or participatory standpoint, but also from a real life and local perspective that transcends physical and intellectual provincialism. Furthermore, these individuals do not fit into a neat curricular categorization, but rather they can be evaluated on an interdisciplinary basis through theological, educational, historical, literary, or other means depending upon particular issues and the philosophy behind social, spiritual, mental and life experiences encountered. Each has also left behind a large body of written work found in letters, journal, editorial/article, or full-length book form along with serving as the inspiration for autobiographical/biographical studies found in libraries and lyceums from South Orange to the world at-large.

Perhaps the most illustrious figure in school history is the patroness of Seton Hall, Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), the first American born Saint. She is also the mother of
American parochial education who revolutionized religious rote during the early nineteenth century as founder of the Sisters of Charity, a renowned teaching order. (Kelly, 18-19) Her legacy to the school comes in the name Seton Hall, chosen by James Roosevelt Bayley, first Bishop of Newark and nephew of this deity. A contemporary of Bayley was Orestes Brownson (1803-1876), a former resident of Elizabeth, New Jersey who served on the first Board of Trustees for Seton Hall College during the 1860s, and whose name graces the school debating society. Brownson was a former minister, journalist and social commentator who also dabbled in a number of other related enterprises during his lifetime. In 1840, he founded and wrote for the *Boston Quarterly Review* which he described as an “eclectic” mix of ideas devoted to religion, philosophy, politics and general literature which eventually led to his own self-titled journal - *Brownson’s Quarterly* which saw print later that century. (Sveino, 25) Another individual of note from a more contemporary viewpoint is historian and social scientist Will Durant (1885-1981). Durant grew up in northern New Jersey and attended school at St. Peter’s College prior to entering graduate studies for the priesthood at the Immaculate Conception Seminary while working in the school library during the early 1910s. (Durant - *Autobiography*, 34) He eventually left Seton Hall after professing his loss of faith to church authorities. Durant ultimately became a teacher and later a writer of detailed compilations including the *Story of Philosophy* and the multi-volume *Story of Civilization* (with his wife and partner Ariel) which earned him worldwide notice and acclaim.

Seton, Brownson and Durant also represent the parallels and paradoxes found among personal intellectual and incidentary development from a local and universal perspective alike. All individuals belonged to the Catholic Church at the time of their death, but from here the similarities vary in type and degree. Each experienced a religious conversion in the course of
their lifetime with Mother Seton born to Episcopal parents; Brownson was formerly a Presbyterian, Unitarian, and Universalist (“Freethinker”) and Durant the most radical became a Socialist and adhered to Darwinism for a major portion of his life. Geographically, Brownson and Durant were native New Englanders and Mother Seton was from New York, but each lived in the Mid-Atlantic region at some point in time. From a political perspective, Brownson leaned toward the Democratic Party, Durant further left and Mother Seton was apolitical for all intensive purposes. In terms of ethnicity, Durant had French-Canadian roots and his wife Ariel was Jewish while Mother Seton and Brownson were of Anglo-Saxon stock.

Beyond personality traits, the place of educational theories help to better define means for scholarly examination. In their own views on education, Mother Seton is best studied by example with her writings as a window into her mindset and mission. Durant’s own take in particular shows a fascinating transformation in the writing of two autobiographies – *Transition* from 1927 (written in semi-novel form) and a *Dual Autobiography* (straight non-fiction) fifty years later which encompasses the alpha and omega of his life. He even touches upon his brief teaching experience at Setonia in the following manner - “Would I come and teach in South (the name “Seton” is purposely changed for novelistic purposes) Hall? The remuneration would be small, but the work might prove congenial, and be a stepping-stone to higher places later on. I could have laughed aloud with joy as I read; never had I had so much reason for believing in Providence, even in a Providence prejudiced in my favor. I wrote a grateful acceptance...” (Durant – *Transition*, 108-109) He later added that his experience with educational development in general provided much personal joy and intellectual independence as a result. “While I was abandoning all notion of ever believing again in the freedom of the will, I began to hunger for…surrendered freedom of speech and thought. I envied this man who had refused a
professor’s honors and a monarch’s subsidy in order to think unhindered in his attic room. What
courage, and what sincerity!..” (Durant – Transition, 137)

Brownson also had an interesting take on the phenomenon of enlightenment as well.
Writing in 1839, he noted that “Education is something more than is commonly understood by
the term. Education is something more than the ability to read and write and cipher…Education
is the formation of character. It is not acquired in schools only…It begins with the first
impression made on the senses of the infant, and ends only with the last made on those of the
man before he sinks into the grave; and it embraces the results of all the circumstances and
influences we have, or which have had, the least possible bearing in making up or determining
the individual character.” (McDonnell, 95) Furthermore, Brownson found that knowledge
building came in many forms from one’s neighborhood to the larger world. “Although
Brownson was indeed interested in schooling, his definition of education went far beyond the
confines of the school-room. Besides the formal educational agencies such as schools, colleges,
and universities, Brownson envisioned informal and popular agencies such as the family,
Church, press, literature…One thing is certain: Brownson never considered the school, Catholic
or common, as the single most important agency in the educative process. Also, Brownson
viewed education as an ongoing process, for youth and adult alike.” (McDonnell, iii-iv)

In summary, the introduction of Seton, Brownson, Durant and the concept of uniqueness
in course, program or core development is related to the originating Seton Hall connection and
universal human experience alike. The Catholicity of Seton Hall and the catholicity of education
has permeated and transcended the walls of the university in various ways over the past several
decades. Therefore, capturing some of the spirit and shared experience of Setonians from
generation to generation helps contribute to the formation of a student’s overall scholarly
evolution. Adopting one or more of these individuals for closer study would only enhance an already solid educational plan found on the drawing board as our students continue to establish their place in campus history while developing and writing their own autobiographical chapter in the ongoing story of civilization.

Bibliography & Selected Reading List


Sveino, Per. *Orestes A. Brownson’s Road to Catholicism*. Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget,
1970.