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Loyola Academy Principal Named Golden Apple Leadership Award Finalist

Golden Apple announced today that Principal of Loyola Academy in Wilmette Kathryn M. Baal, PhD, has been named one of seven 2018 Stanley C. Golder Leadership Award Finalists for her initiative, dedication, perseverance and innovation.

Dr. Baal was appointed principal of Loyola Academy, the largest Jesuit secondary school in the nation, in 2011, when she began shepherding the formation of 2,000 students annually—who hail from more than 75 Chicago-area zip codes and represent a wide range of social, economic and academic backgrounds—by asking the question, “What more can we do to inspire our students to learn, lead and serve?”

Over the past seven years, Dr. Baal and her team have worked tirelessly to usher in a culture of enriched leadership and service, enhanced social-emotional wellness and a variety of 21st-century teaching and learning practices and technologies.

Redesigned student support services have helped our at-risk students reach their potential and transition out of Loyola’s O’Shaughnessy Program, which provides extra literacy instruction and study skills. A Literacy Initiative has enhanced all students’ fluency in reading and writing across the disciplines and improved their critical thinking and analytic skills. Drawing from her background as a science educator, Dr. Baal and her team have built a stronger foundation in science by offering a Physics First science education model, flipping the traditional biology-chemistry-physics sequence. As a result of these academic advancements and more, ACT scores of Loyola’s students have risen since 2009.

While academic excellence is an important part of Dr. Baal’s vision, student and faculty leadership and reshaping the culture have also been ongoing priorities. One of her team’s most recent initiatives was the redesign of the Freshman Orientation experience. To foster a deeper sense of faith, community and belonging from the beginning of a student’s Loyola experience, a house model was implemented and the orientation was expanded from one to three days. The orientation is part of *The LA Way*, a comprehensive leadership program rooted in the principles that have guided Jesuits for nearly 500 years: self-awareness, ingenuity, love and heroism.

To encourage leadership among Loyola’s faculty members, Dr. Baal has established a number of faculty development programs, including Loyola’s Canisius Program. This selective eight-year program, which she co-created and team-teaches with Vice President of Mission and Ministry Gary Marando, fosters the development of Ignatian faculty leaders from a variety of disciplines committed to pursuing more in their respective fields and daily lives.

Because Jesuit education is distinguished by its bold dialogue with the world, Dr. Baal created *Courageous Conversations*, a book and speaker series for students and parents. Now in its fifth year, the series features renowned authors and experts on difficult issues most influencing adolescents and their families today. This year’s series included a school-wide read of noted

lawyer and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. Teachers wove the complex themes of race, mental health and social justice presented in the book into their lesson plans. In November 2017, Loyola welcomed Stevenson, whose visit continues to ignite members of the community in conversation and reflection.

To further encourage wellness and tend to the social-emotional needs of our students, Dr. Baal and her team introduced a new schedule of the day. This new schedule reduces the number of periods from nine to six, allows for longer class periods to increase our students’ academic stamina in preparation for college and ensures that every student will have a flex period to use for exercise, study or teacher meetings.

Under Dr. Baal’s direction, Loyola launched a lineup of dynamic service learning classes that take the service experience into the classroom—enabling students to learn about social justice issues in academic courses across the curriculum, apply their new knowledge to real-life situations through community service and then engage in reflective exercises to process the experience. Courses developed so far include Art as Advocacy, Honors Environmental Science, Hidden Voices in American Literature, Honors Sociology in Action, Spanish Immersion and Justice Seminar.

“Dr. Baal is a master educator in the Jesuit tradition,” says Loyola President Rev. Patrick E. McGrath, SJ. “At her core she is a teacher, and all that she does as principal is informed by that fundamental relationship between teacher and student. Innovation, creativity and diligence were the hallmarks of her science classroom. As an educational leader, Dr. Baal has a clear vision and is willing to do the hard work to bring it to life. She loves learning and appreciates Jesuit education for the holy, essential human labor that it is. Loyola Academy is blessed by the life and work of Dr. Katie Baal.”

The winner of the Golder Leadership Award will be announced at the annual Golden Apple Celebration of Excellence brunch on Saturday, February 24, at the Rosemont Hilton Chicago O’Hare.

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