

STUDENT profile in leadership



exceptional undergrad

Guided by Jesuit ideals, Benjamin J. Lankes '08
learns what it means to be a man for others

story by Audrey R. Browka
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In his poem *Los Caminos de España* (The Roads of Spain), Benjamin Lankes '08 writes about the distinct paths followed by leading figures in Spanish history. He then questions his own course in life.

*What route do I choose? Well, I wonder each day.
The truth is that my own way is still not definite.*

Though his path is not definite, Lankes' future is certain to reflect the Jesuit ideals he champions at Canisius everyday.

In the classroom, this Spanish and European studies major strives for academic excellence. He comes to class with an open mind, prepared to share his knowledge and eager to challenge his professors.

"He doesn't want his time wasted," says Rene A. De La Pedraja, PhD, professor of history. "He wants to know what he will learn about the subject matter, the world and himself in 50 minutes."

Lankes' openness and enthusiasm for learning are not limited to the classroom. During his study abroad experience in Spain, he asked to live in the countryside rather than at the university. "He wanted to experience the authentic version of life in a foreign country," explains Julia L. Wescott, PhD, professor of modern languages, who notes Lankes is fluent in Spanish. "He wanted to use the language in its cultural context and that meant shopping at the market for food, learning what it was like to commute – all those everyday things."



Much like the Jesuits, Lankes fosters a special interest in people, experiences and ideas that are new, different and diverse. Twice he traveled to Morelia, Mexico with the MexiCanisius program. During these visits, Lankes used his free time to explore the historic sites he studied in class.

"I pound away on the phenomenon of the Mexican pyramids in my Latin American introductory course and tell students not to miss this site if they are ever near Mexico City," says De La Pedraja. "While in Morelia, Ben actually made his own arrangements to travel to the pyramids instead of spending his free time at the beautiful beaches. This really speaks to his thirst for learning."

While in Morelia, Lankes also taught English at two schools: one school was for orphans and the other school was for the children of wealthy businessmen and politicians. The disparity led Lankes to reflect on his own purpose in life.

"In the end I realized it's not about how many majors, degrees or publications I have, it's that I dedicate myself as a human being and develop my talents so I may use them to help others, the way the Jesuits intended."

Lankes now exemplifies the Jesuit ideal of being a man for others in local high school classrooms, where he educates students about college life and the MexiCanisius program. He also encourages students to uphold an openness and curiosity about all things new, different and diverse.

“Ben just captivates the students,” says Wescott. “He inspires them to want to learn and experience new cultures.”

At Canisius, Lankes works in the Tutoring Center, where he assists students in Spanish, European studies, Latin American history, and introductory Latin and French. He shares with them the notion that, “Through language, you can read the literature, listen to the music and learn the culture.”

Lankes is eager to share his Canisius experience with new students and offers this advice: “When you come to Canisius, it’s like walking into a room with a buffet table. You can taste a little bit of everything and as you near the end, you see how they all go together to make the meal. You get an interdisciplinary learning experience at Canisius that develops well-rounded individuals for life.”

Lankes’ education has prepared him well for careers in education, linguistics or modern languages. After graduation in May, he will pursue an MBA at Canisius. That degree, combined with his undergraduate education, his foreign language skills and international experiences will make him an ideal candidate in the global marketplace.

No matter what path Lankes chooses, he will be guided by the Jesuit ideals he experienced at Canisius. Because of that, Lankes is certain to lead a life of distinction, much like the Spanish figures he writes about in his poem.

*I have learned from this sacred life
That I will always be a pilgrim.
The path must be observed
I myself forge that road.*

PHOTO: Benjamin Lankes '08 (seated) meets with one of his Canisius mentors, History Professor Rene A. De La Pedraja, PhD, in the college's Bouwhuis Library.



Los Caminos de España / The Roads of Spain

BY BENJAMIN LANKES '08

El camino del Cid, campeador,
El camino de reconquistar,
Que servía para salvar su honor
Y a su gente inspirar.

*The road of the Cid, champion,
The road of reconquering,
That served to save his honor
And inspire his people.*

El camino que el Quijote viajó
Contra lo que fue considerado real.
En la mente, esta ruta nació
Que defendía lo ideal.

*The road that [Don] Quixote traveled
Against what was considered real.
In the mind, this route was born
That defended the ideal.*

El camino calderoniano,
Del que no hemos despertado.
La vida es sueño vano,
Y un sueño bien viajado.

*The Calderonian road
From which we have not awakened.
Life is a vain dream,
And a dream well-traveled.*

El camino jacobeo, siquiera,
Hacia Santiago de Compostela,
Hacia el fin de la tierra
Por la vía de las estrellas.

*The Jacobean road, at least,
Towards Santiago de Compostela,
Towards the end of the land
Along the way of the stars.*

El camino de Gaudí
Que invocaba el naturalismo,
Y el de Salvador Dalí
En que se hizo el surrealismo.

*The road of Gaudí
That invoked naturalism,
And that of Salvador Dalí
In which he became surrealism.*

El camino que aún no existe
Según lo que dijo Machado.
La vía que actualmente consiste
En lo ya caminado.

*The road that does not already exist
According to what Machado said.
The way that actually consists
In what is already walked.*

¿Qué ruta elijo yo?
Pues me pregunto cada día.
La verdad es que aún no
Está definida mi propia vía.

*What route do I choose?
Well, I wonder each day.
The truth is that my own way
Is still not definite.*

He aprendido de esta vida sagrada
Que siempre seré peregrino.
La senda ha de ser observada.
Yo mismo forjo el camino.

*I have learned from this sacred life
That I will always be a pilgrim.
The path must be observed.
I myself forge the road.*