Regents Of The Creighton School Of Medicine

1892-1895 - Rev. James E.X. Hoeffer, S.J.
1895-1898 - Rev. John Fahlin, S.J.
1899-1907 - Rev. Michael P. Dowling, S.J.
1907-1928 - Rev. William P. Whelan, S.J.
1928-1931 - Rev. Terence H. Ahearn, S.J.
1931 - Rev. Patrick J. Mahan, S.J. (Acting)
1946-1951 - Rev. Harry B. Crimmins, S.J.

The office of Regent of the School of Medicine has been a curious one. The incumbent to this administrative office was always a Jesuit priest appointed by the President of Creighton University, but with counsel and recommendations from the Provincial Superior of the Jesuit order. Each school and college at Creighton had a Regent, but many times one priest acted as Regent for more than one school. The specific duties of the Regent were not defined. Certainly the Regent acted as a spiritual advisor to students, saying Mass for them and, if necessary, helping prepare them for marriage and arranging for family funerals. But, especially for one period of time, the Regent served a decidedly more political and powerful function. In fact, for a time, the Annual Announcements listed both a Regent and a Student Counselor or Spiritual Director for the School of Medicine.

Early medical graduates spoke of the Regent as a disciplinarian. One graduate of the 1950's told of the Regent as being a key determiner of those accepted into the School of Medicine. Several likened the Regent to a liaison between the President of the University and the lay leadership of the School of Medicine. The Regent exerted the Jesuit influence, making sure that the School of Medicine followed Jesuit guidelines in its administration. The latter most likely comes closest to describing the nature of the office.

With the passage of time, the Regent's role changed gradually, and those changes have been reflected in the Annual Announcements printed by the School of Medicine. No mention was made of the office of Regent in any way in these publications until the 1908 edition. That year the Rev. William P. Whelan, S.J., was listed as Regent, and grouped with the "higher ups" - above the faculty but below the President of the University, the Dean (D.C. Bryant) and the Vice Dean (A.L. Muirhead). The 1909-1910 edition listed Father Whelan as Supervisor of the Professional Departments of the University. In the 1914-1915 Announcement, Father Whelan was listed as "Supervisor"; by 1916-1917 he was once again listed as "Regent".

In the 1917-1918 edition of The Announcement, there was a change, slight it may seem, but possibly indicative of the shift in relative administrative power taking place in the structure of the School of Medicine. In that year, Father Whelan was listed as Regent with the Officers of the School, but second only to Francis X. McMenamy, President of Creighton University. Significantly he was listed above the Dean and Junior Dean. This positioning was perhaps only a courtesy, but in addition, Father Whelan's name began to appear on important committees, such as The Medical Council in...
1914, Administrative Board in 1916, the Executive Committee in 1917, and the Medical Board of St. Joseph's Hospital in 1918. By 1932, when Rev. John J. McInerny, S.J., was Regent, he was listed not only as Regent of the Schools of Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry and the College of Pharmacy, just under Rev. Patrick J. Mahan, President of Creighton University, but he was also first on the Committee on Admissions.

This preeminence of the Regent within the Annual Announcements coincided in time with what medical graduates have described as the dominance of the Regent at the School of Medicine. Graduates of the late 1920's, 30's, 40's and even 50's remembered the Regent with a respect and awe later reserved for the Dean. Dr. Alfred C. Andersen (M.D. 1941) noted:

They [the Regents] were the ones that told the Dean 'yes, you can do this or no, you can't do that'. They dictated the policies of the University as it filtered into the medical school. I always said they did the hiring and the firing.

The most influential years of the Regent appears to have been with Father John J. McInerny (1931-1946), Father Harry B. Crimmins (1946-1951) and Father John J. Foley (1951-1958). In 1936 Father McInerny was appointed to the newly created Committee on Curriculum, in addition to retaining all of his other committee memberships. Rev. Crimmins augmented all of these appointments with added membership on the Committee on Financial Aid in 1949, as well as the University Committee on Rank and Tenure. Rev. Foley retained all of the earlier Regent appointments and, in addition, joined three new bodies, the Library Committee and the Research Committee in 1955 and the Faculty Council in 1955. The influence of the Regent was most pervasive at this point, covering all administrative aspects of the School of Medicine.

Just as the office of Regent gained steadily in importance over a period of time, its later waning took place gradually. Perhaps significant in its declining preeminence was the fact that over time the office of Dean became more and more a full-time job.

In 1958 the Annual Announcement again provides a clue as to the status of the Regent. It lists the Rev. Vincent L. Decker, S.J. as Student Counselor, not as Regent, and his name follows not only the President of the University, but also the Dean and the Assistant Dean. By 1960 Father Decker's title had changed to "Jesuit Counselor." Between 1961 and 1969, Father James J. Quinn, S.J. was the Jesuit Counselor. Following 1969, the Annual Announcements do not mention in any form a Regent, Student Counselor or Jesuit Counselor. According to Father Quinn, the duties he and his predecessors performed were largely absorbed by the Assistant Dean of the School of Medicine.

Father Quinn himself remained personally active within the School of Medicine, serving on several committees and establishing the Humanities for the Health Sciences program. But his contributions to the School were not in the capacity of Regent. That office ceased to exist in 1969. The Jesuit influence in the School of Medicine at Creighton continues to be felt in many positive ways of course, but not through the office of Regent or its titular equivalent.
Incumbents

As mentioned, there is no indication in any Creighton University publication that the office of Regent existed prior to 1908, when Rev. Whelan’s name first appears. The only chronological listing of Regents anywhere to be found is in Seventy-Five Years: Creighton Memorial Saint Joseph’s Hospital, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1870-1945 by Francis J. Bath. In this history of St. Joseph’s Hospital, Mr. Bath lists the first three Regents of the School of Medicine as the same Jesuits who served as President of Creighton University and their terms as Regent coincide with their terms of office as President. Whether this was, in fact the case, is open to speculation. More likely, Bath simply assumed that the President of the University acted in this capacity. Whatever the case, Bath lists the following as the first three Regents of the School of Medicine:

- Rev. James F.X. Hoeffer, S.J. - 1892-1895
- Rev. John Pahls, S.J. - 1895-1899

William P. Whelan, S.J., Regent, 1908-1928

In his book, Francis Bath indicates that the Rev. William P. Whelan, S.J., held the office of Regent from 1907. However, in the Annual Announcement for 1907-1908, William P. Whelan is mentioned, but only as a Professor of Medical Jurisprudence who gave to the third-year class “lectures on moral principles and medical practice, craniotomy, abortion, venereal excess, views of scientists and professional rights.”

Father Whelan, or “Butch” Whelan as he was called, became Regent indisputably in 1908 and continued in that position until 1928. Father Whelan was born March 5, 1867, at Ashton in Wakefield, Lancashire, England. He completed his undergraduate work at St. Ignatius College in Chicago. He first came to Creighton University in 1896 as Professor of the Classics and head of the Dramatics Department. He served in these capacities until 1899. From 1899 to 1904 he taught at St. Louis University.

In addition to being Regent of the School of Medicine, he served as Regent of the Dental and Pharmacy Schools (a member of their original faculties), and director of the University’s Summer Session for nine years. In all, he served for twenty-seven years at Creighton before being transferred to Chicago in 1928, where he became pastor of the Church of the Sacred Heart. At the time of his transfer, Father Whelan was the “oldest member of the University faculty in point of service.”

Prior to his departure from Creighton, the faculty and alumni of both the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry honored Father Whelan with a festive banquet at the Knights of Columbus Club. They also started a “Father Whelan Fund” to benefit the medical and dental libraries. In addition, the 1927 yearbook, The Bluejay, was dedicated to Father Whelan to honor his many years of service to Creighton.

Father Whelan died December 1, 1948, at the age of 81. At the time of his death, he was teaching at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago.
Terence H. Ahearn, S.J., Regent, 1928-1931

Replacing Father Whalen as Regent was the Rev. Terence H. Ahearn, S.J. Almost nothing is known about the life of Father Ahearn. During his brief time at Creighton, he was Regent of the Schools of Medicine and Nursing and the Colleges of Pharmacy and Dentistry. A brief Creighton Alumnus article announcing his transfer in April 1931 to Loyola University noted:

During his term here Father Ahearn was instrumental in enlarging and improving the medical school; in installing new equipment in the medical, dental and pharmacy schools, and in organizing the Creighton University school of nursing.

Father Ahearn died January 1, 1966.

Patrick J. Mahan, S.J., Acting Regent 1931

When Father Ahearn was transferred to Loyola University, a shuffling exchange took place. In his new position as Regent of Medicine and Nursing at Loyola, Father Ahearn replaced the Rev. Patrick J. Mahan, who had been reassigned as President of Creighton University. As President of Creighton, Father Mahan filled the office of Regent on a temporary basis until a permanent successor to Father Ahearn was chosen. The two men, in one respect, switched jobs.

Father Mahan had been Regent at Loyola Medical School for thirteen years prior to coming to Creighton, so the territory was familiar. Since he was the University President, as well as Acting Regent of four professional schools, it can be assumed that he was a very busy man. Until a new Regent was chosen in August 1931, Father Mahan planned to spend two or three days a week in the Regent's office and the remainder of his time fulfilling Presidential duties.

John Joseph McInerny, S.J., Regent, 1931-1946

One of the most powerful of the Regents of the School of Medicine was the Rev. John J. McInerny. In fact, for a period of about thirteen months between the death of Dr. Herman von Schulte in 1932 and the selection of Dr. Bryan M. Riley as Dean in September 1933, Father McInerny served as Acting Dean of the School of Medicine. From that experience, he obvi-
ously learned the workings of the school, and from that point forward was a force to be reckoned with in the power structure of the School of Medicine.

Father McInerny was born in St. Louis, Missouri, to John M. and Catherine Clancy McInerny. He received his education at St. Louis University, earning an A.B. in 1919, his M.A. in 1920 and an M.S. in 1930. He was ordained into the Society of Jesus in June 1927. He had teaching experience in the field of Biology, first at Campion College in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, from 1921 to 1924, and from 1928-1930 at his alma mater, St. Louis University. In 1931 he came to Creighton as a Lecturer in Philosophy, and as Regent not only of Medicine but also Nursing, Dentistry and Pharmacy.

As Regent, "Father Mac," as he was nicknamed, was respected and feared but not universally liked. Dr. John Hartigan (M.D. 1943) recalled of Father McInerny:

He was an asthenic, almost emaciated man, an unpleasant looking man. To every freshman class, he announced that, "You're welcome in these doors as students, but please remember, the door swings both ways." 

Effective August 1946, Father McInerny was reassigned to St. John's Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri, as a chaplain. He died September 6, 1962.

Harry B. Crimmins, S.J., Regent, 1946-1952

Another powerful Regent, though of a more brief tenure than Father McInerny, was the Rev. Harry B. Crimmins, who became Regent in August 1946. Father Crimmins was also educated at St. Louis University, receiving his A.B. degree in 1919 and his M.A. in 1920. He also received a Ph.D. in 1930 from L'Università Gregoriana in Rome, and an LL.D. from St. Ambrose College in 1941. He was ordained a Jesuit in 1926.

Father Crimmins had extensive teaching and administrative experience prior to coming to Creighton. Beginning in 1920 he served as an Instructor in Latin and English at Rockhurst College until 1924, and again in 1928 and 1929. He served as an Instructor in Philosophy in 1930 and 1931 at St. Mary's College, then returned to his alma mater, St. Louis University, later in 1931. At St. Louis he served in the Department of Philosophy from 1931 to 1936, and as director of graduate studies before assuming the Presidency of that University in 1936. Father Crimmins served as President of St. Louis University from 1936 until 1942.

Father Crimmins was called to duty as a World War II Army chaplain in 1942. He spent two and one-half of his four-year service overseas, earning the rank of Captain. He participated in the African, Sicilian and Italian campaigns with the 70th General Hospital unit from St. Louis University. Perhaps Father Crimmins' most unusual assignment come in Italy after the close of the war, when he served as chaplain at the execution of Anton Dostler, the first of the defeated enemies to be tried and executed as a war criminal. 

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Following discharge from military service in 1946, Father Crimmins came to Creighton University as a Lecturer in Philosophy and as Regent of the School of Medicine and the College of Pharmacy. Though he apparently maintained a rigid outward facade, most found him to be helpful and a true friend. Dr. Larry E. Williams (M.D. 1952) recalled:

One other person I remember well was Father Crimmins. He came on very hard-nosed, but when you needed help he was out there to do anything he could for you. During my internship, he came to the hospital as a patient and we had many wonderful conversations.

Father Crimmins left Creighton in 1952 and died June 13, 1960.

Replacing Father Crimmins in July, 1952 was the Rev. John J. Foley. Father Foley was born in Rantoul, Illinois, on November 20, 1901. He moved to a farm near Rodman, Iowa, when young and was a 1920 high school graduate of Presentation Academy in Whitmore, Iowa. Following graduation, Father Foley attended Creighton University as an undergraduate, earning his A.B. degree in 1924. Father entered the Society of Jesus, making his tertianship, his final year of Jesuit training in Cleveland in 1937-1938. During his Jesuit training period, he earned an M.A. degree from St. Louis University in 1928, and a Licentiate of Sacred Theology in 1937.

Prior to coming back to Creighton, Father Foley was active in the field of secondary education. He taught at Xavier High School in Cincinnati and was principal of Marquette University High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 1938 to 1951. From 1939 to 1950 he was a member of the Jesuit Educational Association Secondary School Commission, serving two terms as chairman in 1949 and 1950. From 1948 to 1952 he was Consultant for secondary schools in the Jesuit Missouri Province. During the summers of 1947, 1949 and 1951 he also taught at Marquette University.

In August 1951 Father Foley was assigned to Creighton University as Assistant Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. Upon Father Crimmins' departure in 1952, Father Foley was appointed Regent of the School of Medicine, in which capacity he served until September 1958. He then served as rector of the Jesuit community at the new Creighton Prep High School in Omaha. Still later, he was Provincial of the Wisconsin Jesuit Province. He then returned to Omaha where he died on September 21, 1983.


In 1958 a minor administrative reorganization at Creighton University was made and several new positions created. There was a new post of Academic Vice President for the entire university, and the new position of Student Counselor for each of the schools was established. The September 1958 Creighton Alumni explained:
The student counselor position came into being at the same time that the post of Academic Vice President was created. Prior to that time, the regent of each school served as a liaison officer with the administration and also performed student counseling duties. In 1958 the Rev. Vincent L. Decker began service as the first “Student Counselor” to the Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy.

Father Decker was born in New London, Connecticut, the son of an Army officer. When young, he traveled extensively and lived in various parts of the United States and the Panama Canal Zone. His father was later stationed in Omaha, and young Vincent was sent to Creighton Prep High School, from which he graduated. Following graduation, he entered the Society of Jesus, in August 1931.

During his Jesuit training, Father Decker received an A.B. degree in Latin and English from St. Louis University in 1936, and also did graduate work there. He taught at St. Louis University High School from 1939-1940 and at Regis High School in Denver from 1940-1941. He then studied Theology at St. Mary’s College in Kansas City, Missouri, and was ordained a Jesuit June 21, 1944.

Following ordination, Father Decker was Assistant Dean of Rockhurst College from 1946 to 1947 and taught Religion and English at Campion College from 1947 to 1948. In 1948 Father Decker joined the faculty at Creighton University in the Department of Theology, eventually becoming Chairman of the Department. He also served as spiritual advisor of the Medical School (while Father Foley served as Regent), moderator of the Medical School Sodality, and director of housing and special activities for nuns attending Creighton University’s summer school sessions. When the post of Student Counselor (formerly Regent) became vacant, Father Decker was a natural to fill it, considering his prior contact with the School of Medicine.

In his affiliations with the School of Medicine, Father Decker was highly regarded. Representative of feelings toward Father Decker was a comment by Dr. Werner Jensen (M.D. 1932), who said that he used to grade Jesuits on a scale of one to five, five being perfect. “Father Decker at the med school, he was a grade five man.”

In 1961 Father Decker left Creighton University for an appointment as President of Creighton Prep High School, in which capacity he served until 1967. He then returned to Creighton University as an Associate Professor of Theology, where he continued to teach until his death. Father Decker died at age seventy-two of cancer on September 19, 1986. At the time of his death, Rev. Michael Morrison, S.J., President of Creighton University, said:

He was a real gentleman. . . He was my superior at Creighton Prep several years ago, and he was outstanding. He was way ahead of his time. . . He was really a great man.
James J. Quinn, S.J., Jesuit Counselor, 1961-1969

The last of the official Jesuit Counselors of the School of Medicine was Rev. James J. Quinn, S.J. Father Quinn, a Chicago native, joined the Society of Jesus in 1937. He received a large portion of his education at St. Louis University—an A.B. degree in 1941, a Licentiate in Philosophy in 1944, an M.A. in Greek in 1945 and in 1951 a Licentiate in Sacred Theology. Father Quinn also studied Theology for three years at St. Mary’s College in Kansas City, Missouri, after which he was ordained into the Society of Jesus.

Prior to coming to Creighton University in 1953, Father Quinn had taught at Regis High School and Regis College in Denver, at Marquette University and St. Louis University. In 1953 he became Associate Professor of Philosophy at Creighton and also served as director of counseling for the dormitories of the university.

In 1961 Father Quinn was named Jesuit Counselor for the Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy. The same year he was also named Archdiocesan Director of Hospitals and Chaplain of the Catholic Physicians Guild by the Rev. Gerald T. Bergan, Archbishop of Omaha. During his term as Jesuit Counselor, he was a member of the Bishop’s Representatives for Hospitals and of the Administrative Board of the Catholic Hospital Administration. In 1967 Father Quinn was honored with a distinguished service award from the President of Creighton University.

As Jesuit Counselor for the School of Medicine, Father Quinn began increasingly to feel a need to educate Health Science students more broadly in the humanities, in order to facilitate their interaction with patients once they were out in the real world of medicine. He himself taught courses in Medical Ethics, but felt that much more was needed.

In 1969 Father Quinn took a three-year leave of absence to study Medical Morals at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, in which field he received a PhD. in 1972. After six months of further study in England, Father Quinn returned to Creighton to implement his ideas. He began an experimental humanities program for Health Science students, which was deemed a success and which still influences the curriculum. Today, Father Quinn continues to serve as an Associate Professor of Philosophy and as Director of Humanities for the Health Sciences.
References

1. Annual Announcement of the Creighton University College of Medicine, 1917-1918, p. 2.
15. Bath, p. 79.
17. Interview, Anderson.
23. "Father Mahan Will Act as Regent of Medical School," The True Blue March 27, 1931, p. 3.
24. Bath, p. 79.
26. Interview, Anderson.
29. Interview, Kelley.
32. Larry S. Williams (M.D. 1962), Graduate Questionnaire, 1990.
33. Interview, Kelley.
35. Interview, Kelley.
42. Audiotape Interview, James J. Quinn, S.J., January 25, 1990.
43. "Father Quinn Appointed Director, Counselor," The Creightonian October 6, 1961, p. 2.
44. "F. Quinn, Dr. Shannon Honored," Creighton Alumnus November 1967, p. 3.