



SISTER JOEL READ

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While she wasn't one to accept compliments or take full credit for a group's collective work, Sister Joel (pronounced Jo-ELL) Read was the pioneer who elevated Milwaukee's Alverno College to its position as a global innovator in higher education. First educated at Alverno, then as a history professor and finally as president for 35 years, the sister and the school were intertwined for the majority of Sister Joel's life.

Alverno's student body is 69% first-generation college students, and Sister Joel emphasized a resume well-rounded by work or life experience as much as grade-point average. She started a babysitting center and "weekend college" to make college accessible for nontraditional students.

Being a feminist – Sister Joel was one of the founders of the National Organization for Women – and a Catholic nun during the feminist movements of the late 20th century may seem at odds to some. Sister Joel bridged those roles in a way that was "quietly respected and allowed, not touted, to take its course" by the church because of her standing and character, says Sister Bernardin Deutsch, who worked with her at Alverno. Sister Joel's belief in women's perspectives tied into a religious belief that education was what helped people become who they were meant to be.

Sister Joel also led an overhaul of Alverno's entire approach to education, starting in 1969 with a faculty meeting and ending with a restructuring that almost immediately drew groups like Harvard and the National Institute of Education to campus to learn more. The faculty rewrote all of Alverno's curriculum to fit eight "abilities" – problem solving, analysis and social interaction, for example – that would make a well-rounded, outcome-oriented student. Almost 50 years later, the changes she pioneered are still in place and attract attention in higher education. Alverno hosts workshops for educators to learn about its "assessment as learning" model focusing on more practical work than traditional exams.

Students and faculty remember Sister Joel for making them sit up a little straighter and asking sometimes pointed questions that made people think. Sister Joel retired from Alverno in 2003 and died in 2017 at age 91. HANNAH HOFFMEISTER