

## **A Summary of the Main Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education**

Based on the recommended documents for the Canisius Formation Course, we have prepared this summary of the main characteristics of Jesuit higher education. The summary is intended to complement and facilitate reading and discussions. It does not aim to cover all aspects comprehensively, nor does it serve as a guide or set of normative instructions for the universities. The diversity among Jesuit universities, shaped by their mission to adapt to the unique contexts in which they operate, is itself a defining characteristic of Jesuit higher education.

### **Main Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education**

Jesuit higher education is distinguished by principles that align with the mission of the Society of Jesus, emphasizing academic excellence, moral and spiritual growth, and a commitment to justice and service. These values shape Jesuit universities' and colleges' curriculum, environment, and goals. Below are some key characteristics that define Jesuit higher education:

#### **1. Commitment to Excellence**

Jesuit institutions place a strong emphasis on academic excellence coupled with ethical reflection. Students are encouraged to strive for excellence in all aspects of life—academic, personal, and professional. Jesuit education fosters a rigorous academic environment where critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and in-depth inquiry are highly valued. This pursuit of knowledge is always paired with a responsibility to use that knowledge for the betterment of society, promoting the dignity and well-being of all individuals.

#### **2. Care for the Whole Person (Cura Personalis)**

A foundational principle of Jesuit education is "cura personalis," or care for the whole person. This means that Jesuit educators focus not only on students' intellectual development but also on their emotional, spiritual, and social well-being. This holistic approach encourages students to grow in self-awareness, develop their values, and discover their purpose in life. Cura personalis extends beyond students to faculty, administrators, and staff, fostering a community where all are supported and valued.

#### **3. Service and Justice-Oriented Education**

Social justice and service are cornerstones of Jesuit education. Rooted in the Jesuit mission to serve "the greater good," students are called to be "men and women for others." This means using their education to address societal injustices and positively impact their communities and the world. Jesuit institutions offer service-learning

programs, volunteer opportunities, and courses focused on social justice, helping students apply their academic learning to real-world challenges while advocating for marginalized groups and promoting a more just and humane society.

#### **4. Reflection and Discernment**

Ignatian pedagogy emphasizes the importance of reflection and discernment. Students are encouraged to pause and reflect on their learning experiences, personal values, and future choices. This process of thoughtful reflection helps them become ethical, responsible leaders capable of making well-informed decisions, particularly in complex and uncertain situations.

#### **5. Global Perspective and Formation of Global Citizens**

Jesuit higher education seeks to form students into global citizens—locally engaged and globally aware individuals. It promotes intercultural dialogue, international cooperation, and respect for diverse perspectives. This global orientation reflects the Jesuit tradition of going beyond borders to serve humanity. Students are often encouraged to participate in international programs, learn about different cultures, and confront global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

#### **6. Faith and Reason**

Jesuit education emphasizes the integration of faith and reason, viewing them as complementary. Jesuit institutions value the pursuit of knowledge through intellectual inquiry while also fostering the exploration of spiritual questions. Students are encouraged to integrate their faith and beliefs with their academic pursuits, promoting a balanced approach to understanding the world and their place within it.

By Susana Di Trolio, Spain, September 2024.