



**BEST PRACTICES**

in Jesuit Higher Education

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# Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education

*AN ONLINE MAGAZINE*

ISSUE

**6.1**

MARCH 2026

FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES,  
AND MECHANISMS IN JESUIT  
IDENTITY AND MISSION



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IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education Project is a global initiative of IAJU. The Kircher Network (Jesuit Higher Education in Europe) is currently leading the project.

Contact information: Susana Di Trolío, PhD. Executive Secretary of the Kircher Network

[bestpractices@kirchernetwork.org](mailto:bestpractices@kirchernetwork.org)

# Table of contents

FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND MECHANISMS IN  
JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

From Reflection to Action:  
Lessons Learned from Issue  
6 - Best Practices in Formation  
Programs, Initiatives, and  
Mechanisms in Jesuit Identity and  
Mission

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Susana Di Trolío, Ph.D.

*Kircher Network*

AUSJAL Ignatian Volunteering:  
formation, service, and  
networking

FORMATION

Jorge Abraham del Valle Márquez and Mayra Eugenia  
Alvarado Menjívar

*ITESO and Central American University José Simeón Cañas*

A Decade of Management  
Exercises: Continuing to Move  
Forward with Purpose

FORMATION AND COLLABORATION

Kimberly Rae Connor, Ph.D. and Richard W. Stackman

*University of San Francisco*

Being a Javerian Inductor is to  
Touch the Soul

RESEARCH

Diana Lucía Avellaneda Rodríguez

*Javeriana Pontifical University*

## Culture, Inclusion, and Universities: Best Practices from the ISA Culture Project

FORMATION

Carla Pinto Cardoso, Ph.D.; Fátima Pereira; and Luísa Magalhães, Ph.D.

*Catholic University of Portugal - Braga*

## Cura Personalis at a Distance: Building Belonging in Online Jesuit Education

EVALUATION INITIATIVE

Dr. Eva Mika, Ph.D., PMP and Jennifer Gettings, M.Ed

*Loyola University Chicago*

## The Deglman Initiative: Formation in the Spiritual Exercises for Faculty and Staff

TEACHING & LEARNING

Erika L. Kirby, Ph.D.; Fr. Gregory Carlson, S.J.; Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.; Kyle Mullins, Ed.D.; and Max Engel, Ph.D.

*Creighton University*

## The Kircher Network Canisius Formation in Jesuit Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education

FORMATION

Susana Di Trollo, Ph.D., Lidia Fioravanti; Gonzalo Villagrán, SJ, and Josep Maria Serrano, SJ.

*Kircher Network*

## Digital Immigration Lab: Integrating Ignatian Pedagogy and Immigration and Refugee Research

FORMATION

Dr. Sabnam Ghosh, Dr. Danushka Bandara and Julie Mughal

*Fairfield University and Saint Louis University*

## Faculty and Staff Formation Toward a Culture of Discernment

FORMATION TRAINING INITIATIVE

Lauren Hackman-Brooks and Elizabeth Barsotti

*Gonzaga University*

## THL 471: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

FORMATION

Rev. Gregory I. Carlson, S.J.; and Rev. Larry D. Gillick, S.J.

*Creighton University*

## Tutoring as a Mission: An Ignatian-Inspired Integral Proposal

FORMATION

Cecilia Eva Burga-Yuy, Gary Grandez-Rodriguez, and Benjamín Alcarraz-Buleje

*Antonio Ruiz Montoya University*

## Safeguarding Children: Co-constructing a Multicultural Training Program for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

FORMATION & TRAINING INITIATIVE

Dr. Alessandra Campo and Dr. Angela Rinaldi

*Pontifical Gregorian University*

## The Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU) Ignatian Leadership Seminar

FORMATION TRAINING INITIATIVE

Jeanne F. Lord, Brittany Fried, and Kevin D. Sullivan

*Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities*



**Lessons Learned from Issue 6**  
Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education



Insights for Ignatian Mission in Secular and Diverse Contexts

| Thematic Area   | Lesson Learned   | Brief Explanation   |
|---|--|---|
| <br><b>Inclusive &amp; Dialogical Formation</b>  | <b>Formation must be inclusive and dialogical</b><br>Programs are strongest when they welcome diverse perspectives and encourage dialogue. | Programs are strongest when they welcome diverse perspectives and encourage dialogue. |
|   | <b>Diversity enriches mission formation</b><br>Cultural, religious, and professional differences deepen engagement.                        | Cultural, religious, and professional differences deepen engagement.                  |
| <br><b>Experiential &amp; Reflective Learning</b>  | <b>Reflection connects mission to experience</b><br>Participants internalize mission when linked to lived reality.                         | Participants internalize mission when linked to lived reality.                        |
| <br><b>Real-world application makes mission credible</b><br>Applying values to concrete situations increases commitment. | Applying values to concrete situations increases commitment.   |   |
| <br><b>Community &amp; Collaboration</b>   | <b>Collaboration across disciplines advances integration</b><br>Interdisciplinary work reflects Jesuit intellectual tradition.             | Interdisciplinary work reflects Jesuit intellectual tradition.                        |
|   | <b>Relationships are lasting formative outcomes</b><br>Networks formed through programs sustain mission long-term.                         | Networks formed through programs sustain mission long-term.                           |
| <br><b>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</b>   | <b>Formation prepares leaders for mission-driven decisions</b><br>Discernment-based leadership improves institutional direction.           | Discernment-based leadership improves institutional direction.                        |
|   | <b>Formation is a shared responsibility</b><br>Jesuits and lay colleagues must be formed together.   | Jesuits and lay collaborators must be formed together.                                |
| <br><b>Sustainability &amp; Impact</b>   | <b>Formation is most effective over time</b><br>Leadership, Structures, staff, and resources are essential.                                | Continuous processes shape identity more than isolated events.                        |

# From Reflection to Action: Lessons Learned from Issue 6 - Best Practices in Formation Programs, Initiatives, and Mechanisms in Jesuit Identity and Mission

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

SUSANA DI TROLIO

KIRCHER NETWORK

Issue 6 of IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education presents formation programs, initiatives, and mechanisms that successfully promote Jesuit identity and mission across universities worldwide. This issue features 26 practices from Jesuit universities across North America (AJCU-NA), Latin America and the Caribbean (AUSJAL), and Europe and Lebanon (Kircher Network).

A careful reading of Issue 6 reveals that most of the 26 practices focus on formation—not as a peripheral activity but as a central strategy for sustaining Jesuit identity. At the heart of this collection lie two unifying convictions. First, Jesuit higher education is defined not by documents but by the commitment of faculty, leaders, and staff to live out Ignatian values in teaching, research, and service. Jesuit higher education endures not because of institutional declarations but because of who it forms—Jesuits and lay faculty, leaders, and staff—and how deeply they embody the Ignatian vision in the life of the university. Second, formation is the primary pathway through which Jesuit identity and mission are sustained and embodied. Across continents, institutional types, and cultural realities, formation emerges as the common language through which mission is enacted, renewed,

and transmitted.

To guide readers through the richness of the issue, this article synthesizes the most relevant lessons learned from the 26 practices, highlighting shared insights across diverse and plural contexts. Some lessons provide new perspectives on contemporary formation practices, while others confirm established principles of transmitting Jesuit identity in higher education.

The experiences documented demonstrate that formation cannot be conceived as uniform or confessional transmission of identity. Instead, it unfolds as a dynamic process of encounter, reflection, and shared meaning-making, requiring intentional design and continuous adaptation to context. Effective formation engages participants intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, allowing them to experience Ignatian values as guiding principles for teaching, research, governance, and community engagement.

While the practices vary in structure and scope, they converge in lessons that illuminate how Ignatian identity can remain meaningful, credible, and transformative in contexts marked by complexity, diverse worldviews, and increasing institutional pressures (see Table 1).

What 26 Formation Practices Around the World Reveal About Effective Formation in Identity and Mission:

### 1. Formation must be inclusive, dialogical, and experiential

A central lesson across the articles is that effective formation on identity and mission must be inclusive and dialogical, inviting participation from people of different beliefs, backgrounds, and roles within the university. Programs succeed when they create spaces for dialogue, reflection, and experiential learning rooted in Ignatian pedagogy. This includes faculty, administrators, and staff across disciplines and backgrounds, regardless of religious affiliation or prior familiarity with Jesuit tradition. Programs that foster dialogue enable participants to critically engage with key concepts such as discernment, service, and the promotion of justice.

Dialogue itself is a formational experience. By conversing and reflecting with others, participants develop attentiveness, humility, and a sense of shared responsibility essential in pluralistic and secularized contexts. Formation programs should intentionally include both Jesuits and lay colleagues, particularly in leadership roles. Shared experiences provide pla-

forms for mutual understanding, collaborative leadership, and integration of Jesuit values into institutional practices.

The peer-formation model at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the tutoring system at Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya demonstrate that formation gains depth when participants learn through accompaniment, reflection, and lived experience rather than abstract discourse alone. Both initiatives flourish when participation is invited rather than dictated.


This principle is strongly confirmed by Brittany Fried and Sullivan in their study of the AJCU Ignatian Leadership Seminar, which found that leaders preferred interactive formats with more dialogue and less lecture, prompting redesign of program sessions. Dialogue translates Ignatian values into concrete attitudes such as empathy, responsibility, discernment, and care.

Hybrid methodologies, such as those in the Canisius Formation, combine reflection, intellectual engagement, and peer dialogue, allowing participants to interpret mission within their professional and cultural contexts. Similarly, the Kircher Network's Canisius Formation: Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education Institu-

tions demonstrates that combining peer dialogue with contextual interpretation deepens engagement and meaning-making.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation is most effective when interactive, inclusive, and grounded in lived experience rather than one-way instruction.


**Table 1**



**Lessons Learned from Issue 6**  
*Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education*

*Insights for Ignatian Mission in Secular and Diverse Contexts*



| Thematic Area  | Lesson Learned   | Brief Explanation  |
|--|--|--|
| <br><b>Inclusive &amp; Dialogical Formation</b>     | <p><b>Formation must be inclusive and dialogical</b><br/>Programs are strongest when they welcome diverse perspectives and encourage dialogue.</p> <p><b>Diversity enriches mission formation</b><br/>Cultural, religious, and professional differences deepen engagement.</p> | <p>Programs are strongest when they welcome diverse perspectives and encourage dialogue.</p> <p>Cultural, religious, and professional differences deepen engagement.</p> |
| <br><b>Experiential &amp; Reflective Learning</b> | <p><b>Reflection connects mission to experience</b><br/>Participants internalize mission when linked to lived reality.</p> <p><b>Real-world application makes mission credible</b><br/>Applying values to concrete situations increases commitment.</p>                        | <p>Participants internalize mission when linked to lived reality.</p> <p>Applying values to concrete situations increases commitment.</p>                                |
| <br><b>Community &amp; Collaboration</b>          | <p><b>Collaboration</b> across disciplines advances integration<br/>Interdisciplinary work reflects Jesuit intellectual tradition.</p> <p><b>Relationships are lasting formative outcomes</b><br/>Networks formed through programs sustain mission long-term.</p>              | <p>Interdisciplinary work reflects Jesuit intellecturdition.</p> <p>Networks formed through programs sustain mission long-term.</p>                                      |
| <br><b>Leadership &amp; Responsibility</b>        | <p><b>Formation prepares leaders for mission-driven decisions</b><br/>Discernment-based leadership improves institutional direction.</p> <p><b>Formation is a shared responsibility</b><br/>Jesuits and lay colleagues must be formed together.</p>                            | <p>Discernment-based leadership improves institutional direction.</p> <p>Jesuits and lay collaborators must be formed together.</p>                                      |
| <br><b>Sustainability &amp; Impact</b>            | <p><b>Formation is most effective over time</b><br/>Leadership, Structures, staff, and resources are essential.</p>  | <p>Continuous processes shape identity more than isolated events.</p>  |

**2. Formation must respect religious, cultural, and socio-economic diversity**

The practices presented underscore that formation in Jesuit universities must be deeply attentive to religious, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity. Students and staff arrive with different personal histories, vulnerabilities, and worldviews, which programs must recognize to be transformative.

Formation initiatives flourish when they embrace the plurality of contemporary academic communities. Programs sensitive to these differences foster engagement, encourage participants to bring their full identities to learning, and adapt content, methodology, and examples to local realities. Contextualized formation helps participants connect Ignatian values with their own social and professional contexts, making principles mea-

ningful and actionable. This approach transforms formation from a set of abstract lessons into a lived experience that encourages reflection in concrete institutional and societal settings.

Accompaniment models grounded in cura personalis, as seen in Avellaneda Rodríguez' and Burga-Yuy's articles<sup>1</sup>, exemplify formation attentive to diversity. The regional Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL initiative described by del Valle Márquez and Alvarado Menjívar<sup>2</sup> integrates formation, social engagement, and intercultural exchange, enabling participants from varied contexts to interpret Ignatian values within their realities.

Likewise, across the experiences documented, a consistent pattern emerges: Across secularized and plural contexts, formation is most transformative when relational, dialogical, and attentive to diversity. Such formation does not seek uniformity but communion—cultivating communities capable of integrating intellectual rigor, ethical commitment, and intercultural un-

<sup>1</sup> Abraham del Valle Márquez & Mayra Eugenia Alvarado Menjívar, Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL: formación, servicio y vinculación en red, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente (ITESO), Mexico, in IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education, Issue 6 (2026).  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

derstanding in service of the common good. The Canisius Formation experience<sup>3</sup> provides strong confirmation, demonstrating formation designed for post-secular.

European contexts that invites participants to interpret mission through cultural and professional perspectives rather than assuming religious affiliation.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation deepens when it honors and engages the diversity of participants' backgrounds and experiences.

**3. Formation is a shared institutional responsibility**

A recurring lesson showed by the experiences documented is that formation cannot depend on isolated programs or a small group of committed individuals. . It is a shared institutional responsibility, involving leadership, faculty, staff, and students. When embedded across academic, pastoral, and governance structures, formation becomes part of institutional culture rather than a peripheral activity.

**This shared responsibility encourages coheren-**

<sup>3</sup> Villagrán et al., The Kircher Network Canisius Formation in Jesuit Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education, Issue 6 (2026).

ce between the university’s mission and everyday practices, fostering an institutional culture in which Ignatian values guide decision-making, collaboration, and community-building. Formation programs on identity and mission succeed only when multiple stakeholders participate collaboratively, as Conor Kelly demonstrates in “Integration through Inquiry: Preserving Ignatian Priorities in the Contemporary University Environment”<sup>4</sup>. The AJCU Leadership Seminar<sup>5</sup> likewise reinforces that mission formation is a collective process rather than the work of isolated units. It reinforces this point by intentionally bringing together administrators, faculty, and leaders from different institutional roles into a single formation cohort, highlighting that mission formation is a collective institutional process rather than a specialized activity.

Another consistent insight across the issue is that formation programs addressed to faculty and staff should intentionally include both Jesuits and lay collaborators. This is essential because both groups—especially those in lea-

<sup>4</sup> Conor Kelly, Integration through Inquiry: Preserving Ignatian Priorities in the Contemporary University Environment (Marquette University), in IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education, Issue 6 (2026).

<sup>5</sup> Jeanne F. Lord, Brittany Fried, & Kevin D. Sullivan, The Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU) Ignatian Leadership Seminar, in IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education, Issue 6 (2026, USA).

dership roles—must learn how to collaborate effectively, understand one another’s vocations, and co-carry institutional mission.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation programs in identity and mission succeed when embraced as a collective, institution-wide responsibility. Formation programs addressed to faculty and staff should intentionally include both Jesuits and lay collaborators.

#### 4. Engaging real institutional tensions

Another significant lessons emerging from the 26 experiences is that faculty and administrators respond most positively to methodologies that openly engage the real tensions present in university life. Formation programs in identity and mission are most effective when they address the real tensions present in university life, such as financial constraints, performance metrics, research demands, or regulatory pressures. Addressing these challenges fosters institutional authenticity and helps participants to reflect on how Ignatian principles can guide decision-making amid uncertainty and constraint.

. Addressing the university complexity fosters institutional authenticity and helps participants integrate Jesuit educational vision into professional responsibilities without idealization. For

instance, the participant feedbacks from the AJCU Leadership Seminar shows that formation is more effective when sessions addressed concrete institutional challenges<sup>6</sup>.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation is most effective when it acknowledges the real tensions of university life. Acknowledging real-world challenges makes formation relevant, credible, and applicable.

#### 5. Institutional conditions for sustainability

Another well-known but sometimes overlooked lesson is that for formation to have lasting impact, it must be supported by robust institutional structures. Three key enabling conditions consistently emerge:

- **Leadership commitment:** Visible support from presidents, rectors, and senior teams signals that formation is central to the university’s mission and not merely optional or symbolic.
- **Governance structures:** Formal frameworks—such as committees, dedicated offices, policies, and strategic plans—anchor formation within the institution. These struc-

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

tures ensure continuity, coordination, and alignment with academic and administrative goals, even as individual leaders or contexts change.

- **Dedicated budgets and staff:** Sustainable formation requires consistent investment in personnel, training, and program resources. Institutions that allocate funding and skilled staff can maintain program quality, foster pedagogical innovation, and provide long-term accompaniment. Without these resources, even strong initiatives risk instability or fragmentation.

Programs such as UNIJES<sup>7</sup> illustrate that sustainable formation depends on leadership commitment, structured design, and follow-up rather than episodic initiatives. Without these conditions, even well-designed programs risk remaining fragile or fragmented.

**Key Takeaway:** Sustainable formation depends on committed leadership, strong governance, and dedicated resources.

#### 6. Formation cultivates awareness and identity

<sup>7</sup> UNIJES – Universidades Jesuitas en España, Programas de Formación, 2026.

One foundational lesson emerging from the 26 practices is that formation in identity and mission should cultivate a deep awareness of the distinctive nature of a university's educational project. Effective formation helps faculty, staff, and students recognize that their daily work contributes to a broader mission of service, justice, and human flourishing. For instance, evidence from the AJCU Leadership Seminar<sup>8</sup> shows that lay leaders often move from seeing Jesuit mission as primarily a Jesuit concern to understanding themselves as co-responsible collaborators.

Across diverse and secularized contexts, these experiences illustrate that Jesuit identity is not preserved primarily through statements, policies, or structures, but through people who act, decide, teach, and lead with discernment and care for others. In this way, formation becomes a living bridge between Ignatian tradition and the contemporary and complex realities of higher education.

The transformative impact of formation is particularly evident in the way participants' self-understanding evolves. Rather than remaining

<sup>8</sup> Lord & Sullivan, *The Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU) Ignatian Leadership Seminar*. 2026

observers of Jesuit mission in higher education, participants emerge as co-agents, empowered to internalize Ignatian values and actively contribute to institutional mission. This identity transformation—from observer to partner in mission—represents a distinctive outcome of formation, ensuring that Jesuit values are not only understood intellectually but enacted in daily practice.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation empowers participants to recognize themselves as partners in mission, fostering a living, action-oriented Jesuit identity that bridges tradition and contemporary higher education.

Another lesson emerging from these experiences is the importance of intercultural learning within network-based formation. Networks create spaces where participants from diverse institutional, cultural, and national contexts can exchange practices, reflect together on mission challenges, and learn from one another's experiences. Through these interactions, participants generate collective wisdom and deepen their understanding of how Ignatian values can be lived in different university contexts. Interuniversity collaboration therefore strengthens identity, fosters intercultural learning, and nur-

tures shared discernment about mission.

The experience of initiatives such as the AUSJAL volunteer program illustrates another dimension of this lesson. Collaboration across universities expands opportunities for service and exchange while simultaneously forming both participants and coordinators. These shared experiences cultivate leadership capacities, broaden horizons, and reinforce commitment to the Jesuit mission.

Finally, the cases reviewed in this issue suggest another important lesson: networks help address uneven levels of mission formation across institutions and across countries. By leveraging resources, expertise, and experience across universities, networks can support institutions that are still developing their formation programs. The experience of UNIJES demonstrates how collaboration within a country can strengthen formation efforts, while initiatives developed through AUSJAL, AJCU, and the Kircher Network illustrate the value of cross-national cooperation. In this regard, the fact that UNIJES allowed the Kircher Network to draw inspiration from its formation program when developing its own initiative is itself a telling example of how networks facilitate the transfer

of experience and knowledge across countries and could also do so across regions. These network-based initiatives succeed because they complement and enrich local formation programs rather than duplicating them, adding value while respecting institutional autonomy.

### **Key Takeaway**

Jesuit higher education networks function as formative spaces: they transmit experience across countries, foster intercultural learning, strengthen Ignatian identity and collaboration, and help address uneven levels of mission formation among universities within and across countries.

## **8. Other Lessons on Formation Programs Confirmed by Issue 6**

In addition to the core lessons already identified, the articles included in Issue 6 confirm several complementary insights that deepen our understanding of how formation programs can be effectively designed and sustained in diverse, secularized, and plural contexts.

### **8.1. Ignatian Pedagogy as a Methodological Framework**

The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm—context, experience, reflection, action, and evalua-

tion—emerges as a foundational framework for contemporary formation. Its strength lies in integrating intellectual rigor with personal transformation, while remaining adaptable to changing realities such as technological innovation, institutional pressures, or social and political disruptions. Across the experiences documented, Ignatian pedagogy provides a coherent structure that allows formation programs to remain faithful to tradition while responsive to context.

**Key Takeaway:** Ignatian pedagogy offers a flexible and enduring framework for meaningful formation.

### **8.2. Careful Design, Accompaniment, and Peer Formation**

Intentional selection, preparation, and ongoing accompaniment significantly enhance formation outcomes. Programs that structure participation in clear stages—from recruitment and preparation to evaluation and reintegration—ensure that learning is integrated rather than episodic. Peer-formation approaches are especially powerful: those who accompany others often experience the deepest transformation themselves, developing leadership, empathy, communication skills, and a strengthened sen-

se of purpose.

**Key Takeaway:** Thoughtful design and peer-led processes maximize formation impact.

### **8.3. Hybrid and Longitudinal Formation Models Increase Access and Inclusion**

Formation is most effective when it unfolds over time and through multiple modalities. Programs combining online preparation, in-person immersion, and post-program engagement deepen learning while increasing accessibility. Longitudinal approaches allow formation to accompany participants across stages of development, supporting adaptation, vocational discernment, and growing social commitment at different moments of academic and professional life.

**Key Takeaway:** Long-term and hybrid formation models deepen learning and ensure continuity across life stages.

### **8.4. Closure and Reflection Moments Consolidate Learning**

Structured opportunities for reflection—such as retreats, guided evaluations, and communal discernment sessions—play a decisive role in consolidating learning. These moments help participants interpret their experiences, name

insights gained, and integrate formation into their personal and professional lives. Formation is strengthened when action is intentionally accompanied by reflection.

**Key Takeaway:** Reflection and closure transform experiences into lasting formation.

### **8.5. Aligning Needs Assessment with Mixed-Method Evaluation**

Effective formation begins with a careful diagnosis of participants' needs and expectations. Programs are more coherent and impactful when formative intentions are clearly stated from the outset and evaluation combines qualitative and quantitative indicators. Including the perspectives of participants, facilitators, and institutional leaders allows institutions to assess outcomes such as empathy, applicability, responsibility, and commitment more effectively.

**Key Takeaway:** Formation programs are stronger when grounded in participant needs and evaluated rigorously.

### **8.6. Continuous Updating Sustains Relevance**

Formation initiatives remain effective when curricula, materials, and formats are regularly

updated. Integration of digital platforms, centralized resources, and innovative pedagogical approaches enhances accessibility, coherence, and long-term continuity, ensuring that formation responds to evolving institutional and societal contexts.

**Key Takeaway:** Ongoing renewal and innovation sustain formation's relevance and impact.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, Issue 6 of IAJU Best Practices offers a compelling reminder that formation in Jesuit higher education is not merely a program—it is a journey. It is a living, ongoing process through which faculty, staff, and leaders grow as companions in the Jesuit mission. The experiences shared across the global network reveal not only creativity and commitment but also the spiritual depth that sustains Jesuit identity across continents and contexts.

These practices demonstrate that formation is most effective when it is woven into the very fabric of institutional life. It is not enough to run a single program or a set of workshops. Formation flourishes when it becomes part of an **institutional culture**—shaped by pedagogy, nurtured by leadership, and shared collectively

among all members of the university community. Programs that are dialogical, inclusive, and attentive to diversity engage participants deeply, helping them integrate Ignatian values into teaching, research, governance, and service. The experiences analyzed in this issue confirm that promoting and deepening Jesuit identity through formation is a foundational strategic priority.

At the heart of effective formation lies a simple but profound goal: helping participants **recognize, and hopefully embrace, the distinctive character of Jesuit higher education and their role within it.** By cultivating this awareness, universities empower their faculty, leaders, and staff to embody Ignatian values in daily work and decision-making. As Fr. General Arturo Sosa emphasized in his address to the IAJU Assembly at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, “Formation in the distinctive elements of the identity and mission of Jesuit higher education is not a luxury; it is a necessary condition for the long-term sustainability of the universities.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sosa, A. (2025, July 1). The Jesuit University: Witness to hope, creative and dialogical presence [Address delivered at the International Association of Jesuit Universities Assembly, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia]. International Association of Jesuit Universities. <https://iaju.org/2025/07/01/the-jesuit-university-wit->

Intentional formation provides a unifying thread that connects every aspect of institutional life. In contexts marked by rapid change, secularization, and diversity, it ensures that responses to challenges remain grounded in the Ignatian charism. Another significant lesson emerging from the 26 practices is that faculty and administrators respond most positively to methodologies that openly engage the **real tensions present in university life.** Formation programs in identity and mission are most effective when they address practical challenges—such as financial constraints, performance metrics, research demands, or regulatory pressures—allowing participants to reflect on how Ignatian principles can guide decision-making amid uncertainty. Acknowledging institutional complexity fosters authenticity, helping participants integrate the Jesuit educational vision into their professional responsibilities without idealization. Formation programs that combine dialogue, reflection, and action foster communities where Ignatian values are not only taught but lived and shared.

Finally, Issue 6 highlights a **clear call for shared learning and collaboration.** Differences in resources and institutional capacities across universities—both within countries and across

<https://iaju.org/2025/07/01/the-jesuit-university-wit->

continents—can create uneven access to formation. Jesuit institutions are therefore encouraged to share experiences, materials, and expertise and to strengthen collaborative initiatives. By doing so, they reduce gaps, enhance collective impact, and support one another in promoting Jesuit identity and mission. In this way, collaboration and sharing themselves become a form of formation, helping all institutions grow together in fidelity to the Jesuit vision.



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## A Decade of Management Exercises: Continuing to Move Forward with Purpose

Kimberly Rae Connor and Richard W. Stackman  
University of San Francisco (AJCU)

### ABSTRACT

The article reflects on a ten-year initiative at the University of San Francisco called "Management Exercises." This program integrates Ignatian spirituality and Catholic social teaching into the MBA curriculum through four modules. It aims to develop self-aware business leaders who understand their personal mission and their role as global citizens.

### MAIN GOALS

To foster self-awareness, integrate personal mission with professional goals, and introduce students to Jesuit values like *cura personalis* and "magis" in a business context.

### METHODOLOGY

The program uses a four-module framework. Each module combines: 1) Ignatian Spirituality, 2) Catholic Social Teaching, and 3) Management concepts. The pedagogical flow follows the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP).

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

**Showing the Way to God:** By introducing students to discernment and the practice of finding meaning beyond profit.

**Journeying with Youth:** By accompanying graduate students during a pivotal transition in their professional and personal lives.

### LESSONS LEARNED



#### Language is Key

Using management-friendly terms (like "mission" or "vision") helps bridge the gap for students who may be skeptical of spiritual language.



#### Faculty as Accompaniment

The role of the professor changes from "expert" to "guide" or "spiritual director" during these exercises.



#### Timing Matters

Introducing these concepts at the beginning of the program sets a reflective tone for the entire degree.

### RESULTS

- ✓ Over ten years of successful integration into the MBA orientation and curriculum.
- ✓ Students report a "transformative shift" in how they view leadership, moving from individual success to the common good.
- ✓ The program has been shared globally as a model for "Inspirational Paradigms" in Jesuit business schools.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 🎯 Increasing the **long-term engagement of alumni** to see how these exercises impact their leadership years after graduation.
- 🎯 **Integrating the modules more deeply into core finance and accounting courses**, not just leadership or ethics classes.
- 🎯 **Adapting the content for online and hybrid** formats to reach a more diverse student body.

# A Decade of Management Exercises: Continuing to Move Forward with Purpose

## FORMATION & COLLABORATION

**KIMBERLY RAE CONNOR, PH.D. AND RICHARD W. STACKMAN**

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss our ten-year journey imagining an "inspirational paradigm" for management education at a Jesuit university that would bring Ignatian spirituality into our academic programs, primarily the Master's of Business Education (MBA) program. Our formation initiative, called Management Exercises, offers students professional development that encourages a renewed awareness of their identities and personal missions in order to proceed forward as self-aware, engaged, global citizens. Management Exercises combines three perspectives in its overall design of four modules. Each module is framed by foundational concepts drawn from Ignatian spirituality, Catholic social teaching, and terms commonly applied in management settings. We continue to share Management Exercises widely, including lessons learned, in order to refresh it and enhance students' engagement and experience.

Ten years ago, more than a decade into our careers as professors at a Jesuit university, we began, independently at first and then collaboratively, to seek out formation opportunities and to engage more directly in programming that would acquaint us with Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy. Few faculty members have a wide range of choices in where we are hired and neither of us came to the University of San Francisco with much background or abiding interest in its Jesuit charism. However, the ambient Ignatian culture started to seep into our souls and changed the way we thought about what we taught and how we taught. Deeply transformed by our own encounters with the Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, we realized more fully the privilege we enjoyed teaching at a faith-based institution that had a clear and compelling mission statement that articulated not just a method for educating for students, but a process for formation of the whole person. How to carry this transformative spirit into our classes in a School of Management was our challenge and our opportunity. So, we applied to our university's Jesuit Foundation for a grant to explore ways to bring Ignatian spirituality into conversation with our MBA courses where Ignatian-inflected influence was underrepresented, perhaps even deemed irrelevant or unnecessary. We were ima-

gining an "Inspirational Paradigm for Jesuit Business Education," before it became a priority of the IAJU.<sup>1</sup>

Just as we had learned ourselves, we were motivated to illustrate to our students the difference it made to acquire their MBAs at a Jesuit university. We wanted to offer a new model – a Jesuit-informed model – for professional development that encouraged them to touch back to their identities and personal missions in order to proceed forward as self-aware, engaged global citizens. Instead of studying the "dominator paradigm" that has prevailed across cultures for millennia, our management students would study how to be compassionate instead of callous, how to respond instead of react, how to serve the common good instead of attending only to shareholder interests. While most management gurus refer to these traits as "soft skills," we sought to redefine them as "durable" or "core skills."

We were uniquely qualified for this collaboration. One of us is trained in organizational behavior, the other in the humanities. We both had deep experience as editors, program builders, and administrators. Together we brought our singular

<sup>1</sup> <https://iaju.org/program/an-inspirational-paradigm-for-jesuit-business-education/>

and shared talents to the task of envisioning a way to enhance our students' academic experience with elements derived from Ignatian spirituality. We recognized that our Jesuit tradition provided us the resources and techniques to shape a fresh, value-enriched experience for our students and that the Spiritual Exercises, in particular, provided us the form, method, and some of the content to shape that experience.

To honor the influence of this formative text, we named our program Management Exercises and aimed to guide our students in how to manage not just their careers but their lives. They would come to learn how to exercise discernment, build character, and enact citizenship. We settled on a structure drawn from the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, but widened our scope to include elements drawn from complementary sources. Management Exercises would combine three perspectives in its overall design. Each of the four modules would be framed by foundational concepts drawn from Ignatian spirituality, Catholic social teaching, and terms commonly applied in management settings. Taken together,

we hoped to establish a unified perspective (see Table 1) from which students could engage recommendations for reflection derived from these three intellectual traditions. We gathered the concepts under broader categories that introduce the four modules and build, as the Spiritual Exercises do, an expanding vision from self, to others, to organizations, and to society.

**Table 1. Management Exercises Modules**

| Module 1  | Module 2  | Module 3  | Module 4   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Self Leadership   | Others Stakeholders   | Organization Culture  | Society Purpose  |
| <i>Discernment</i>  | <i>Cura Personalis</i>  | <i>Cura Apostolica</i>  | <i>Magis</i>   |
| <b>Self-Awareness</b><br>Understands one's strengths, weaknesses, values, and world view.       | <b>Love</b><br>Engages others with a positive, loving attitude.   | <b>Ingenuity</b><br>Confidently innovates and adapts to embrace a changing world.             | <b>Heroism</b><br>Energizes themselves and others by embracing courageous and spirited ambitions.        |
| <b>Synchronicity</b><br>Is my decision true to my deepest values and uncompromising principles? | <b>Solidarity</b><br>Is my decision respectful of others and inclusive, especially the most vulnerable? | <b>Subsidiarity</b><br>Is my decision empowering others and promoting leadership development? | <b>Sustainability</b><br>Is my decision making a positive change for communities and future generations? |

Sources: The terms Self-Awareness, Love, Ingenuity, and Heroism from Lowney (2003). The terms Synchronicity, Solidarity, Subsidiarity, and Sustainability from Tavanti (2012).

When he established the Society of Jesus in 1540, St. Ignatius shared with his companions the Spiritual Exercises as a kind of handbook for

retreat directors that offered guidance for how to help a retreatant or seeker “discern” – to make decisions and act based on core character dimensions and emotional responses to experience, what he called “movements of the soul.” The notes Ignatius kept were drawn directly from his spiritual journey, which he felt certain would be useful to others seeking God.

As a companion to a management education, Management Exercises was designed to initiate this movement not from a handbook but from an online platform, yet still intended to support a similar function: to be a whole-soul work-out that enhances the educational experience of students by asking them to consider their professional development from multiple points of view. While it draws its structure and reflections from the Spiritual Exercises, the program also calls on diverse intellectual traditions to provide a variety of contexts and forms of connection. Sensitive to the fact that our complex student body came from multiple and in many cases no spiritual or religious background, we emphasized that we were not providing religious instruction but rather something akin to coaching with an Ignatian spin. As the founder of both an international organization and an enduring wisdom tradition, we reasoned that St. Ignatius was particularly qua-

lified to be the guiding force behind our program and someone we could turn to for enrichment and guidance. In adapting the Spiritual Exercises for a management education, we were answering the question we asked ourselves after our encounters with Ignatian spirituality: How do we help our students learn to manage themselves so that their lives are aimed not only at the pursuit of a career but focused on a journey towards human fulfillment?

As St. Ignatius encouraged seekers to engage multiple senses in the process of discernment, so do we in this program. Each module begins with a poem that establishes the theme, often posing a relevant question as in Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Summer Day”: “What is it that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” Then we invite students to adopt a contemplative moment modeled on the Ignatian Examen. Proceeding forward, students would watch videos, listen to podcasts, and read content derived from a variety of sources. Students conclude their encounter with an imaginative reflection. While we believed it was important to continue to hew to the original structure based on the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises for the core pillars of the program, we recognized that the content may need to be adapted for different settings and

encouraged anyone wanting to run the program to feel free to choose the resources that worked best for them in their particular context. Over time we have done the same and switched out readings and videos and podcasts as we encounter new information and assess students’ response to the offerings, always seeking to find points of contact that inspire them.

We have also added new content drawn from the larger Ignatian humanistic tradition, later grounding the program in an initial encounter with the “Ignatian Presupposition,” which opens the Spiritual Exercises and establishes a relational rather than a transactional approach to the retreat experience. We also included the rhetorical guidelines of “Eloquentia Perfecta,” that emerged out of Ignatius’s advice to those attending the Council of Trent. These recommendations established the tone and the terms of conduct for the kind of exchange among peers we hoped to build as a community of trust and respect. Two elements have remained stable over the ten years. One is the meditations, what we call the “practice,” that are modeled on the Examen prayer developed by St. Ignatius. We introduce each module with an Examen keyed to the theme of the week. The other is the reflections, each drawn from contemplative exercises St. Ignatius created for the Spi-

ritual Exercises. Having been successful for almost 500 years, these reflections have yet to fail us in their impact and the profound impression they make on students.

One feature of this program that we think is especially important and should be lifted up as a best practice is the way in which we illustrate how an Ignatian formation program is integral to and co-equivalent to academic achievement; that formation is essential to our goal to support students to become “people for others.” Also indicative of a best practice is the ways in which Management Exercises demonstrates a way of proceeding through life and education that follows the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm. The importance of individual students’ context is reinforced by the personal, interior journey they take through the content; they open themselves up to the experience of coming to understand the lives and values of others they encounter in the content; they are guided to reflect on the ways in which all they are learning is linked to academic offerings and the broader goals of seeking a purposeful education; they are inspired to take specific action not only by completing the elements of Management Exercises but in how they imagine their next steps after graduation; and they evaluate their overall movement through their program of

study not just by the grades they receive but the confidence, poise, and perspective they develop along the way and carry forward.

Once created, we began sharing Management Exercises with colleagues in the AJCU-North America. We published articles, the first of which appeared in the open resource online journal Jesuit Higher Education under the title, “The Management Exercises: A Way Forward with Purpose” (2016). We pledged from the beginning that Management Exercises would not be monetized; no one would have to pay in order to use it at their institutions. We have freely shared the contents in subsequent publications, including in an open educational resource textbook (Connor, 2012) on teaching ethical decision making, and most recently as a chapter (Connor & Stackman, 2025) for an edited volume that seeks to address what lies beneath the “roar and the tumult” of education and how we can apply a prophetic imagination to create a culture of hospitality and belonging in our classrooms. Also, our university featured an article on our program in its quarterly magazine.<sup>2</sup> We have given presentations at conferences where we provided our contact information, responded to inquiries about the program, and

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usfca.edu/magazine/may-2023/feature/management-common-good>

encouraged follow-up.

We launched our own version of Management Exercises as a co-curricular activity for MBA students that complemented a newly re-designed academic program and linked outcomes in Management Exercises with elements of required coursework over the two years of their MBA education. We followed this pattern for several years but came to appreciate that the complexities involved were most likely not sustainable. Several reasons contributed to this assessment. First, university leadership can be in flux or unstable, and a supportive dean or leadership team, with a vision dedicated to the distinctiveness of Jesuit education, is essential for integrating a program or course like Management Exercises into the curriculum of a school of management. Beyond this, the complicated mechanics of running the program as we designed it became apparent.

To manage the program, we needed an informed and trained faculty member who would be compensated with a modest salary or course release. They would need to follow students for a two-year period, simultaneously running the program for first- and second-year students. Given the possibility that the content may evoke a strong response or unresolved issue or conflict in students, we recommend that the instructor have comple-

ted the Spiritual Exercises themselves or at least be conversant in Ignatian spirituality. Ideally, the instructor would be trained in spiritual direction, comfortable guiding seekers through retreats and willing to invite students who may be triggered or inspired by the content or who wished to engage in a deeper conversation about their experience to reach out to the instructor for a private conversation. Students could also be referred to someone in university ministry who could offer similar support and accompaniment. That same faculty member must be a cheerleader for the program, too, able to secure the cooperation of other, potentially skeptical faculty members teaching courses that are linked to Management Exercises. We had to convince students of the same value proposition, even if the Management Exercises elements constituted only a small, even nominal portion of their final grade.

While we successfully ran the program this way for the first few years, we eventually let go of the model of embedding the modules into established courses and settled on offering Management Exercises as a stand-alone elective course for MBA students. While Management Exercises would ideally be presented and reflections shared in a face-to-face setting, we have also found success and flexibility in offering the elec-

tive course online, both as a synchronous and an asynchronous offering. This adaptation led us to create a similar course for degree-completion undergraduate students as a required element of their online bachelor’s degree program. Elements of Management Exercises have also been adapted for the Next Generation Business Institute which provides resources and support for small, family-owned businesses to help them thrive in competitive marketplaces. Universidad Loyola Andalucía in Seville, Spain, invited us to lead Management Exercises retreats for their graduate students before adapting the program as a core feature of their MBA program. And several individual faculty members have incorporated some of the elements of Management Exercises for their courses in ethics and leadership.

While we relied primarily on discussion boards and in-person sharing of reflections to encourage conversation and build community, the kinds of disclosures the course evokes can leave students feeling vulnerable and uneasy about sharing. We recommend as much transparency as possible to challenge the stigma of self-expression but tempered with a sensitivity appropriate to the context and student population. While we expect all students to contribute to discussion board conversations about the content, we do not

refuse students who wish to share their end of module reflections privately. We appreciate that it is hard for our students to open up and trust the process we were inviting them to experience but also hard for them to trust each other; most don't yet know each other when they begin the program. Yet we also want to affirm their ability to take a leap of faith.

So often management training focuses on developing a tough, analytical personae and drawing clear lines between work and life outside the nine-to-five world. It is also hard for students to submit to an academic experience that isn't measured by conventional algorithms of performance and that operates outside of a competitive environment. This is one reason we now insist that even when offered for academic credit, Management Exercises be evaluated pass/fail. Rather than a course, we describe the academic offering as a "retreat" to help shift their perspective towards engaging in an experience rather than earning a credential. We want to emphasize contribution over performance, personal satisfaction over external achievement. In so doing we offer an implicit perspective that students could apply in other areas of their lives – to appreciate the benefits of outcomes that arrive without normative validation and that perhaps did not fulfill their

original expectations. This discerning approach guides them towards an essential understanding of Ignatian spirituality – that God/Good is found in all things.

The student response has convinced us that we are recognizing the "hungers" described in the Inspirational Paradigm, discovering what matters to them, even if they can't articulate it and despite the fact that our initial aims to create a holistic experience, linked program-wide, turned out to be too ambitious and unwieldy. The appreciation of the students was especially evident when they collectively shared their reflections. The days set aside for these presentations became events, often attended by other students and faculty members, occasionally accompanied by pot-luck feasts and always eliciting deeply emotional responses. It was clear to us that students came to value what the program introduced to their lives and the ways in which it helped their cohorts generate feelings of solidarity with each other.

To illustrate the initial impact of Management Exercises, consider the outcome of the "Ethical Will" reflection that we observed. The "Ethical Will" is the first reflection they undertake in the program and is drawn from a contemplative practice St. Ignatius recommends to seekers in the

Spiritual Exercises – to frame responses to big life questions as if they were on their deathbed, evaluating if they would die satisfied by their choice. In asking students to complete this assignment, we invite them to consider the epistolary form itself (most commonly students write a letter to their loved ones) and whether or not there is another form that is a more accurate expression of their feelings and sensibilities. Students' responses to this invitation to create have been astonishing in its variety, sincerity, ingenuity, impact, and beauty. While many write letters to family members – one even wrote her own obituary – we've watched video montages and short films and danced to playlists; we played a game show format that guided us through making life choices and we've been instructed on how to prepare value-infused cocktails; a daily commute was used as a vehicle for reflecting on a moral life, while rules that guide virtuosity in golf, baseball, hockey, basketball, hiking, yoga, dancing, and photography have all been used as metaphors for a life well lived. We've viewed collages and artworks—like an origami bouquet, a Diwali candle, and a Dia de los Muertos altar—that visualize the religious and cultural inflections of our international student body. Students read original poems and sang songs and ate meals prepared using skills and insights passed down in families. And

we listened to poignant narratives situated in the circumstances of both global and personal crises that put a familiar face on a moral abstraction. We cried, laughed, groaned, clapped and more than once witnessed a presentation that began, "I've never shared this kind of thing with anyone before."

In the process we generated a deeper community of empathetic awareness. The effects of this reflection go beyond the classroom and their immediate cohort. Most students share their Ethical Wills with family members and often add them to their estate plans. After presenting her Ethical Will, one student remarked: "I didn't know how much I needed this." In each instance, students followed their own visions and found their own "way of proceeding" by accompanying each other as they walked in the steps of St. Ignatius. When they conclude their experience of Management Exercises, we encourage them to consider how they can sustain the experience and continue to apply these methods for discernment and renewal, to bring their true selves to what poet Wendell Berry calls their "real work."

In closing, we are continually reminded that the best practice for management education originated a long time ago by St. Ignatius himself, and

we continue to see the fruit of his inspiration.

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### **Biographies**

Kimberly Rae Connor (Ph.D) is an emerita professor of ethics in the School of Management at the University of San Francisco. She is also a spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition.

Richard Stackman (Ph.D.) is a professor of organizational behavior and change and currently serves as the associate dean for graduate programs in the Masagung Graduate School of Ma-

agement at the University of San Francisco. He is the co-editor-in-chief for the *Journal of Management Inquiry*.



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## AUSJAL Ignatian Volunteering: Formation, Service, and Network Connection

Jorge Abraham del Valle Márquez, Mayra Eugenia Alvarado Menjívar,  
ITESO Guadalajara (AUSJAL)

### ABSTRACT

This is an inter-university initiative promoting undergraduate student exchanges among Jesuit universities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its goal is to provide a comprehensive formative experience by linking service in vulnerable communities with a deep practice of Ignatian spirituality. Since its creation in 2022, the program has evolved into a structured collaborative model with increasing participation from various countries.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

- **Showing the Way to God:** Fosters spiritual growth through Ignatian discernment, retreats, and the daily Examen to recognize God's presence in service.
- **Walking with the Poor:** Promotes personal conversion and a commitment to justice through direct encounters with inequality and marginalized communities.
- **Accompanying Young People:** Empowers students to become Ignatian leaders, developing global awareness and ethical sensitivity during a key developmental stage.
- **Caring for our Common Home:** Advocates for integral ecology and a simple lifestyle, linking social justice with the protection of the community and environment.

### MAIN GOALS

**Spiritual Growth:** To foster spiritual development through conscious service and encounters with different cultures.

**Ignatian Leadership:** To form leaders with intercultural skills, global awareness, and values rooted in the Ignatian tradition.

**Global Networking:** To raise awareness about the universality of the Society of Jesus and its function as a global network.

**Regional Integration:** To promote fraternal integration and collaboration among Latin American Jesuit universities.

### LESSONS LEARNED



#### Selection and Preparation

Based on personal maturity and prior Ignatian formation improves the quality of the experience.



#### Coordination

Relationships with host institutions must be built in advance with clear commitment letters defining responsibilities.



#### Logistics

The experience includes weekly spiritual accompaniment, opening and closing retreats, and the daily practice of the Examen of Conscience.



#### Accompaniment

Personalized and frequent Ignatian accompaniment is fundamental for the formative success of the exchange.



#### Language Sensitivity

Linguistic preparation is crucial for exchanges with Brazil to overcome the Spanish/Portuguese barrier.

### RESULTS

#### Quantitative

Between 2023 and 2024, 18 students from six universities participated, serving in 15 social works related to migration, human rights, and pastoral action.

#### Qualitative

Participants reported deep personal transformations, including vocational clarity, increased intercultural awareness, a stronger sense of belonging to the global Jesuit network, and a high appreciation for the spiritual accompaniment received.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



**Expand the program's international reach**, including pilots with institutions, such as Santa Clara University (USA)



Connect it with **large-scale strategic projects**, such as the Amazonian University Program (PUAM)



Build an **intercultural learning community** for the program coordinators to exchange best practices



Develop **long-term volunteering opportunities** (6–12 months) for alumni



**Secure funding** to ensure equitable access for students regardless of their economic situation

# AUSJAL Ignatian Volunteering: Formation, Service, and Networking

## FORMATION

JORGE ABRAHAM DEL VALLE MÁRQUEZ AND MAYRA EUGENIA ALVARADO MENJÍVAR

ITESO AND CENTRAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY JOSÉ SIMEÓN CAÑAS

## RESUMEN

El Programa de Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL es una iniciativa interuniversitaria que promueve el intercambio de estudiantes de licenciatura entre universidades jesuitas de América Latina y el Caribe. Su objetivo es ofrecer una experiencia formativa integral, articulando el servicio a comunidades vulnerables con una vivencia profunda de la espiritualidad ignaciana.

Desde su creación en 2022, el Programa ha evolucionado hacia un modelo colaborativo estructurado, con participación creciente de universidades de distintos países. En sus dos primeras ediciones participaron 18 estudiantes de seis instituciones, quienes sirvieron en obras sociales vinculadas con la Compañía de Jesús o con valores afines, en seis países distintos.

El Programa se alinea con las Preferencias Apostólicas Universales y ha demostrado resultados positivos en el crecimiento espiritual de los estudiantes, su conciencia intercultural y su sentido de pertenencia a una misión compartida. Además, lo aprendido en sus implementaciones, abre camino para su expansión global, la vinculación con proyectos eclesiales, la exploración de modalidades para egresados y la construcción de una comunidad de aprendizaje intercultural.

Esta práctica busca responder, desde lo educativo y lo pastoral, al llamado de formar personas conscientes, competentes, compasivas y comprometidas en clave ignaciana, a través del servicio intercultural como experiencia transformadora.

**Descripción de la práctica:**

El Programa de Voluntariados Ignacianos AUSJAL es una iniciativa que promueve el intercambio internacional de estudiantes de licenciatura entre universidades jesuitas de América Latina y el Caribe, con el objetivo de ofrecer experiencias profundas de servicio, autoconocimiento y crecimiento espiritual. Durante su participación, los estudiantes realizan, en el país de destino, trabajo voluntario de tiempo completo en comunidades vulnerables, combinando el servicio social con una vivencia enriquecedora de la espiritualidad ignaciana en contextos culturales diversos.

Desde su concepción en 2022, el Programa ha evolucionado a través de un modelo de intercambio estructurado, en el que las universidades participantes seleccionan cuidadosamente a los estudiantes, coordinan su envío y recepción, y aseguran su acompañamiento espiritual y logístico durante toda la experiencia de servicio. Cada etapa del Programa, desde la convocatoria y selección hasta el acompañamiento y la evaluación final, se desarrolla cuidando cada detalle para garantizar que el voluntariado se viva como una experiencia de formación integral, en profunda sintonía con los valores de la

Espiritualidad Ignaciana.

**Tipo de práctica:**

Programa formativo.

**Contexto en el que se lleva a cabo:**

Esta Práctica surge en el marco de la Red de Pastoral Universitaria de AUSJAL, una de las redes interuniversitarias que conforman la Asociación de Universidades Confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina y el Caribe (AUSJAL). La Red busca “Impulsar la identidad cristiana, católica y jesuita en las universidades AUSJAL, fortaleciendo la reflexión, el compromiso social y el diálogo, en colaboración con los miembros de la red” (AUSJAL, s.f.)

En el Encuentro de homólogos de pastoral celebrado en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Cali en 2022, se creó un grupo de trabajo conformado por once universidades jesuitas con programas de voluntariado, con el objetivo de generar proyectos de colaboración regional. Este grupo se dio a la tarea de diseñar y lanzar el Programa de Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL, cuya prueba piloto se implementó en 2023 con la participación de cuatro universidades. La experiencia tuvo una segunda edición en 2024 con una participación de 6 universidades, año

en el que también se realizó el lanzamiento oficial del Programa (AUSJAL, 2024), y para 2025 se proyecta la participación de 20 estudiantes de ocho universidades.

**Objetivos y metodología:**

EL Programa de intercambio del Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL, busca alcanzar los siguientes objetivos (VIA, s.f.):

1. Impulsar el crecimiento espiritual de los estudiantes a través del servicio consciente y del encuentro con otras culturas.
2. Formar líderes con valores ignacianos, aptitudes interculturales y consciencia global.
3. Concientizar a los participantes sobre la universalidad de la Compañía de Jesús y su trabajo como red global.
4. Fomentar la integración fraterna entre las universidades latinoamericanas de la Compañía de Jesús.

El Programa de Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL se desarrolla a través de un proceso estructurado que busca garantizar una experiencia formativa profunda, segura y coherente con los valores de la espiritualidad ignaciana. Las principales etapas son:



Ilustración 1: Proceso del Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL

- **Convocatoria y participación de universidades**

Cada año, se convoca a las universidades miembro de AUSJAL. Las interesadas confirman su participación, define el número de estudiantes que puede participar y se acuerdan los emparejamientos para el intercambio de voluntarios.

- **Selección de voluntarios**

Cada universidad elige a sus candidatos considerando criterios como: madurez personal, experiencia previa como voluntarios, formación ignaciana (idealmente con participación en el PLIUL y Ejercicios Espirituales), y disposición para vivir la experiencia con apertura espiritual e intercultural.

Una vez elegidos los candidatos, Las universidades receptoras los entrevistan y aprueban su participación, después de lo cual deben firmar una carta de compromiso personal, reconociendo la naturaleza formativa e ignaciana de la experiencia.

- **Preparación previa**

Las universidades de origen preparan a los voluntarios en aspectos logísticos, culturales y espirituales. Esta etapa incluye información sobre el país y la obra de destino, apoyo en trámites migratorios y seguros, y espacios de acompañamiento ignaciano.

- **Desarrollo de la experiencia**

Al llegar al país de destino, los voluntarios reciben alojamiento, alimentación, transporte local, una inducción institucional y un retiro de apertura para iniciar la experiencia con una actitud

de reflexión y discernimiento.

La experiencia tiene una duración de entre 4 y 10 semanas, dependiendo de los periodos vacacionales de cada universidad, en los que los voluntarios colaboran a tiempo completo en obras jesuitas o instituciones aliadas. Durante este tiempo reciben acompañamiento ignaciano presencial y semanal, y se les da un acompañamiento cercano para garantizar su bienestar físico, emocional y espiritual.

La experiencia concluye con un retiro de cierre en el país de destino. Posteriormente, las universidades de origen acompañan el proceso de integración y evaluación personal de lo vivido.

- **Evaluación final**

Tanto estudiantes como universidades participantes completan una evaluación que permite identificar aprendizajes, impacto formativo y oportunidades de mejora para futuras ediciones.

**Conexión con las Preferencias Apostólicas Universales:**

El Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL se alinea de manera integral con las Preferencias Apostólicas Universales (PAU) de la Compañía de

Jesús, no solo como referente inspirador, sino como estructura formativa concreta. A través de sus distintas fases, el Programa ofrece una vivencia encarnada y transformadora de estas preferencias, fortaleciendo el compromiso de las universidades jesuitas latinoamericanas con la misión universal de la Compañía.

**Mostrar el camino hacia Dios mediante los Ejercicios Espirituales y el discernimiento**

El Programa promueve activamente el crecimiento espiritual de los voluntarios a través de múltiples elementos inspirados en la espiritualidad ignaciana. Desde la etapa de preparación, los estudiantes son invitados a profundizar en su vida interior mediante retiros, espacios de oración personal, y acompañamiento ignaciano. Además, se alienta la práctica diaria del examen de conciencia como herramienta de discernimiento, permitiendo a los participantes leer su experiencia a la luz de la acción de Dios en sus vidas.

Este proceso busca despertar en los estudiantes una disponibilidad más generosa para responder al llamado de servir desde su vocación particular.

**Caminar junto a los pobres, los descartados**

**del mundo, los vulnerados en su dignidad**

Desde un enfoque de respeto y aprendizaje mutuo, el servicio en comunidades vulnerables permite a los estudiantes entrar en contacto directo con realidades de exclusión, desigualdad y resistencia. Esta vivencia alimenta un compromiso social profundo y genera procesos de conversión personal en torno a la justicia, la compasión y la dignidad humana.

**Acompañar a los jóvenes en la creación de un futuro esperanzador**

El Programa está dirigido específicamente a estudiantes universitarios, quienes se encuentran en una etapa crucial de formación humana, profesional y espiritual. Al ofrecerles una experiencia significativa de encuentro intercultural y servicio comprometido, el Programa se convierte en un espacio privilegiado para formar líderes ignacianos con conciencia global, capacidad de diálogo y sensibilidad ética.

Los jóvenes no son solo beneficiarios, sino protagonistas activos del Programa. Su creatividad, energía y compromiso son catalizadores del proceso, y el acompañamiento pastoral personalizado les brinda las herramientas necesarias para integrar lo vivido en su propio proyecto de vida.

**Colaborar en el cuidado de la Casa Común**

Si bien no todos los contextos incluyen un enfoque ambiental explícito, la experiencia fomenta una espiritualidad encarnada que reconoce la interconexión entre lo social y lo ecológico. La sencillez en el estilo de vida y la apertura al otro propician una ética del cuidado con proyección hacia la Casa Común, promoviendo una espiritualidad que integra cuerpo, comunidad y territorio.

**Resultados obtenidos:**

Tras dos años de implementación, el Programa de Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL ha mostrado impactos relevantes tanto en términos de participación como en su dimensión formativa.

**Resultados cuantitativos**

Entre 2023 y 2024 el Programa contó con la participación de 18 estudiantes de licenciatura provenientes de seis universidades jesuitas localizadas en 5 países distintos:

- Universidades emisoras y receptoras: UCAB (Caracas), Javeriana (Bogotá), UCA (EL Salvador), Rafael Landívar (Guatemala), Ibero León e ITESO (Guadalajara).

- Universidad receptora adicional: PUC (Río de Janeiro), que se incorporó en 2023.
- Instituciones de destino: 15 obras sociales vinculadas a la Compañía de Jesús o aliadas, en áreas como migración, derechos humanos, educación popular y acción pastoral.

Para 2025, se prevé la participación de 20 estudiantes de 8 universidades, incluyendo nuevas incorporaciones como la Javeriana (Cali), la PUCE (Quito) y la Ibero Torreón.



Ilustración 2: Crecimiento de la participación de estudiantes en el Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL

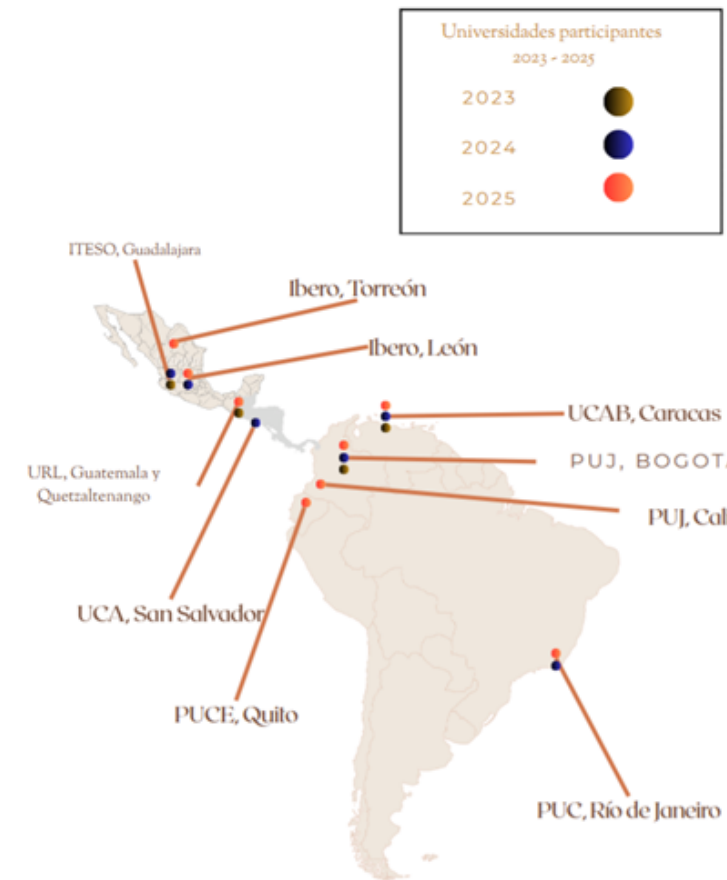


Ilustración 2: Crecimiento de la participación de estudiantes en el Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL

**Resultados cualitativos**

Los testimonios y evaluaciones del piloto 2023 muestran que el Programa ha generado transformaciones personales profundas. A través de grupos focales realizados con voluntarios, coordinadores y representantes institucionales, se identificaron los siguientes resultados alineados con los objetivos del Programa:

- **Crecimiento espiritual y autoconocimiento:** Los estudiantes reportaron una mayor claridad en torno a su vocación, su proyecto de vida y su vínculo con Dios. La experiencia propició una profundización del “principio y fundamento” ignaciano, vivida a través del servicio, el discernimiento cotidiano y la práctica del examen.
- **Formación de líderes con conciencia intercultural:** La convivencia con realidades sociales desafiantes y culturas distintas permitió a los voluntarios desarrollar sensibilidad, resiliencia y compromiso. Muchos expresaron el deseo de continuar colaborando en proyectos sociales y de incidir, desde su profesión, en causas vinculadas a la justicia, la educación o la migración.
- **Conexión con la red global de la Compañía de Jesús:** La vivencia del Programa fortaleció la conciencia de pertenencia a una red internacional. Los participantes señalaron que, a pesar de las diferencias geográficas, encontraron una misma manera de entender el servicio, la espiritualidad y el trabajo comunitario, lo cual favoreció un sentido de unidad y misión compartida.
- **Integración fraterna entre universidades:** Los lazos creados entre instituciones, así

como las iniciativas compartidas entre voluntarios y coordinadores, abrieron nuevas posibilidades de colaboración interuniversitaria. La experiencia dejó sembrada la semilla de redes de apoyo entre jóvenes ignacianos de distintos países.

- **Valoración positiva del acompañamiento:** Uno de los aspectos mejor evaluados fue la calidad del acompañamiento espiritual y humano. Coordinadores e instituciones receptoras reconocieron la importancia de contar con referentes disponibles, espacios de escucha y momentos rituales que ayudaran a procesar e integrar la experiencia.

En conjunto, los resultados indican que el Programa cumple con sus objetivos formativos, generando una experiencia transformadora que articula servicio, discernimiento y pertenencia a una comunidad internacional.

Se puede escuchar el testimonio de algunos alumnos participantes en la página web del Programa (VIA, s.f.).

### Lecciones aprendidas:

La implementación del Programa ha generado aprendizajes claves que han fortalecido su diseño y operación:

- **Selección y preparación de los voluntarios**

Un proceso claro y participativo en la selección de los estudiantes mejora la calidad de la experiencia. Las universidades coinciden en que es esencial establecer criterios claros —basados en la madurez personal, la experiencia previa de voluntariado y la formación ignaciana— para garantizar que los estudiantes estén preparados para una experiencia exigente.

La claridad en el perfil ideal y el acompañamiento previo no solo favorecen la adaptación en el destino, sino que potencian el aprovechamiento espiritual del voluntariado. Los espacios previos de formación ignaciana e interculturalidad han demostrado ser clave en la preparación de los estudiantes.

- **Coordinación con las instituciones receptoras**

La relación con las instituciones donde se realiza el servicio debe construirse con antelación, claridad y corresponsabilidad. Las universidades destacan el valor de realizar visitas previas y definir cartas de compromiso que expliciten funciones, responsabilidades y expectativas compartidas. Esta claridad evita malentendidos y permite que los voluntarios se integren mejor

a los procesos comunitarios, favoreciendo experiencias significativas tanto para ellos como para las organizaciones.

- **Logística y condiciones de estancia**

Garantizar condiciones dignas de hospedaje, alimentación y transporte es una responsabilidad asumida con seriedad por las universidades receptoras. Una buena práctica compartida ha sido la creación de alianzas con familias anfitrionas, otras unidades universitarias o instituciones colaboradoras. Se ha señalado que la planificación anticipada del presupuesto anual para estas necesidades es fundamental para garantizar la calidad de la experiencia.

Asimismo, contar con protocolos de seguridad —incluyendo seguros médicos, información sobre zonas de riesgo, contactos de emergencia y normas de conducta— se ha vuelto indispensable.

- **Acompañamiento durante la experiencia**

El acompañamiento ignaciano personalizado y frecuente es fundamental. Las universidades recomiendan definir claramente al responsable del acompañamiento espiritual y garantizar que cuente con formación y experiencia. Además, se destaca la importancia de abrir espacios in-

formales de conversación y reflexión, así como la participación de los voluntarios en actividades significativas de la vida pastoral o espiritual de la universidad receptora.

- **Flexibilidad y adaptabilidad**

Es importante mantener una estructura clara en la planeación, pero con márgenes de flexibilidad. Diversos factores externos pueden alterar los cronogramas previstos, por lo que la capacidad de adaptación, tanto del equipo organizador como de los voluntarios, se vuelve esencial para el éxito del intercambio.

- **Evaluación y cierre significativo**

El cierre de la experiencia ha demostrado ser un momento formativo muy valioso. Se recomienda no solo aplicar instrumentos de evaluación, sino también crear espacios rituales y de trabajo espiritual que permitan a los estudiantes integrar lo vivido. Actividades como retiros o ceremonias de cierre fortalecen la dimensión reflexiva y comunitaria del Programa.

- **Sensibilidad lingüística en intercambios con universidades brasileñas**

Aunque el portugués y el español comparten similitudes, se ha identificado que la barrera del lenguaje puede convertirse en una dificultad

tad real, especialmente cuando los voluntarios conviven con comunidades vulnerables. Por ello, se recomienda que quienes participen en intercambios con universidades brasileñas realicen una preparación lingüística previa que les permita desenvolverse con seguridad y respeto en el entorno local.

Este punto se vuelve aún más importante si el Programa se expande a otras regiones del planeta, donde solo se podrá aceptar la participación de voluntarios que dominen el idioma del país de destino.

- **Planificación con suficiente anticipación**

Confirmar la participación de universidades con al menos cinco meses de anticipación, permite iniciar llevar un proceso de selección holgado, y facilita la gestión de visas, vuelos y logística, reduciendo el riesgo de contratiempos.

### Oportunidades de mejora:

Tras dos años de implementación y sistematización del Programa de Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL, la experiencia acumulada ha revelado oportunidades estratégicas para profundizar, expandir e institucionalizar el Programa.



Ilustración 4: Oportunidades de mejora para el Voluntariado Ignaciano AUSJAL

- **Ampliar el alcance internacional del Programa**

El Programa nació como una iniciativa regional en AUSJAL, pero tiene potencial para expandirse a otras regiones del planeta. Actualmente se prepara una experiencia piloto con Santa Clara University (EE. UU.), abriendo la puerta a la “Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities” y fortaleciendo el carácter internacional

del Programa. Esta expansión representa una oportunidad significativa para fortalecer el sentido de cuerpo apostólico internacional y enriquecer la vivencia intercultural de los estudiantes.

- **Vinculación con proyectos estratégicos**

Si bien el Programa colabora actualmente con instituciones diversas que atienden a personas en situación de vulnerabilidad, se vislumbra una oportunidad importante en establecer alianzas con iniciativas eclesiales y sociales de mayor escala. Un caso ejemplar es el del Programa Universitario Amazónico (PUAM), que ha manifestado interés en integrar a voluntarios del VIA en sus proyectos. Este tipo de colaboración permite que el Programa amplie su impacto y su horizonte formativo.

- **Construcción de una comunidad de aprendizaje intercultural**

La interconexión entre universidades de distintos países no sólo favorece el intercambio estudiantil, sino que también puede convertirse en un potente espacio de formación continua para los equipos responsables del Programa. Establecer un seminario de aprendizaje permanente entre los responsables institucionales del VIA, y eventualmente con actores de otras redes

jesuitas internacionales, facilitaría el diálogo intercultural, el desarrollo de competencias en formación ignaciana, y la mejora continua del Programa a partir del intercambio de buenas prácticas, experiencias y reflexiones comunes.

- **Desarrollo de un voluntariado de larga duración para egresados**

Se explora la creación de modalidades de voluntariado de larga duración (6 – 12 meses) para egresados de licenciatura. Esta propuesta, de interés para la Conferencia de Provinciales de América Latina, permitiría un impacto más profundo y sostenido en proyectos prioritarios de justicia social. La puesta en marcha de este tipo de voluntariado representa un reto en términos de diseño, acompañamiento y sostenibilidad, pero podría consolidar al VIA como una plataforma integral de formación ignaciana y servicio transformador.

- **Acceso equitativo: financiamiento para la participación estudiantil**

La obtención de recursos para cubrir boletos de avión y seguros médicos sigue siendo un reto para algunos estudiantes. Gestionar apoyos institucionales o externos permitirá garantizar que ningún estudiante quede excluido por razones económicas.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## Being a Javerian Inductor is to Touch the Soul

Diana Lucía Avellaneda Rodríguez, Pontifical Javeriana University  
(AUSJAL)

### ABSTRACT

The **Inductor program** is a peer-mentoring program designed to facilitate the entry of new students through **Ignatian pedagogy** and experiential learning. Rooted in *Cura Personalis*, it serves as a transformative experience that builds community while fostering leadership and empathy in the mentors. While successful in creating a sense of belonging, the program aims to improve through structured evaluation and institutional integration to ensure long-term sustainability.

### MAIN GOAL

To **facilitate the transition to university life while promoting student well-being** and strengthening the university community.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

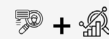
The mentor role reflects the commitment to **forming integral, conscious, and committed individuals**.

It is considered a **spiritual experience** that allows students to reflect on their personal growth and future projection.

### METHODOLOGY

- The training is inspired by **Ignatian pedagogy** and uses an **experiential learning methodology**.
- Each faculty member forms their own team, with guidance from the Vice-Presidency for University Life (VMU).

### LESSONS LEARNED



The need for an **evaluation model** that combines **qualitative and quantitative aspects** and voices from all actors.



The **importance of prior diagnostics** to align training with the real needs of participants.



The effectiveness of the program depends on the **design and execution** of activities and the **contextualized** responsibility of the groups.

### RESULTS

#### Belonging

It strengthens bonds and the sense of institutional identity.

#### Skill Development

Inductors develop leadership, empathy, assertive communication, and teamwork

#### Human Excellence

It promotes "Ignatian leadership" based on service, active presence, and ethical commitment.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



Implementing a **structured evaluation model** that is technically solid and embraced by facilitators.



**Strengthening the capabilities** of those who design and facilitate these formative experiences.



**Ensuring sustainability** through better articulation with faculty plans and the VMU's offering.

# Being a Javerian Inductor is to Touch the Soul

## RESEARCH

DIANA LUCÍA AVELLANEDA RODRÍGUEZ

JAVERIANA PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

La estrategia de inductores(as) de la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana es una práctica de acompañamiento entre pares que busca facilitar la transición e integración de los(as) nuevos(as) estudiantes a la vida universitaria. Esta estrategia combina el acompañamiento con procesos formativos para los(as) inductores(as), centrados en la pedagogía ignaciana y una metodología experiencial. Además de apoyar a los(as) ingresantes, ser inductor(a) representa una oportunidad de crecimiento personal y desarrollo de habilidades como liderazgo, empatía y trabajo en equipo. La práctica responde a los principios de la cura personalis consolidándose como una experiencia formativa transformadora. Entre sus principales resultados destacan el fortalecimiento de vínculos, el sentido de pertenencia y el impacto en la trayectoria de los(as) nuevos(as) estudiantes. Se reconocen oportunidades de mejora en la implementación de un modelo de evaluación estructurado y en la articulación institucional para asegurar sostenibilidad. Esta práctica reafirma el compromiso de la Universidad con una educación centrada en la persona, integral, ética y socialmente comprometida.

### Descripción de la práctica

La estrategia de inductores(as) es una práctica de acompañamiento de pares para pares, en la que estudiantes con trayectoria en la Universidad acompañan a quienes ingresan por primera vez, con el propósito de facilitar su adaptación, transición, integración y vinculación en el inicio de la vida universitaria.

Esta labor se enmarca en el proceso de inducción a la vida universitaria, especialmente durante la Semana de Acogida. La participación en este proceso busca alcanzar varios objetivos: i) vincular a los(as) estudiantes con el proyecto educativo de la Universidad; ii) fortalecer su sentido de identidad institucional a través del conocimiento y apropiación de los rasgos distintivos y el modo de proceder javeriano; y iii) favorecer la adaptación al entorno universitario mediante experiencias, herramientas y conocimientos relevantes. En este sentido, se comprende esta práctica como una expresión concreta del compromiso con la Formación Integral (FI) y una contribución directa a su desarrollo en la experiencia estudiantil.

### Tipo de experiencia:

Esta práctica se configura como una estrate-

gia de acompañamiento entre pares, orientada a facilitar la integración y adaptación de los(as) estudiantes que ingresan por primera vez a la Universidad. Al mismo tiempo, se trata de una experiencia formativa, ya que el rol de inductores(as) requiere el diseño e implementación de programas de formación específicos. Estos programas no solo buscan cualificar las habilidades necesarias para el ejercicio de su rol, sino también fortalecer su desarrollo personal y académico desde una perspectiva de Formación Integral, permitiendo que la experiencia de acompañar también sea una oportunidad de aprendizaje y crecimiento para quienes la ejercen.

### Contexto:

La estrategia de inductores(as) se enmarca en un contexto institucional profundamente comprometido con la Formación Integral (FI), principio rector explícito en su Misión y Proyecto Educativo Institucional. Esta concepción ubica a la persona en el centro del proceso formativo, promoviendo acciones orientadas a su bienestar, desarrollo pleno e integración a la vida universitaria. En coherencia con esta visión, la Universidad entiende la construcción de comunidad educativa como un proceso que atraviesa todas sus acciones y estrategias, implicando formas de acompañamiento diferencial ajustadas a las

características, intereses y necesidades de su estudiantado.

La inducción, concebida como parte esencial del Modelo de Desarrollo Estudiantil —especialmente en la etapa del Neojaveriano— contribuye a las dimensiones de Sentidos, Bienestar, Comunidad, Integración y Sensibilización. En este marco, la Vicerrectoría del Medio Universitario (VMU) lidera y fortalece experiencias formativas dirigidas a inductores(as), estudiantes activos con un alto sentido de pertenencia institucional, quienes acompañan a quienes ingresan por primera vez a la PUJ.

Esta labor se inscribe en el horizonte de la Cura Personalis, principio de la tradición educativa jesuita que orienta el cuidado integral de las personas y promueve su crecimiento humano, académico y ético, reforzando así el compromiso con una educación que va más allá del contenido curricular para formar en contexto, responsabilidad y autocuidado.

### Objetivos y metodología:

La estrategia de acompañamiento de los(as) inductores(as) tiene como principal objetivo facilitar la transición a la vida universitaria, promoviendo el bienestar, la integración y el sentido de

comunidad en los(as) estudiantes que inician su recorrido académico en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Esta estrategia busca asegurar una experiencia de ingreso que esté en sintonía con el enfoque de Formación Integral que orienta el proyecto educativo institucional y con la identidad de la Universidad.

Para ello, cada Facultad conforma su propio equipo de inductores(as), con el acompañamiento de la Vicerrectoría del Medio Universitario (VMU), y se garantiza que quienes asumen este rol participen en un proceso formativo. Dicha formación está inspirada en la pedagogía ignaciana y emplea una metodología experiencial que permite cualificar tanto las habilidades necesarias para el acompañamiento de estudiantes, como el propio proceso formativo de los(as) inductores(as).

Desde la VMU se ofrecen oportunidades formativas dirigidas a inductores(as) de toda la Universidad, la cual se complementa con procesos específicos desarrollados por cada Facultad, muchos de ellos contruidos colaborativamente con la VMU. Esta articulación metodológica garantiza que el acompañamiento responda a los contextos particulares de cada unidad académica, al tiempo que fortalece la cohesión institucional en torno al cuidado y la formación entre

pares.

### Conexión con las PAU

El rol de los(as) inductores(as) refleja el compromiso de la Universidad con la promoción de una educación que forma personas integrales, conscientes y comprometidas, en línea con las Preferencias Apostólicas Universales de la Compañía de Jesús. En este acompañamiento, la Universidad, en tanto es una obra de la Compañía de Jesús, acompaña a los(as) inductores(as) en su propio desarrollo formativo, mientras ellos a su vez guían a otros estudiantes en su tránsito universitario. Además, la experiencia formativa de los(as) inductores(as) trasciende lo académico, constituyéndose en una experiencia espiritual que les permite reflexionar sobre su crecimiento personal y sentar las bases para su proyección futura, en consonancia con los principios ignacianos que orientan la misión institucional.

### Resultados

Los resultados de la estrategia de los(as) inductores(as) revelan aportes significativos en diversos ámbitos, siendo el primero de ellos el sentido que este rol adquiere en la vida personal de los(as) inductores(as). Este sentido puede comprenderse desde tres dimensiones principales: la integración a la vida universitaria, la inci-

dencia en la experiencia de otros estudiantes y los aprendizajes personales. En cuanto a la integración, ser inductor(a) ha facilitado la inserción en la comunidad universitaria, promoviendo el encuentro con nuevas personas, el sentimiento de pertenencia y la construcción de vínculos significativos. Esta experiencia potencia el desarrollo de competencias socioemocionales como la empatía, la comunicación asertiva y la apertura al otro, al tiempo que fortalece la capacidad de reconocer y valorar la diversidad como una oportunidad de crecimiento personal.

Respecto a la incidencia en la vida de los demás, los(as) inductores(as) son percibidos como figuras significativas en la trayectoria universitaria de los(as) Neojaverianos(as), al constituirse en referentes cercanos que comparten sus aprendizajes, transmiten el sentido de pertenencia institucional y ofrecen orientación en momentos clave de transición. Este rol, además, no se limita al acompañamiento inicial, sino que puede extenderse a lo largo del recorrido académico, consolidando una red de apoyo sostenible.

En el plano de los aprendizajes personales, ser inductor(a) representa una oportunidad para identificar fortalezas, reconocer áreas de mejora, desarrollar habilidades de liderazgo, gestión

y planeación, y materializar el deseo de servicio. Estos aprendizajes, aunque no estrictamente académicos, se proyectan en la vida profesional y constituyen un diferencial en la formación, alineado con los valores promovidos por la Universidad. Asimismo, se fortalecen competencias relacionales como el trabajo en equipo, la escucha activa y el acompañamiento cuidadoso, que se manifiestan tanto en la planeación colaborativa de actividades como en la interacción con estudiantes y otros actores institucionales.

El ejercicio del rol también profundiza el sentido de responsabilidad y compromiso, al exigir una disposición constante al cuidado del otro, una actitud empática y una escucha atenta, elementos clave en el marco de la Formación Integral (FI). Desde esta perspectiva, el acompañamiento se convierte en una experiencia formativa que enriquece tanto a quien lo ofrece como a quien lo recibe, elemento propio de la cura personalis. Además, permite a los(as) inductores(as) ejercer un liderazgo ignaciano, basado en el amor, la empatía y la excelencia humana, desde una lógica de presencia activa, sensibilidad y compromiso ético con la comunidad universitaria.

También se refuerza el sentido de pertenencia e identidad institucional. Los(as) inductores(as)

son el primer referente de la cultura universitaria para los(as) Neojaverianos(as), y sus acciones, modos de proceder y formas de relacionarse inciden en la manera en que los nuevos estudiantes interpretan la vida universitaria. En este sentido, se convierten en agentes clave para la transmisión del proyecto educativo javeriano, de su inspiración ignaciana y de su modelo de Formación Integral. La profundización en el conocimiento de la historia, misión, servicios, procesos académicos y valores institucionales permite a los(as) inductores(as) orientar adecuadamente y representar de manera coherente la identidad universitaria.

Finalmente, los aportes más significativos de esta experiencia se encuentran en el desarrollo de vínculos relacionales y en el crecimiento personal. La interacción con otros estudiantes, personal administrativo y directivos enriquece la experiencia y fortalece competencias clave para la vida profesional. Este componente relacional se vincula directamente con las capacidades de trascendencia y relacional promovidas por el modelo de FI de la Universidad. Aunque algunos inductores(as) perciben que el rol impacta en menor medida en su “ser mejor persona”, reconocen que los aprendizajes adquiridos en liderazgo, empatía, acompañamiento y sentido

institucional tienen un efecto duradero que trasciende la experiencia universitaria, reafirmando el valor formativo y humano de esta práctica.

### Lecciones aprendidas

Entre las principales lecciones aprendidas en torno a la formación de inductores(as), se resalta la necesidad de contar con un modelo de evaluación que articule tanto elementos cualitativos como cuantitativos, e integre las voces de todos los actores involucrados en las experiencias formativas: inductores(as), gestores(as) de inducción y el equipo facilitador. Asimismo, se reconoce la importancia de realizar un diagnóstico previo de necesidades formativas que permita alinear los contenidos ofrecidos y los aspectos evaluados con las expectativas de los(as) participantes y el alcance real de su rol.

En cuanto a la aplicabilidad de los contenidos, se destaca que la forma en que se diseñan y ejecutan las actividades, así como la capacidad de organización y respuesta de los grupos de inductores, son claves para una formación efectiva. Adicionalmente, aspectos como la responsabilidad, el compromiso, el juicio crítico y la capacidad de actuar de manera contextualizada refuerzan el valor de cada inductor(a) desde su propia forma de ser y estar.

En este sentido, se concluye que los procesos de evaluación deben considerar tres dimensiones fundamentales: empatía, aplicabilidad y responsabilidad/compromiso.

Finalmente, se subraya la importancia de explicitar desde el inicio la intencionalidad formativa de estas experiencias, para orientar con mayor claridad tanto el proceso como los resultados esperados.

### Oportunidades de mejora

Dentro de las principales oportunidades de mejora identificadas se encuentra la implementación de un modelo de evaluación estructurado que no solo sea técnicamente sólido, sino que logre una apropiación real por parte de quienes agencian y acompañan las experiencias formativas de los(as) inductores(as). Para ello, es fundamental desarrollar procesos de socialización y formación que permitan comprender el sentido, la importancia y la aplicabilidad del modelo, así como herramientas que faciliten su uso e integración.

De igual manera, se requiere fortalecer las capacidades de quienes diseñan y facilitan estas experiencias, asegurando que los propósitos formativos estén claramente definidos y alineados con el enfoque de Formación Integral que pro-

mueve la Universidad.

El modelo propuesto representa una innovación al incorporar la medición de efectos e impactos, y al estar articulado con una iniciativa de la Vicerrectoría del Medio Universitario, se abre la posibilidad de trascender los recursos específicos de cada facultad para avanzar hacia una implementación más sostenible e institucionalizada. En este sentido, es clave continuar trabajando en su articulación con los planes de medio de las facultades y con la oferta formativa de la VMU, fortaleciendo así la coherencia y el alcance de la estrategia en toda la comunidad universitaria.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## Culture, Inclusion, and Universities: Best Practices from the ISA Culture Project

Carla Pinto Cardoso, Fátima Pereira and Luísa Magalhães,  
Catholic University of Portugal - Braga (Kircher Network)

### ABSTRACT

The ISA CULTURE project, led by the Catholic University of Portugal, alongside partners from Spain and Slovenia, empowers vulnerable youth by training them in cultural mediation and accessibility. By using interdisciplinary methods, it transforms cultural heritage sites into inclusive spaces for learning and empowerment, fostering social responsibility and academic excellence.

### MAIN GOAL

To empower marginalized youth (aged 13-30) by identifying exclusion mechanisms and evaluating inclusive models. It also aims to raise awareness among cultural professionals and promote fair employment in the cultural sector.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

**Walking with the Excluded:** By placing marginalized youth at the center and dismantling barriers to cultural life.

**Journeying with Youth:** Offering spaces for critical engagement, reflection, and professional growth through capacity-building.

**Caring for Our Common Home:** Promoting stewardship and collective responsibility for cultural and social environments.

**Showing the Way to God:** Using Ignatian pedagogy for ethical discernment and inner transformation.

### METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was used over 24 months, including a literature review and questionnaires for youth, cultural institutions, and social organizations. The process included transnational sessions, capacity building, territory-specific pilots, and continuous monitoring.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The project reaffirmed the value of **interdisciplinary, community-based learning** where education, culture, and social work intersect.

**Authentic collaboration** is key; involving participants as co-creators rather than passive recipients challenges conventional power dynamics.

The **Ignatian pedagogical** paradigm (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation) is a **powerful framework** for justice-oriented education.

### RESULTS

- ✓ 30 young people were successfully trained, with over 70% completing the program and gaining competencies in mediation and communication.
- ✓ Participants led inclusive initiatives like "Cultural Boost" and "5 Senses" in real-world contexts.
- ✓ A "Best Practices in Cultural Accessibility Handbook" was published to support replicable inclusive strategies.
- ✓ At least one participant has already secured a professional opportunity in the cultural sector.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 🎯 Ensuring **long-term sustainability** by embedding inclusive practices into policy and organizational structures.
- 🎯 Developing **more robust mechanisms to track the long-term employability and social integration** of participants.
- 🎯 **Expanding the model** to other marginalized groups, such as refugees or rural youth.
- 🎯 Investing in **digital inclusion strategies to enhance accessibility** for those with limited mobility or in remote areas.

# Culture, Inclusion, and Universities: Best Practices from the ISA Culture Project

## FORMATION

CARLA PINTO CARDOSO, PH.D.; FÁTIMA PEREIRA; AND LUÍSA MAGALHÃES, PH.D.

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF PORTUGAL - BRAGA

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the participation of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Portugal in the ISA CULTURE: Intellectually and Socially Accessible – On the Way to Equality project as an example of mission-driven higher education. Developed in partnership with institutions from Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia, the initiative promotes inclusive participation in cultural life by equipping socially and intellectually vulnerable youth with skills in accessibility, cultural mediation, and communication.

Through interdisciplinary methods spanning education, social work, culture, and communication, the project redefines formation as an active process rooted in engagement, reflection, and community involvement. With the support of project partners, young participants co-developed and led inclusive activities in heritage settings, transforming cultural spaces into platforms for learning, empowerment, and shared belonging.

ISA CULTURE exemplifies how universities can foster social responsibility while strengthening academic excellence. The project operates within a framework that aligns with values consistent with Jesuit educational principles, particularly reflecting the Universal Apostolic Preferences in its enga-

gement with youth and outreach to marginalised groups.

The outcomes include increased employability, deeper social inclusion, and institutional innovation. By presenting the project's objectives, methodology, and impact, the article contributes to the broader reflection on how higher education can respond to contemporary challenges through collaborative, inclusive, and transformative practices.

### **Description**

The ISA CULTURE: Intellectually and Socially Accessible – On the Way to Equality project is an educational and social inclusion initiative carried out through a transnational partnership involving academic institutions, a cultural foundation, and key social organisations. It brings together the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Portugal (FFCS-UCP), and the University of Burgos (Spain) as academic partners; the Bracara Augusta Foundation as the cultural partner; and CERCI Braga (Portugal) and Zavod Risa (Slovenia) as key social organisations. The initiative is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Its core focus is to foster cultural accessibility for intellectually and socially vulnerable youth through target training programs and participatory cultural practices.

### **Type of Experience**

The ISA CULTURE initiative is a multi-partner programme involving comprising training modules, international collaboration, and community-based pilot projects. It places a strong emphasis on inclusion, skills development, and meaningful cultural participation. Designed as both a formative and transformative experience, the programme integrates academic knowledge with community engagement, aiming to foster critical reflection, social responsibility, and active citizenship among participants.

### **Context**

The project emerged from a shared aspiration between the Bracara Augusta Foundation and CERCI Braga to bring young people closer to culture and heritage by eliminating intellectual and social barriers. This initial vision centred on transforming cultural spaces into inclusive, welcoming environments that promote a shared sense of belonging and shared ownership of cultural heritage.

Recognising the project's potential for educational and social impact, the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Portugal (FFCS-UCP) accepted the invitation to join the initiative without hesitation. The University's involvement significantly enriched the pedagogical dimension of the project, contributing research-led methodologies, critical pedagogical frameworks, and a strong alignment with Ignatian values. These contributions helped to reinforce principles of justice and dignity into the project's educational design.

With this solid foundation, the project expanded internationally, welcoming the international partners (University of Burgos and Zavod Risa Entity). Supported by the Erasmus+ programme, ISA CULTURE was implemented across Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia, and grounded in local diagnoses, interdisciplinary collaboration, and educational practices linked to heritage and tourism. It empowered marginalised youth not merely as beneficiaries, but as active agents in the reimagining of cultural spaces and civic life.

The ISA CULTURE project is guided by the conviction that cultural participation is both a fundamental right and an essential component of social inclusion. In contemporary societies

marked by increasing diversity, this plurality of identities, experiences, and abilities should be a source of enrichment. However, entrenched barriers, particularly social and intellectual, continue to restrict full access to cultural life. While progress has been made in improving physical accessibility, these other dimensions remain insufficiently addressed and demand urgent attention.

### **Objectives and Methodology**

#### **Objectives:**

The project addresses persistent gaps in access to culture by promoting intellectual and social accessibility, with a focus on empowering marginalised young people, especially those facing cognitive and social challenges. It envisions cultural spaces not merely as sites of passive consumption, but as dynamic platforms for engagement, creativity, and empowerment.

Among its specific objectives are: the identification of exclusion mechanisms that prevent vulnerable groups from participating in cultural life; the critical evaluation of inclusive models that enable cultural integration; and the examination of how cultural engagement contributes to personal autonomy, identity development, and em-

ployability. The project also seeks to systematise and share best practices in accessibility by developing a flexible model that can be adapted across various local and institutional contexts. Furthermore, it aims to raise awareness among cultural professionals and institutions, not only to create more inclusive and welcoming environments for marginalised groups, but also to promote fair employment opportunities within the cultural sector. By advancing institutional change alongside individual empowerment, the project contributes to a more equitable and participatory cultural landscape.

Central to the initiative is the formation of a pilot group of 30 young participants who undergo tailored training in cultural mediation and heritage interpretation. These participants are supported to become active facilitators and interpreters within cultural institutions. This hands-on involvement enables them to challenge conventional notions of expertise and belonging in the cultural field. The process is supported by continuous evaluation, ensuring that experiences and insights gained inform future implementations and broader policy development.

#### Methodology:

The ISA CULTURE project, implemented over 24 months (April 2023 to March 2025), adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary and primary data to inform inclusive cultural strategies. A systematic literature review identified best practices, conceptual gaps, and effective models for accessibility and participation, particularly for intellectually and socially marginalised populations.

To complement this, primary data were gathered through targeted questionnaires administered in Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia. Three key groups were consulted:

- **Young people**, to understand perceived barriers to cultural access, their expectations, and how culture might support their personal, social, and professional development;
- **Cultural institutions**, to assess current accessibility practices, identify challenges, and explore their openness to inclusion and structural change;
- **Social organisations**, to map the specific needs of vulnerable groups and identify barriers and strategies for improving cultural participation.

A clear participant profile was defined for youth

aged 13–30 with fewer opportunities, tailored to each territory in coordination with partners. Local networks were essential for outreach and relevance.

The methodology unfolded in four phases:

- » Transnational working sessions, fostering dialogue and exchange between partners
- » Capacity-building programmes training for youth and cultural agents;
- » Territory-specific pilot initiatives, allowing inclusive practices to be tested in real-world settings;
- » Continuous monitoring and evaluation, enabling refinement, adaptation, and potential scalability of the practices developed.

This structure ensured that the project combined participatory processes with interdisciplinary collaboration, producing inclusive practices that are both context-sensitive and transferable.

#### Connection to the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs)

The ISA CULTURE project is closely aligned with the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, integrating them both as guiding principles and as practical frameworks for

action. Its focus on vulnerable youth, cultural inclusion, and transformative education resonates deeply with all four UAPs.

**Walking with the Excluded:** By placing intellectually and socially marginalised young people at the centre of its mission, the project creates tangible opportunities for empowerment, recognition, and social integration. It actively seeks to dismantle the barriers that prevent full participation in cultural life.

**Journeying with Youth:** The initiative offers spaces for young people to engage critically in their cultural environment, encouraging active reflection, creativity, and civic engagement. Through capacity-building and co-creation, it accompanies them in their personal, social, and professional growth.

**Caring for Our Common Home:** Through the promotion of heritage education and responsible engagement with cultural institutions, the project nurtures a sense of stewardship and collective responsibility for cultural and social environments.

**Showing the Way to God:** Grounded in Ignatian pedagogy, ISA CULTURE invites par-

ticipants to engage in meaningful reflection, ethical discernment, and inner transformation. It fosters educational encounters that are not only inclusive and participatory but also spiritually and morally grounded.

### Results

The ISA CULTURE project delivered both tangible and intangible outcomes, closely aligned with its strategic objectives and supported by clearly defined indicators.

A central result was the successful training of a pilot group of 30 young people - 10 from each participating country - many of whom came from intellectually and socially marginalised backgrounds. Over 70% of these participants completed the programme, gaining practical competencies in cultural mediation, communication, accessibility, and heritage interpretation. Their involvement in co-developing and delivering inclusive initiatives - such as Cultural Boost, 5 Senses, Gallery for All, and UBU Explora - allowed them to apply these skills in real-world cultural contexts. At least one participant has already transitioned into a professional opportunity in the cultural sector, reinforcing the programme's employability impact.

The Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Portugal played a central role in ensuring the academic and pedagogical coherence of the initiative. Drawing on its interdisciplinary expertise and commitment to socially engaged education, FFCS-UCP contributed to the design of training modules, the articulation of inclusive methodologies, and the development of evaluation tools.

On an institutional level, the project contributed to raising awareness and strengthening inclusion-oriented practices among cultural entities. Partners reported greater openness to structural change, and the co-development of pilot activities helped establish accessible models that can be adapted to other settings.

One of the project's key deliverables - Best Practices in Cultural Accessibility Handbook - has been published. It consolidates tested recommendations and replicable strategies to support inclusive practice in diverse cultural environments.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Handbook of Best Practices in Cultural Accessibility is available at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bIhJFRKIBRQLzZ0LcEynOOuETfh1UeBJ/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawKUUBZleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETFiNG-1GYkk3czlzOG8yQjJtAR53jU XVIDqbFJ7op72nzoLFmTN-Ql1dQoQosUA769wkgrigu\\_6vkV1MOWwsAEw\\_aem\\_7a8dnmksHe02ObNAJqkVhQ](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bIhJFRKIBRQLzZ0LcEynOOuETfh1UeBJ/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawKUUBZleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETFiNG-1GYkk3czlzOG8yQjJtAR53jU XVIDqbFJ7op72nzoLFmTN-Ql1dQoQosUA769wkgrigu_6vkV1MOWwsAEw_aem_7a8dnmksHe02ObNAJqkVhQ)

In addition to measurable outcomes, the project supported the development of transversal skills aligned with the EU's Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Participants demonstrated increased cultural awareness, autonomy, and readiness to act as peer facilitators and guides. The initiative also contributed to the broader public and institutional discourse, placing cultural accessibility and inclusion more firmly on social and policy agendas at local, national, and international levels.

The ISA CULTURE project has demonstrated that inclusive cultural engagement serves as a catalyst not only for personal empowerment but also for institutional transformation. When young people from vulnerable backgrounds are allowed to participate actively in cultural life, their development as confident, capable agents is mirrored by shifts in the institutions that welcome and work with them.

The project reaffirmed the value of interdisciplinary, community-based learning. By bringing together education, culture, social work, and communication, the initiative deepened the educational experience and ensured that learning remained relevant and grounded in real contexts.

Equally important was the emphasis on authentic collaboration with marginalised groups. By involving participants as co-creators rather than passive recipients, the project enriched the pedagogical process, fostered mutual learning, and challenged conventional power dynamics within cultural and academic institutions.

Finally, the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm - centred on context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation - proved to be a powerful framework for justice-oriented education. It supported critical engagement, ethical discernment, and transformative practice, enabling both individuals and institutions to grow in alignment with deeper values of dignity, equity, and participation.

While the ISA CULTURE project has achieved significant outcomes, several areas offer potential for further development and sustainability. First, the long-term impact of the initiative will depend on continued institutional commitment beyond the project's duration. Embedding inclusive cultural practices into policy and organisational structures is essential for ensuring that the progress made does not remain episodic.

Additionally, developing more robust mechanis-

ms to monitor the long-term employability and social integration of participants would strengthen the project's evaluative framework. Tracking outcomes over time could provide valuable insights into the sustained effects of cultural engagement on youth trajectories.

Expanding the project model to include other marginalised groups - such as refugees, rural youth, or those facing multiple forms of exclusion - would increase its reach and relevance. The adaptability of the ISA CULTURE approach positions it well for application in diverse social and geographic contexts.

Finally, greater investment in digital inclusion strategies could enhance accessibility, particularly for participants with limited mobility or those in remote areas. Integrating digital tools more fully into training and dissemination efforts would contribute to a more inclusive and scalable model.

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ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES,  
AND MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: EVALUATION INITIATIVE

## Cura Personalis at a Distance: Building Belonging in Online Jesuit Education

Dr. Eva Mika, Ph.D., PMP and Jennifer Gettings, M.Ed.  
Loyola University Chicago - School of Continuing & Professional Studies - SCPS (AJCU)

### ABSTRACT

This practice examines how Loyola University Chicago's SCPS uses Ignatian pedagogy and a social-ecological framework to build a sense of belonging for adult learners in online environments. It provides a replicable model for distance learning that prioritizes community and student persistence over simple content delivery.

### MAIN GOAL

To foster a sense of belonging, increase student persistence, and apply cura personalis in a virtual environment.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP 'S

- **Journeying with Youth (and Adult Learners):** By accompanying students in their complex life journeys and creating spaces for hope and professional growth.
- **Showing the Way to God:** Through the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, Evaluation), fostering deep reflection even in digital spaces.

### METHODOLOGY

An ex post facto study using a **social-ecological framework**. It analyzes data from the LUC Exit Survey and SCPS Orientation Feedback Survey to evaluate the impact of community-building interventions.

### LESSONS LEARNED

**Communal Aspect:**  
Formation is most effective when done in community rather than individually.

**Language Matters:**  
It is vital to use language that is accessible and inclusive of various religious and non-religious worldviews while remaining rooted in the Jesuit tradition.

**Intentionality:**  
Formation requires dedicated time and institutional support; it cannot be an "add-on" to an already overflowing schedule.

### RESULTS

#### High Satisfaction

96% of students reported that the orientation made them feel welcome.

#### Sense of Belonging

Graduation surveys show that SCPS students feel a stronger sense of community and connection to the Jesuit mission than the general university average.

#### Persistence

The intentional focus on "care for the person" has led to high rates of academic persistence among adult learners.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 🌀 **Scaling the "high-touch" coaching model** as enrollment grows without losing the personal touch.
- 🌀 **Enhancing the "Virtual Student Lounge"** to encourage more spontaneous, student-led interactions.
- 🌀 **Providing more professional development for adjunct faculty** to fully integrate Ignatian reflection in asynchronous discussions.

# Cura Personalis at a Distance: Building Belonging in Online Jesuit Education

## EVALUATION INITIATIVE

DR. EVA MIKA, PH.D., PMP AND JENNIFER GETTINGS, M.ED

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

## ABSTRACT

This ex post facto study explores how one fully online academic unit fosters a sense of belonging among adult learners through intentional community-building practices rooted in Jesuit practice and Ignatian pedagogy. Drawing on survey results, student feedback, and an adapted social ecological framework, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS) at Loyola University Chicago has developed a replicable approach to cultivating student engagement in distance learning contexts. Educators are encouraged to reflect on how online programs can go beyond content delivery to create community, support Ignatian pedagogy, and promote student persistence at a distance.

## Introduction and Relevance

For many adult learners, the opportunity to study online is what makes higher education possible. Yet the same flexibility that enables access can also create distance—not just physical, but emotional and relational. Students navigating work, caregiving, and complex life demands may find themselves disconnected from their peers, instructors, and even their own sense of purpose in the learning process. In Jesuit education, this disconnection runs counter to the principle of *cura personalis*, which calls educators to attend to the full experience of the learner: intellectual, personal, and spiritual.

Belonging has been repeatedly shown to influence academic persistence, well-being, and motivation (Gillen-O’Neel, 2021; Mtshweni, 2024). In digital environments, cultivating that sense of connection must be deliberate. The concept of a virtual community—centered on shared identity, mutual influence, and emotional investment—has become a vital construct in explaining student engagement in online education (Koh & Kim, 2003; Zhao & Shi, 2022).

It is not the digital platform that determines whether students thrive, but the relationships and

pedagogical choices that surround it. Educators foster community when they reach out proactively, invite student voice, and remain fully present in the learning space (Adams, 2021; Eden et al., 2024; Seifert & Bar-Tal, 2023; Wiitavaara & Widar, 2024). Within a Jesuit context, these practices are more than strategy—they are expressions of a deeper vocation to form whole persons and accompany them in their growth.

At Loyola University Chicago’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS), community-building is not an adjunct to course design but a guiding philosophy. Woven throughout advising, orientation, instruction, and peer engagement, it reflects a commitment to honoring the dignity of each student and creating spaces—however virtual—where transformation can take root.

## Theoretical Framework

The SCPS model draws from an integrated set of frameworks that align both with research in online learning and the deeper spiritual commitments of Jesuit education. McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) foundational Sense of Community theory identifies four key components of belonging: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection. Within online learning environments,

these dimensions are reinterpreted through the lens of virtual community, where learners navigate shared meaning, relational presence, and commitment in digital spaces (Koh & Kim, 2003; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Zhao and Shi (2022) expand on this with an emphasis on immersion—the idea that students feel anchored in a learning environment where they matter and can contribute.

To further contextualize this work, SCPS adopts a socio-ecological perspective rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model. This framework recognizes that students are not isolated participants, but active agents operating within nested systems: personal, relational, institutional, and societal. Each of these layers offers opportunities to either affirm or erode a student’s sense of belonging (Arifeen, 2023).

In a Jesuit university, these nested systems take on added dimension. The mission to educate “people for others” infuses every level with an ethic of care, justi-

ce, and reflection. Ignatian pedagogy encourages educators to see each student as a whole person—not simply a learner, but someone with a unique story, purpose, and capacity for growth.

By aligning community-building with this layered understanding of student experience, SCPS designs its virtual environment to promote more than retention or performance; it aims to cultivate a sense of shared purpose, personal meaning, and connection to others. The result is a model in which learning is not transactional, but transformational—and where students are empowered not only to succeed academically, but to discern how their education can serve the greater good.

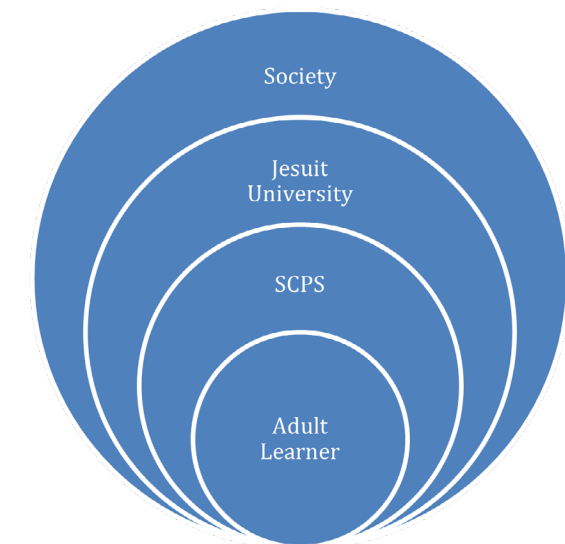


Figure 1: Nested Community

## Methodology and Results

This study employed an ex post facto design to explore how adult learners experience belonging and connection in SCPS's virtual programs. Drawing on data from the 2024 SCPS Exit Survey, the 2025 Orientation Feedback Survey, the 2021 Noel-Levitz Adult Student Priorities Survey, and 2024 focus groups conducted by The Kaleidoscope Group, the study synthesizes both quantitative and qualitative insights.

The findings point to a culture where students feel seen, valued, and supported. In the 2024 SCPS Exit Survey, 98% of respondents reported a strong sense of belonging within the school community. The same proportion expressed high satisfaction with academic advising—a foundational touchpoint in the student experience. Results from the 2021 Noel-Levitz survey showed that 94% of SCPS students intended to re-enroll, suggesting continuity and trust. Orientation feedback from 2025 echoed these trends, with students describing the experience as welcoming, calming, and empowering.

These numbers are reinforced by student voices. One focus group participant shared, “It made me feel like I matter. They care about us as indivi-

duals and want to see us succeed.” Another reflected, “There is a strong sense of community with SCPS. You’ll find support, mentorship, and a real sense of community from staff, faculty, our peers, the ambassadors, alumni—you name it.” These reflections illustrate what Zhao and Shi (2022) define as affective commitment: the turning point where learners internalize a sense of responsibility and belonging to their learning community. The data affirms that SCPS's virtual design—grounded in Ignatian values and relational practice—fosters more than access. It cultivates connection, resilience, and hope.

## Strategies to Build Online Community and Belonging

SCPS implements a purposefully layered approach to cultivating community in its online environment—an approach that reflects both the socio-ecological framework and Ignatian values. Community is not treated as an incidental outcome, but as a deliberate, ongoing effort embedded into every layer of the student journey. This commitment to forming inclusive, trusting relationships mirrors the Jesuit tradition of accompaniment and discernment.

Rather than waiting for community to emerge, SCPS creates the conditions for it to take root—

through proactive outreach, shared rituals, visible care, and structures that prioritize connection (Adams, 2021; Eden et al., 2024). These high-impact practices make room for risk-taking, empathy, and authentic presence online. What follows are several key strategies through which SCPS weaves belonging into its academic culture, reminding students that they are never alone in their learning.

## High-Touch, Human-Centered Communication

SCPS approaches student communication as a relationship-centered practice. Beginning with admission and continuing through graduation, students receive a blend of proactive and responsive contact through email, phone, and text. The communication plan outlines regular touchpoints coordinated across advising, faculty, and the Ambassador team.

Each student is introduced early to their assigned academic and faculty advisors. Personalized messages acknowledge milestones and transitions, such as orientation, course registration, and upcoming deadlines. For example, advisors routinely reach out at the start of each term, during midterm evaluations, and before key registration windows.

The commitment to high-touch support becomes especially evident during moments of challenge. When a student is placed on academic probation, for instance, communication acknowledges the student's broader context before explaining the specific terms of their probation status. Advisors check in individually to offer support, connect students with resources, and reinforce the message: you are not alone.

This human-centered communication strategy reflects *cura personalis* by approaching each student as a whole person. It reframes transactional moments as opportunities to build trust and reinforce belonging.

## Relational Orientation Experiences

Orientation at SCPS is not only a preparation tool—it is a gateway into the learning community. Offered as a three-hour virtual experience, the session is designed to facilitate connection and reflection. Breakout rooms are a defining feature of this experience, providing multiple opportunities for small group discussion. At different times during the session, new students meet separately in breakout rooms with SCPS Ambassadors, faculty, and their peers. These structured interactions allow students to share their goals, concerns, and hopes in different relational contexts,

fostering a sense of comfort and support before classes begin.

The experience intentionally centers the student voice. Students learn about expectations, advising, academic policies, and peer resources in ways that are conversational and grounded in lived experience. Through breakout discussions and interactive activities, students begin forming informal support networks and gain a clearer understanding of where to turn for guidance and connection.

This relational focus signals from the outset that learning at SCPS will not be isolated or impersonal. Orientation affirms that each student's background and identity matter and introduces community norms of encouragement, transparency, and shared success.

### **Faculty as Anchors of Belonging**

Faculty at SCPS are key figures in sustaining community. Through both instruction and outreach, they help students feel connected, supported, and engaged. All faculty receive training in inclusive pedagogy, adult learning principles, and Ignatian teaching practices.

New instructors are assigned faculty mentors

for their first course. Together, they engage in a three-stage process: pre-course meetings to discuss planning and student communication, mid-course observations with structured feedback, and post-course reflections to support growth. This development cycle encourages consistency in student experience and strengthens instructional presence.

Faculty also play a central role in SCPS's timely intervention system. They submit participation reports in Weeks 1, 5, and midterm, signaling early signs of disengagement. These reports trigger follow-up by advisors or the Dean's Office. For example, if a student misses early assignments, advisors will reach out with encouragement, offer resources, and help the student re-engage. This structure ensures that support is not reactive, but intentional and embedded.

This attention to presence and responsiveness reinforces a culture where students are not left to struggle in silence. Faculty are empowered not just to teach content, but to serve as partners in student formation.

### **Peer-to-Peer Connection Through Ambassadors**

The SCPS Ambassador Program offers a

peer-based support structure that embodies the Jesuit value of accompaniment. Composed of current students and alumni, the program provides both logistical and emotional support to new and continuing students. This model supports belonging on two fronts: it affirms the identity and value of Ambassadors themselves—many of whom are alumni—and reinforces a sense of community and encouragement for the peers they support.

Ambassadors are introduced to students as early as the admissions process. They assist with learning management system (LMS) onboarding, participate in orientation, and engage students throughout the academic year via email and discussion boards. Ambassadors are trained in storytelling and reflective communication strategies (Hughes, Oliveira, & Bickford, 2024), equipping them to share experiences that are honest, motivational, and relatable.

The program is flexible, allowing Ambassadors to contribute based on their capacity. Roughly half of the 50 active Ambassadors participate in outreach each term. Some remain involved for years, offering continuity and intergenerational support that helps sustain the SCPS culture of care. Their presence affirms that support is not just available from staff and faculty, but also from

peers who understand the journey firsthand.

### **Recognition as Community Affirmation**

Recognition is one of SCPS's key tools for reinforcing belonging. The school issues digital recognition badges at multiple points in a student's journey—not just at admission or graduation, but for key accomplishments like completing Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), being named to the Dean's List, finishing a capstone, or participating in a featured program.

Unlike third-party digital credentials, SCPS recognition badges are personal and celebratory. They are designed to be shared with family, friends, and professional networks on social channels—reminding students and their communities of each achievement along the way. Faculty and advisors often prompt students to share these badges to encourage conversation and visibility within their support systems.

By affirming academic milestones and the persistence they require, recognition practices help students feel seen and valued. They also serve as tangible expressions of SCPS's belief that success deserves celebration and that affirmation strengthens both individual and community identity.

### Belonging-Focused Pedagogy

SCPS embeds Ignatian pedagogy across its curriculum, grounding learning in reflection, relevance, and relationship. The instructional model prioritizes context, experience, and discernment, with each course designed to draw on student voice and lived expertise.

Courses such as Introduction to Degree Completion, Civic Identity and Development, and a Capstone include assignments that ask students to reflect on their values, identity, and goals. Students engage in peer-to-peer feedback, structured reflection prompts, and activities that tie academic content to civic and personal growth.

In the capstone course, for instance, students complete a civic engagement project and present a reflection that draws connections between their learning and Jesuit values. Instructors use tools such as discussion forums and personalized messaging to maintain a supportive learning environment, and many incorporate spiritual and ethical themes into course dialogue.

This intentional pedagogical approach treats students not just as learners, but as whole persons. It reinforces the message that who they are, what they bring, and what they hope to become are

central to their educational experience.

### Lessons Learned

The collective findings based on ex post facto survey and focus groups need to be interpreted with caution. Although the findings suggest that the student who responded experienced a sense of belonging and community, we cannot draw conclusions about students that did not respond. It maybe that students who experience a strong connection to SCPS are more likely to participate in surveys and focus groups. We also need to be cautious about drawing conclusions from ex post facto data. While the data suggests that strategies SCPS employs are working, this study did not explicitly study the connection between strategies employed and student experience. Further, while sense of belonging and community have shown to be correlated to persistence and academic success, these variables were not explored with the SCPS student body. Finally, while the SCPS pedagogical and advising model is rooted in Ignatian pedagogy and Jesuit values, these were not explicitly addressed in the surveys or focus groups.

### Opportunities for Improvement

Future research should employ methodology with instruments that directly measure the impact

of the SCPS pedagogical and advising approach to online sense of belonging and community. A mixed-methods approach that combines survey data and in-depth focus groups and interviews specifically addressing the learner's experience along the variables of belonging, community, persistence, self-efficacy, and academic achievement should be employed. Measures should also explicitly explore the role that Jesuit values and Ignatian pedagogy play in the learner's academic and personal growth. For example, a replication of the study by Ko, et.al. (2021) that surveyed student perception of online learning in a Jesuit context would be prudent.

### Conclusion

Adult learners express a strong preference for online education due to its flexibility and compatibility with work, caregiving, and other responsibilities (Ko et al., 2021). But flexibility alone does not ensure success. A strong sense of belonging—deliberately cultivated through design, pedagogy, and practice—is essential for engagement, persistence, and personal growth. The SCPS model demonstrates that community-building in virtual environments is not a byproduct of good instruction; it is a core commitment.

Through strategies grounded in Ignatian pedagogy

and Jesuit values, SCPS fosters connection, visibility, and purpose. From high-touch communication and timely faculty interventions to student-led outreach, recognition practices, and reflection-based learning, each element works to build a culture where students feel known and supported. These practices align with research demonstrating that belonging, academic self-efficacy, and psychological resilience enhance engagement in distance learning (Yi, Zhang, Lu, & Shadiey, 2024).

This work must be continuous and responsive. Building community online is not a one-time initiative—it requires sustained attention to student voice, institutional humility, and a willingness to adapt. Faculty, advisors, and staff each have a role to play, and their coordination is essential for a cohesive and inclusive student experience.

As higher education continues to expand in digital and hybrid formats, institutions must center connection as core to learning. Belonging is not peripheral—it is foundational. When learners feel valued, included, and supported, they persist not only through coursework but through life's interruptions. As Producers, Travis, and Pownall (2023) remind us, the work of defining and sustaining learning communities in an online era re-

mains urgent. But the opportunity is just as clear: when adult learners are not only taught but truly known, they thrive.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## Digital Immigration Lab: Integrating Ignatian Pedagogy and Immigration and Refugee Research

Dr. Sabnam Ghosh, Dr. Danushka Bandara, and Julie Mughal,  
Fairfield University (in collaboration with Washington University in St. Louis) (AJCU)

### ABSTRACT

Fairfield University's students participated in a border immersion trip, which led to the creation of the Digital Immigration Lab (DIL). DIL is an interdisciplinary research group that uses Ignatian pedagogy to teach students about immigration reform and misinformation, empowering them to advocate for social justice and systemic change.

### MAIN GOAL

To introduce students to immigration policy, counter misinformation through data-driven research, and foster advocacy for systemic change.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

The project directly aligns with "Walking with the Excluded" (refugees and displaced persons) and "Journeying with Youth" (empowering students to create a hopeful future through critical research and ethical commitment).

### METHODOLOGY

The project follows the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, Evaluation). It uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining humanities, computer science (to track misinformation), and humanitarian action.

### LESSONS LEARNED



**Direct encounter** (the immersion) is a powerful catalyst for academic interest.



**Interdisciplinary collaboration** (humanities + technology) is essential to tackle modern social challenges like digital misinformation.



**Sustained engagement** is necessary to turn emotional experiences into meaningful social action.

### RESULTS

- ✓ Development of a "misinformation tracker" to analyze anti-immigrant narratives on social media.
- ✓ Increased student engagement in advocacy and humanitarian research.
- ✓ Production of digital content and research papers to humanize the refugee experience.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 🎯 Expanding the lab to include more diverse academic departments.
- 🎯 Increasing the frequency of student-led advocacy campaigns.
- 🎯 Developing stronger partnerships with local resettlement organizations beyond the border trip.

# Digital Immigration Lab: Integrating Ignatian Pedagogy and Immigration and Refugee Research

## FORMATION

DR. SABNAM GHOSH, DR. DANUSHKA BANDARA AND JULIE MUGHAL

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY AND SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

In spring 2024, a group of students and faculty from Fairfield University (FU) embarked on its annual spring break immersion trip to a refugee resettlement organization close to the U.S. Mexico border. This trip is facilitated by the long-standing partnership between the organization and FU's Center for Social Impact (CSI), a core program that reflects FU's Jesuit values. The week-long experience supports the organization's refugee resettlement programs by allowing our students to walk alongside resettled children and families. Inspired by this immersive experience, a faculty-led, student-interest based research group, the Digital Immigration Lab (DIL), was established. Based on an interdisciplinary humanities lab-based approach, DIL is a collaborative research group designed to introduce students to the issues surrounding immigration reform, policy, and misinformation. DIL empowers students to reflect, research, and advocate for change through an immigration-based solidarity, ethics, and humanitarian pedagogy and methodology to usher systemic change and to counter anti-immigration rhetoric. Together, these efforts reflect the Ignatian commitment to solidarity, justice, and hope.

## Introduction

“When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change” (Kolvenbach, 2000).

The power of encounter is an important concept in Ignatian pedagogy, one that is brought to life each spring in the many and varied domestic and international short-term immersion trips offered throughout the Jesuit university network (Sebastian, 2021; Muldoon, 2022). One such spring immersion trip is offered by Fairfield University’s (FU) Center for Social Impact’s (CSI) Humanitarian Action program through its partnership with a resettlement agency based in the southwest, providing students with the opportunity to encounter refugees in their programs. In 2023, the trip coincided with the children’s spring break, providing the FU group with the unique opportunity to help coordinate a school break camp. Through service-learning methodology, six students and two faculty engaged in English language workshops, enrichment activities such as art and historical storytelling, and field trips, all designed to foster confidence and belonging. Jordan, a student

on the trip, observed, “I met people of all ages who showed incredible bravery and strength by saving themselves from dangerous situations, inspiring me to lean into my faith and inner strength when I face challenges”. The trip challenged FU students to confront the structural injustices facing refugees, such as limited access to equitable education, stable housing, and professional careers.

### Creating the Digital Immigration Lab (DIL)

After returning from the immersion, the group gathered to debrief the experience and envision how they might integrate what they experienced into their daily lives. While the debrief often signals the end of most immersion experiences, this meeting opened up a new chapter, creating a mechanism to keep the students and the advisors engaged and connected. The seeds for the idea of the DIL project were planted and out of it would grow an opportunity for a multidisciplinary group of faculty and staff from Fairfield University (FU) and Washington University in Saint Louis (WashU), to continue to build on knowledge gained during the spring immersion trip.

DIL’s cohort model embraced many important Ignatian ideals including the importance of conducting research in community, especially so

when working on a divisive issue. A study by Seider (2009) found that students, when faced with the difficult humanitarian subject matter of global hunger and poverty, became “overwhelmed” and began to view these problems as “intractable and unsolvable” p.70). DIL provides needed support while fulfilling an important universal apostolic preference (UAP) issued by Pope Francis in 2019, to journey with youth in a hope filled future (The Society of Jesus, 2019).

As DIL coalesced and grew, another important characteristic emerged: the interdisciplinary nature of the participants. The students hail from a variety of disciplines including nursing, politics, and international studies while the advisors are faculty in American Cultural Studies (AMCS) with a research focus in Ethnic Studies, International Studies, and Computer Science with a research focus on Data Science. Importantly, the Jesuit values are not institution bound, but are an inspiration across institutions. This is demonstrated by DIL’s multi-institutional nature where both students and faculty have joined hands in solidarity over immigrant education through Ignatian Pedagogical Practice (IPP) that is based on the interplay of experience, reflection, and action (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, 1993).

DIL intends to fill a gap in immigration and humanities research through a lab-based approach usually found in the sciences. Our model utilizes short-term student participation, targets current issues and trends, and facilitates short and focused analysis in articles that are ready for publication. One DIL student, Lylah, describes the synergy of the interdisciplinary process, “Multiple rounds of editing, with several students reading over an article, always helps refine, strengthen and synthesize the argument, and different people always have different insights into how to improve a piece”. Students learn to identify targeted areas of research, identify patterns, collaborate with a research group, and undertake the task of writing, editing, proofreading, and publication as a team dedicated to innovative immigration-focused humanities.

### Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning as Pedagogy

Experiential learning is an important component of curricular and co-curricular activities and certain practices, such as alternative spring breaks have emerged as high impact pedagogies to engage with global issues (Mansilla & Chua, 2017, Connelly, 2012). K.E. Heyer (2016) notes that, “Fostering interdisciplinary approaches in curricula and research, together with opportunities

for global and local experiential learning, holds promise for reinvigorating the common good in the context of Catholic higher education” (p.1). Indeed, experiential learning, such as the immersion trip, is deeply rooted in the five principles of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP): context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation (Hudgins, et al., 2019); and, the convergence of IPP and immersion can lead to transformative growth. Connelly (2012), in a self-reflective exchange, questions, “How do we instill in students, faculty, and staff the habit of taking a long loving look at the real, rooted in the Ignatian way?” and responds, “Immersion programs are among the most powerful methods of doing so” (p. 91). The alternative spring break has been one way we answer Connelly’s call to Ignatian experiential pedagogy. Grace, a student on the trip, affirmed the strength of the experience by recognizing the chain of interdependence fostered by her work with the refugee community, “They made me realize that we are all humans, and it is our communal responsibility to help each other out in whatever ways we can”. Recognition of global citizenship is an important teleological goal of experiential learning and, as Kolvenbach (2000) foretold, “the mind may be challenged to change”.

The immersion experience has also become an

important bridge to DIL, helping students integrate and reframe the new learning from the immersion in what Jones et al. (2012) note is “... an effort to integrate what they learned into their lives and reflecting on their sense of purpose and future plans” (p. 212). Ava noted that DIL “...furthered my passions for service work and made me even more excited to pursue my degree in International Studies”. Interdisciplinarity in experiential work is a powerful tool that helps students map tangible connections between systems, issues, theories, and their representations, making for a more powerful learning experience.

#### **Interdisciplinarity as Methodology**

Interdisciplinarity was crucial to the formation of the “lab” structure for DIL. Lab structures of learning and research are a core model in the sciences where principal researchers focus, grow, and collaboratively research with junior research assistants, simultaneously training future scholars in the field. DIL applies the structure to facilitate collaborative, interdisciplinary humanities research surrounding current issues of immigration trends, politics, and pedagogy. Viewing any work in immigration as “sustained advocacy”, DIL’s vision is to enhance critical understanding of popular rhetoric animating discourses of immigration, and refugeehood in the 21st century. Heyer des-

cribes interdisciplinary engagement as a very “timely contribution to the project of Catholic higher education” because it, “offers an opportunity to integrate the educational experience of students, contribute to understandings of shared goods beyond the university, counter isolating tendencies in academia and fragmentation in the wider world, and refine traditional understandings of the common good in need of renewal” (2016, p. 3). Some of our current projects involve analyzing and mapping current immigration-centered political rhetoric, social media sentiment analysis, and surveys of immigration pedagogies to demystify how immigration is weaponized to affect real human bodies. DIL currently has several manuscripts under preparation for publication.

Interdisciplinarity is explored in DIL in a variety of ways. First, we draw from disciplinary methodology from the humanities, computer science, and social work to train students in interdisciplinary methods to holistically analyze data, representation, and service surrounding a topic. Through this practice, the language of data is used to analyze real human testimonies and their intersections with race, color, gender, sexuality, safety, class, alterity, etc. Second, DIL focuses on a multimodal approach to immigration by focusing on media, literature, visuals, social media platfor-

ms, and former research surveys that facilitate cognition of the larger world-making facilitated through immigration. Finally, DIL’s interdisciplinary approach circumvents co-opting immigrant voices by focusing on “representational” material, such that critical analysis and criticism are focused on analyzing issues of power, hierarchy, and marginalization behind immigration rhetoric. Sensitivity towards positionality, voice, and information sources are key to DIL’s interdisciplinary methodology. This focus on “sensitivity” while studying alterity is a core part of the Jesuit Ignatian approach. Jordan sees DIL as serving, the Jesuit value *cura personalis* or “care for the individual person” noting, “Not only does participating in this work allow me to explore various parts of myself, but our work at DIL is based on the passion we share for caring and advocating for others.”

#### **Facilitating Interdisciplinarity: Faculty Voices**

- Sabnam Ghosh – Studying Immigration in the Humanities

What is “real” experience? How do we represent the real? Who gets to write? Who is heard? And whose stories matter? How do we write about the other? These are central questions that animate the study of literature, especially in migration literature that engage immigrant voices.

*“My research, teaching, and community engagement ventures explore such questions of representation. My research in “displacement aesthetics” engages with theories of alterity, marginalization, tokenization, and fetishization, essentially interrogating how representation and real experiences animate and inform each other. Critical questions of representation expand discursively when methodologically combined with disciplinary approaches in the sciences and in experiential learning. Overall, the interdisciplinary approach enables the capaciousness of studying immigration in the humanities.”*

*“My experiences at the refugee relief organization transformed my literary approach towards my research. Similarly, another student on the immersion trip remembers the transformative potential of the trip, “I was particularly struck by the difference between the lives the refugees live and the lives I thought they lived”. During our work with the children from refugee backgrounds and the organization’s staff, I witnessed approaches in aesthetics, data, government systems, and fieldwork coalesce to serve refugee families. In the spring break camps we observed children with limited cultural exposure in the U.S. struggle to integrate into U.S. school systems. Uneven pedagogies, difficulties with staffing, and the hopes and dreams of the children in those classes reinforced our team’s determination to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to facilitate smoother transitions for immigrant communities and spread awareness about immigration policies and trends. DIL emerged from our team’s desire to continue the pedagogy-centered work of introducing students to systematic interdisciplinary study, research, and analysis of immigration issues that would demystify trends and information surrounding immigration events and policies.”*

- Danushka Bandara – Computer Science Approach

*“As a computer science faculty member, I joined the immersion trip driven by a deep desire to contribute to a greater cause and effect meaningful change. Having grown up in Sri Lanka during the civil war, I understand the trauma and desperation refugees endure. Contrary to common misconceptions, refugees do not choose to come to the United States; they are compelled by dire circumstances. The stories of the refugees I met made it clear that there is still so much work to be done to support and improve the conditions of those displaced by crisis and conflict. On our journey back to Fairfield, we reflected on our experiences and explored ways to further support refugee wellbeing. As a group, we felt a shared responsibility to contribute in our own capacities and this reflection led to the creation of DIL as a platform dedicated to highlighting the importance of refugee support.*

*However, as a researcher, I encountered several challenges during this process, including limited data accessibility due to organizational policies protecting refugee privacy. Even with these challenges, I believe that this interdisciplinary approach can help collaboratively solve issues facing refugee-related work. Computer Science provides tools that can parse the large amounts of data about refugees in the public domain. It can also help analyze the collected data and build better systems to gather data about refugees and help make data-driven decisions on allocating much needed resources.”*

- Julie Mughal – Humanitarian Action and Experiential Learning

“Over the past three decades of my career, I have worked in the field of humanitarian action and was part of the interdisciplinary team that developed FU’s humanitarian action minor. Established in 2016, the minor has prepared students to engage with the world through the development of cognitive objectives and skills/methods, the latter embracing “experience, reflection or direct action, in order to be effective participants in humanitarian action” (Feltz et al., 2012, p. 5). Since its inception, faculty in the program have confronted the delicate balance of engaging students in difficult humanitarian issues while ensuring that students do not become resigned, believing that they cannot make a meaningful difference. Re-phrased through the UAP lens, how can faculty accompany students in the creation of a hopeful future (The Society of Jesus, 2019)? One key to striking this balance has been through experiential learning, including the annual alternative spring break trip facilitated by the CSI. The trip has proven to be a transformative experience for students and faculty alike, sparking a renewed sense of solidarity and allyship; nowhere is this more evident than in the work being done by the DIL learning community.”

### **Lessons and Difficulties in Practicing True Interdisciplinarity**

Ignatian pedagogy calls us to research in community and build bridges between disciplines in the realization that the inherent challenges of interdisciplinary work hold the seeds of newfound perspectives and knowledge. In 1989, Kolvenbach asserted that interdisciplinarity “is the only significant way to heal the fracture of knowledge”; this rings as true today as it did over 30 years ago (Kolvenbach, 1989, p.6).

### **Thinking Beyond Disciplinary Differences: Creating a Collective Understanding**

Practicing true interdisciplinarity is a challenge. As researchers, it tests our methodological and pedagogical limits. Often, it requires a team to create new kinds of knowledge that are not always common in a single discipline. Our interdisciplinary team brought diverse vocabularies and domain knowledge, requiring us to engage with unfamiliar fields. Aligning our varied research methodologies—such as quantitative approach and qualitative methods—demanded significant time and effort. Despite these hurdles, the process was a valuable learning experience, enriching our collective understanding and strengthening our commitment.

Because of the shifting and protected nature of immigration data, accessing data and evaluating its validity was a challenge. DIL’s methodology adapted and shifted to a “collective understanding” model to evaluate the reliability of immigration data. Students and faculty adopted a multimodal approach to foster collective understanding. Ava, one of the students, used the advocacy framework to think beyond disciplinary differences and to highlight the benefits, “...whether that be staying up to date on refugee-related news, reading into the negative rhetoric surrounding immigration, or potentially speaking on the injustices faced in the field, our pieces always did something more than tell a story and share some research”.

### **Embracing Flexibility: Learning to Pivot**

Initially, DIL aimed to assist the refugee relief organization by leveraging our expertise in pedagogy and curriculum development to create educational programs. However, due to funding cuts to non-profit organizations, our team needed to pivot. Undeterred, we shifted our focus to advocacy through research, an area where academia excels. Our goal was twofold: to underscore the urgency of refugee support and to analyze the narratives surrounding refugees to foster a more empathetic and informed discourse. Flexible

approaches and pivoting are the fundamentals of immigration advocacy because of the rapidly changing nature of the field. DIL embraces this flexibility pedagogically as a part of studying immigration.

### **Activating a Powerful Action-Reflection Cycle**

The immersion trip and research group form a powerful cycle of action and reflection, a hallmark of Jesuit education. The trip immersed students in the lived realities of refugees, fulfilling the call to walk with the marginalized. The research group then empowered them to analyze and address systemic issues, accompanying them as they grew into hopeful, justice-oriented leaders. This dual approach of encounter and scholarship converges to advance social justice. Moreover, the engagement model when paired with research offers a scalable framework for Jesuit schools, aligning with the UAPs’ emphasis on collaboration for justice.

### **Looking Ahead: The Future of DIL**

Based on the challenges we faced in conceptualizing and structuring DIL, our plans for the future include: developing a modular DIL curriculum for Jesuit institutions, enabling replication of its interdisciplinary model; and strengthening partnerships with refugee organizations through formal

agreements to address understaffing and enhance program delivery. Ethical data protocols covered by institutional review boards (IRBs) will improve research access while protecting refugee privacy. Finally, a public-facing DIL platform on X or on public-facing podcast services could amplify findings and foster dialogue on immigration issues, while meeting the goal of disseminating public-facing scholarship backed by research.

As the UAPs remind us, such work is not just a task but a way of being—a call to live in solidarity with the marginalized and to accompany young people as they shape a world renewed by justice and reconciliation. Jordan, a student in the DIL cohort sums up this call to action in her powerful observation, “The challenges and accomplishments of displaced persons deserve to be shared, and just as we are taking action to help these people, we make an effort to inspire our readers to do the same in whatever way they are able”. We have learned that having a strong motive, like the Jesuit Ignatian framework, is methodologically binding and healing for our work as scholars.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES,  
AND MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION TRAINING INITIATIVE

## Faculty and Staff Formation Toward a Culture of Discernment

Lauren Hackman-Brooks and Elizabeth Barsotti  
Gonzaga University

### ABSTRACT

The article details a new cohort-based formation program at Gonzaga University designed for faculty and staff. It focuses on the importance of Ignatian formation not just for students, but for employees, outlining the program's methodology, goals, and the results of its implementation in fostering a mission-driven campus culture.

### MAIN GOAL

To build a cross-campus community and foster personal and professional growth through reflective practices (like the Ignatian Examen), and empower employees to articulate and implement the university's mission in their own words and work.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

The program explicitly incorporates the UAPs into its curriculum. It focuses on:

- **Showing the Way to God:** Through the practice of the Examen and Ignatian spirituality.
- **Walking with the Excluded:** By exploring the promotion of justice.
- **Journeying with Youth:** By forming the mentors and staff who accompany students.
- **Caring for our Common Home:** Integrated into the exploration of the "Common Good."

### METHODOLOGY

The program uses a "Scaffolding for Mission" approach. It utilizes the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm and focuses on communal discernment. Participants move from foundational history (Ignatius) to contemporary mission (Xavier) and finally to practical leadership and projects (Manresa).

### LESSONS LEARNED

**Communal Aspect:** Formation is most effective when done in community rather than individually.

**Language Matters:** It is vital to use language that is accessible and inclusive of various religious and non-religious worldviews while remaining rooted in the Jesuit tradition.

**Intentionality:** Formation requires dedicated time and institutional support; it cannot be an "add-on" to an already overflowing schedule.

### RESULTS

#### Strategic Alignment:

Participants reported that the learning was directly useful for departmental strategic plans and inclusive excellence initiatives.

#### Community Building:

The program successfully broke down "silos," creating strong networks between faculty and staff who previously had little interaction.

#### Ownership of Mission:

Graduates demonstrated a high capacity to articulate Gonzaga's mission in their own words and took "co-responsibility" for the institution's identity.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

**Sustainability:** Ensuring the program can continue to scale as interest grows across the university.

**Integration:** Finding more ways to tie the "Manresa" capstone projects directly into university-wide strategic goals.

**Inclusivity:** Continuing to refine the dialogue between the Jesuit tradition and the diverse personal values of a modern workforce.

# Faculty and Staff Formation Toward a Culture of Discernment

## FORMATION & TRAINING INITIATIVE

LAUREN HACKMAN-BROOKS AND ELIZABETH BARSOTTI  
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

### ABSTRACT

Formation is at the heart of an Ignatian way of educating. This is true for students as well as those employed at Jesuit universities. We desire to share what we have learned through the design, implementation and evaluation of a new cohort formation program at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington (USA). This article seeks to summarize Gonzaga's mission formation cohorts including an overview of our context, approach to formation, goals and outcomes, results, and horizons of this work.

## Introduction

Jesuit higher education is not simply about graduating professionals but forming persons. Faculty, staff and administrators across the university participate in this project of formative education which is understood as “the development of habits to make the student a ‘fully human’, well-rounded person. To reach such maturity, cognitive development is not enough: psychological, ethical and spiritual attitudes are also necessary” (Casalini, 2020, p. 179). This integrative approach to the growth of intellect and character is concerned with what students know, how they think, what they do, and especially who they are and who they are becoming. Formation is the work of all members of the university community – in ways that are formal and informal, intentional and unintentional, known and unknown. To bring the educational mission and vibrancy of a Jesuit school to its fullness, we need colleagues who practice and model mature ways of being fully human, sharing their gifts in response to the needs and deep desires of our world. We need colleagues who accompany students – and each other – along this journey.

We know from early Jesuit documents that who the educator is matters in Jesuit education. That

is not to say that the “who” must be a Jesuit. More recently, Characteristics of Jesuit Education, 1986 articulated the need to offer “continuing education and continued personal development—especially in professional competence, pedagogical techniques, and spiritual formation” specifically for lay colleagues (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, 2017, para. 160/152). As faculty and staff demographics grow increasingly diverse, many employees in Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States do not have a connection to the Jesuit or Catholic identities of the institution. Certainly, there is a need to know the “what” of Jesuit education. However, Jesuits learn Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy through lived experience and practice. While knowledge of history, terminology, and values is important, it is not enough to know about these things; awareness does not bring a mission to life. What might it look like - at an institutional level and in a non-confessional manner - to embody the Ignatian way so that employees learn by living, or more concretely working, in this environment?

The task of mission formation is to create spaces for colleagues “to taste something internally” (Duminuco & International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, 2000, para.

42/2), allowing them to experience the formative education for which they are responsible. Faculty and staff formation must be structured and facilitated in a way that employees know the Catholic, Jesuit mission intellectually and affectively, and, through lived experience, know themselves as an essential part of a community of educators and formators.

## Context & Creation of Cohort Programs

Over the last five years, we have developed and refined an employee mission formation program using a cohort model at Gonzaga University<sup>1</sup> in Spokane, Washington (USA).

In 2018-2019, Gonzaga participated in its first Mission Priority Examen sponsorship review process. As a result, Gonzaga named four priorities, including the “Jesuit Identity Initiative,” emphasizing “shared responsibility for mission” intended to “enhance mission engagement” (Gonzaga University, Mission Priority Examen Self-Study, 2019, p. 30). Strategic mission formation for staff and faculty was desired and needed. It was no-

<sup>1</sup> Gonzaga University is a nationally-ranked liberal arts university located in Spokane, Washington along the Spokane River on the unceded homelands of the Spokane Tribe of Indians. Approximately 5,293 undergraduate students, 24% of undergraduate students self-report as Roman Catholic; 1,370 employees (Gonzaga University Factbook, n.d.)

ted that employees are “inspired by and want to contribute to our institutional mission,” yet there was a need to “expand and enhance opportunities for community members to learn about the Society of Jesus, the Catholic Tradition, Ignatian Spirituality, Jesuit education and pedagogy, and contemporary mission Leadership” with a goal of examining and deepening “how our mission identity is integrated in ... all areas of university life” (Gonzaga University, Mission Priority Examen Self-Study [internal document], 2019). Then Provincial Very Rev. Scott Santarosa, S.J. wrote to Gonzaga “...Father Sosa comments upon the efforts essential to building a culture of discernment. ‘This requires articulating values and developing processes that promote shared responsibility and accountability for mission’” (Scott Santarosa, S.J., personal letter to Thayne McCulloh, September 29, 2020).

The following year, two new staff positions were created to bring the Jesuit Identity Initiative to life. With the support of a faculty fellow for mission, they convened a faculty advisory to draft an initial plan for a comprehensive, multi-phase mission formation program. A pilot cohort was launched during the COVID-19 quarantine, and in 2020-2021, the pilot was adapted for staff. The current iteration of the cohort formation program is open

to all employees, regardless of position or length of service. “The cohorts offer an in-depth exploration of the history, values, and practices of Jesuit higher education, Ignatian Spirituality, and the Catholic Intellectual and Social Traditions” as well as “personal and professional growth aligned with Gonzaga’s mission” (Faculty and Staff Formation Cohorts, n.d.).

### Program Structure

Our approach to Gonzaga’s cohort program is informed by the global goals of the Society of Jesus, commitments of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, feedback from participants, the skills and gifts of the team, best practices at other universities, and an unwavering commitment to the cohorts as a formative process. The cohorts are an experience of formation and a locus for cultivating a culture of discernment.

The cohort program is four semesters in length. Participants commit to one semester at a time with the opportunity to renew for subsequent semesters. Each semester is comprised of eight to twelve sixty-ninety minute sessions.

### Faculty Cohort

- Semester 1 | Ignatian Mission Formation

Program builds cross-disciplinary community while introducing the foundations of Jesuit Higher Education, Ignatian Spirituality, and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in relation to one’s role as teacher-scholar.

- Semester 2 | Arrupe Faculty Seminar features critical reading and discussion of formative texts related to Catholic and Jesuit higher education. Seminar discussions prompt connections to one’s discipline, experience, and the proximate context at Gonzaga.

### Staff Cohort

- Semesters 1 & 2 | Cardoner Mission Formation Program explores the foundations of Gonzaga’s mission through content presentations and discussions. Reflective practices facilitate connections at the personal and professional level.

### Combined Faculty and Staff Capstone

- Semesters 3 & 4 | Manresa Collective is directed toward integration and action. Participants design and implement a mission engagement project which applies their learning to some aspect of their work. Manresa includes an introduction to Ignatian discernment, scaffolded project development, mission coaching, and public presentation.

To celebrate outstanding commitment to Gonzaga’s mission and foster an ongoing community of mission-engaged colleagues, employees who complete the full sequence are recognized as Mission Advocates. Mission Advocates gather once or twice per semester for ongoing formation, consultation, and community. We invite Mission Advocates to be guest presenters, panelists, and discussion facilitators for other formation offerings.

### Philosophy of Formation

The program structure and learning goals (appendix 1) illustrate that the cohorts are not only informational but also formational, including components of reflection, community-building, and praxis. The following commitments shape the design, facilitation, and evaluation of the cohort programs:

**Ignatian educators are exemplars.** With Jesuit education’s emphasis on character formation, the personhood modeled by the educator matters. The goal is not that students replicate their teachers and mentors, but that they be empowered and inspired by educators who practice, embody, and even wrestle with the values and commitments our schools seek to cultivate. The notion of exemplarity is closely aligned with Ignatian

spirituality, drawing upon Ignatius’s own desire and imaginative imitation of great knights, and later, Christ and the saints. He was drawn to a different way of life through attraction rather than pressure, persuasion, or coercion. The formation cohorts are spaces where university employees commit to deepening their own knowledge, skills, virtue, and character.

**To be educators who form students as whole persons, faculty and staff must be seen, valued, and treated as whole people within the university.**

When colleagues experience a misalignment between what is asked of them and what is practiced, we run the risk of burnout, distrust, dissociation, and disillusionment. Attention to the educator’s own development and integration is assumed in early Jesuit texts due to the formational nature of a Jesuit vocation. The cohorts are an opportunity to model and practice this commitment over time. We exercise hospitality, learn names, express sincere interest in our colleagues as professionals and as people, and champion their gifts. We care about the life and personhood of our colleagues without expecting that their entire life be the university.

**Formation includes critical engagement with the mission and empowers employees to be**

**co-responsible for the mission.** As we facilitate mission formation cohorts, we listen as colleagues identify and name the gap between the professed mission and lived mission. We hear disappointment, anger, and frustration. We also hear hope. One faculty noted, “The program was remarkable in creating a space where we could honestly discuss some difficult issues, which ... is not always the case in our current climate.” (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2024.). Our colleagues are inspired and motivated by documents on Jesuit higher education, speeches to Ignatian educators, core values from the Catholic Social Tradition, and stories from other areas in the institution. Inspired by synodality, we emphasize participation and co-responsibility throughout the experience. The cohorts empower colleagues individually and collectively to more fully live into our Jesuit mission.

**Employee formation is integrative formation.** It is not faith formation or catechesis, nor is employee formation a meeting, class, or training. The cohorts include reflective practices and discussion for meaning-making around one’s values and one’s work experience, offering opportunities to connect the dots and lead a more integrated life. Our cohorts are informed by the Catholic Christian traditions as expressed in the Ignatian

charism and neither require nor presume religious affiliation or faith expression.

**Formation engages the participants as knowers.** Cohort sessions draw upon pedagogical methods suitable for adult learners. We begin each session with a reflective prompt connecting participant’s experience with and existing knowledge of the topic followed by partner or table conversation. Sessions include additional opportunities for discussion and usually conclude with a prompt to name what they are drawn to, resist, and remain curious about.

**Formation engages the proximate context.** Colleagues desire to engage mission in the concrete, not in the abstract. Participants long to see how values, documents, and ideas come to life in the university. Reflection and discussion prompts are crafted to encourage connections to one’s own role and our university within its broader socio-political context. Colleagues participate in the half-day immersion for Gonzaga’s place-based initiative to encounter neighbors and local organizations with whom we are in relationship, introduce community-based learning efforts and mission-aligned research, and encourage colleagues to imagine the university as social force.

**Formation entails accompaniment and calling forth from within.** Program facilitators serve as guides and companions, a paradigm suggested in the Exercises in which the guide engages in a process of calling forth, arousing and inspiring what is within the other rather than providing it for them.<sup>2</sup> Our goal is not to instruct colleagues how to enact the mission but to help them come to a deeper understanding of mission and recognize the ways in which their skills, gifts, and work align with and enliven it. One faculty reflected that while they already integrated “mission goals like social justice, diversity, and care for the poor and vulnerable ... language from the various intellectual and spiritual traditions discussed” enabled them to speak with students about mission more specifically and with greater context. (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2025.). We encourage colleagues to notice their experience and identify patterns of resistance and interest, desolation and consolation. We reflect back what we see and hear, encouraging them to direct their gifts in service of the commu-

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius’ second annotation of the Exercises reminds us that when a person gains clarity by one’s own reasoning or being enlightened by “divine power,” they “will get more spiritual relish and fruit, than if he who is giving the Exercises had much explained and amplified the meaning of the events. For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul”(Fleming, 1996, p. 2). This also reflects Ignatius’s understanding of “the pedagogical character of God’s revelation”(Gray, S.J., 2000, p. 16).

nity and common good.

**Formation is a communal and collaborative process.** The cohort model was intentionally chosen to facilitate the development of collegial relationships over time. A staff member reflected, “getting to know people from across campus has led to a greater sense of community and connection from departments outside my own and genuine work collaboration that might not have occurred otherwise” (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2024.).

Colleagues begin the cohort experience in explicit faculty or staff groups, allowing exploration in relation to one’s role. The capstone year brings staff and faculty together, honoring and championing the shared work of mission while encouraging collaboration across units. One participant articulated that having “staff and faculty in the same cohort fostered community, collaboration, and shared understanding of our mission” (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2025.). Staff, faculty and members of the Jesuit community serve as guest presenters and panelists<sup>3</sup> which introduces participants to a com-

<sup>3</sup> Guest speakers have included faculty from Religious Studies, Philosophy, Communication Studies, Psychology, Business School, Nursing, Biology, and staff from Tribal Relations, Center for Community Engagement, University Ministry, Office of Sustainability, Unity Multicultural Educa-

munity of mission leaders, highlights colleagues as exemplars, and serves as ongoing formation for the presenters.

**Formation cultivates a culture of discernment.** Each participant receives a journal at the start of the program as a place to collect their thoughts, noticings, notes, and questions. The journal supports their discernment and can be referenced following program completion. The cohorts culminate in a scaffolded process to discern, design and implement a mission engagement capstone project. The project is not meant to be an “extra” but rather an opportunity for magis, deepening and infusing elements of mission in a meaning-making way into a program, process, or course. It also celebrates the creative and distinct ways mission is integrated across the institution through the gifts of each person. At the end of the capstone, colleagues present their project at the annual cohort closing and explain how their project animates Gonzaga’s mission. This witnesses to the larger community the fruits of discernment and amplifies the co-creative process of animating the mission in our context, contributing to a culture of discernment across the university.

tion Center, and New Student and Family Programs.

## Results

Since 2020, more than 90 faculty from 35 academic departments and over 85 staff and administrators from 46 university units have participated in at least one semester of the formation cohort program. Of these 175+, 40 have completed the cohort program in full, including the implementation of a mission engagement project. Projects have included:

- Courses<sup>4</sup>
- Mission-aligned scholarship and publications<sup>5</sup>
- Promotion of justice<sup>6</sup>
- Public commitment to mission<sup>7</sup>
- Institutional practices<sup>8</sup>
- Student formation<sup>9</sup>

4 Some examples include: collaborative redesign of required undergraduate communication course emphasizing eloquentia perfecta in contemporary context, new course proposals, reflective teaching community of practice through the Center for Teaching and Advising

5 Some examples include: creation of a new framework for civic dialogue integrating practices from discernment in common, perinatal health equity in Spokane

6 Some examples include: faith-justice pathway for community engagement, sustainability strategic plan, community tree-planting

7 Some examples include: commissioning student artist for piece on UAPs, story-telling and publicity initiatives around mission efforts

8 Some examples include: infusing mission across new student orientation with campus partners, development of donor accompaniment framework, online reflection library

9 Some examples include: mission-informed student staff hiring and training, identity conscious supervision for BIPOC student staff, faith and justice workshop

- Community and belonging<sup>10</sup>

The cohort programs have extended our work and reach in unanticipated ways. Participants invite us to consult on specific projects, solicit resources to help them address questions and issues in their areas, and request custom formation sessions for their teams. We have facilitated discernment sessions for units, workshopped Ignatian Pedagogy with staff groups, and supported the review of Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure guidelines for faculty departments.

## Learning & Horizons

Accompanying the cohorts has been a lesson in humility and gratitude. We continue to be surprised and delighted by what enthralls and perplexes our colleagues. Questions are asked to which we do not know the answers. Activities do not have the intended outcome. Presenters offer unexpected content despite shared planning. Cohorts seed collaborative professional endeavors and personal friendships. Key insights we have gained from this process include:

## Program Design

- Competent delivery of content is not neces-

10 Some examples include: Catholic Faculty Fellowship breakfast, staff affinity groups

sarily formation. Colleagues are hungry for reflective practices and experiential learning. The regular use of reflective practices, including variations of the Ignatian examen, builds habits and increases their comfort to utilize and adapt these practices on their own and with students. A faculty member reflected that the tools for reflection and discernment were personally and professionally enriching during a time of burnout and could also be used when advising students (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2025.).

- The faculty cohorts were initially targeted to pre-tenure faculty. After observing the benefit for longer-term staff participants, we welcomed faculty of any rank, appointment and length of service.
- The capstone phase is an appropriate place to combine faculty and staff. One participant “appreciate[d] the intentional effort to build a unified, mission-driven experience ... strengthening our collective commitment” (Office of Mission Engagement, unpublished survey, 2025.).
- The project process requires significant scaffolding and revisions. Deadlines, proposals,

individualized coaching, project check-ins, and presentation rehearsals are effective and appreciated by participants.

### Facilitation and Logistics

- The inclusion of colleagues from across the university as guest presenters, storytellers, and panelists celebrates their contributions, expands the imagination of participants, and cultivates a community of mission leaders.
- Shorter and more frequent meetings build momentum while fostering collegiality and cohesion within the group.
- Utilizing a learning platform (such as Canvas) allows participants to access materials during and after the program.
- Space and hospitality are important. Meeting in a central location is appreciated. Simple snacks, beverages, nametags, and greeting people at the door contribute to a welcoming environment.

### Agency, Discernment and Gifts

Participants are unlikely to articulate the mission in their own words or explain how their work connects to mission unless they are repeatedly given

time and space to practice verbally and in writing and receive constructive, encouraging feedback.

Many participants initially identify projects outside of the scope of their work/role. Refocusing on one's interests, areas of influence, and bandwidth increases the achievability of the project.

While the tangible outcome of the capstone is the project, the goal is to cultivate a university-wide culture of discernment. We revised the first and second semesters to explicitly build reflective habits toward this end.

Currently, some areas for future development include strategies to recruit from under-represented campus areas, remote/hybrid adaptation, encouraging faculty enrollment, and more effective integration of the place-based immersion experience. Faith and reconciliation continually surface as topics of curiosity, confusion, and resistance. Participation is optional; access and incentives are live questions. What motivation, incentivization, and expectations exist around mission competencies and mission leadership? We wonder how engagement might be recognized as part of one's compensable university work and the potential differences this may entail between faculty, salaried staff, and hourly staff.

### Conclusion

Gonzaga's cohort formation programs successfully deepen mission literacy and engagement across the university. The cohorts recognize the full humanity of employees, foster participation and relationships, cultivate practices of reflection and discernment, and empower colleagues to be co-responsible for mission. We are curious to see how these programs will continue to evolve as our team learns with and from our colleagues and makes adaptations in response. We wonder what horizons may be revealed in our next Mission Priority Examen.

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## Appendix 1: Learning Goals & Outcomes

The following program outcomes offer insight into the hopes and goals of the cohorts.

### Semesters 1 & 2

*Develop basic mission literacy regarding key topics related to Gonzaga's Catholic, Jesuit & humanistic identity*

- Topics include themes from the Catholic Intellectual and Social Traditions (dialogue between faith and reason, sacramental imagination, common good), St. Ignatius and the formation of the Jesuits, Ignatian Spirituality, Ignatian Humanism and Ignatian Pedagogy, the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus (service of faith and promotion of justice), Jesuit higher education (particularly in US including Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education), and the Universal Apostolic Preferences.
- With faculty, we also explore the development of the professoriate.

*Identify alignment between topics and one's role*

- "I have found the learning to be particularly useful in my work on my department's Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan work, as well as

my department's work in the overall strategic plan.

*Build cross-campus community with cohort participants and invited facilitators*

*Reflect on one's personal and professional growth*

*Utilize reflective practices of noticing, particularly the examen*

*Articulate Gonzaga's mission in one's own words*

*Bring one's values (inclusive of religious identity, spirituality, and/or orienting worldview) into dialogue with the Jesuit, Catholic, humanistic tradition*

*Participate in the Northeast Immersion, part of Gonzaga's place-based initiative*

### Capstone (Manresa)

1. Summarize discernment in the Ignatian tradition
2. Identify the significance of how discernment can shape Jesuit universities
3. Utilize tools of discernment
4. Understand self as co-responsible for mission
5. Implement a mission engagement project



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES,  
AND MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION AND TRAINING INITIATIVE

## Safeguarding Children: Co-constructing a Multicultural Training Program for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Alessandra Campo and Angela Rinaldi,  
Pontifical Gregorian University (Kircher Network)


### ABSTRACT


The IADC at the Pontifical Gregorian University developed educational programs to prevent child sexual abuse following Church scandals. Using a student-centered approach that prioritizes the perspectives of survivors, the program is built on three pillars: co-construction, cultural sensitivity, and holistic formation, ensuring the training is effective across diverse global contexts.


### MAIN GOAL

To equip **leaders and professionals** with the **skills to prevent abuse**, to **integrate survivor perspectives** into safeguarding practices, and to **promote a global culture of care and human dignity**.

### LESSONS LEARNED

 **Safeguarding cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" approach**; it must be co-constructed with local communities to be effective.

 **Incorporating the voices of survivors is not optional**; it is the essential starting point for any authentic prevention program.

 A **holistic approach** that addresses the learner's emotions and physical reactions is **more effective** than purely theoretical training.




### CONNECTION WITH THE UAPS

The program is a concrete expression of "**Walking with the Excluded**," specifically by placing victims and survivors of abuse at the center of the educational mission. It also supports "**Journeying with Youth**" by creating safe environments for their development and protection.




### METHODOLOGY

The program employs a student-centered, holistic methodology. It relies on "co-construction" (where students actively shape the learning), "cultural sensitivity" (adapting content to local contexts), and a focus on the whole person (cognitive, emotional, and physical).

### RESULTS

-  **Successful implementation** of the "**Safeguarding: Our Common Commitment**" program globally.
-  Creation of a diverse network of trained "**safeguarding officers**" and professionals.
-  **High levels of student engagement** and the development of local safeguarding projects tailored to specific cultural needs.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

-  **Strengthening the evaluation of long-term social impact** in different regions.
-  **Expanding digital accessibility** to reach areas with limited technological infrastructure.
-  Continuing to **refine the curriculum to address emerging forms of digital and technological abuse**.

# Safeguarding Children: Co-constructing a Multicultural Training Program for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

## FORMATION & TRAINING INITIATIVE

ALESSANDRA CAMPO AND ANGELA RINALDI

PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

In the wake of the child sexual abuse scandals within the Catholic Church, the imperative to implement effective measures for the protection of minors became increasingly evident. In response, the Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy, initiated a critical reflection on the phenomenon and began developing both on-site and online educational programs. These initiatives adopt a student-centred pedagogical approach, aimed at fostering comprehensive and culturally sensitive formation. Central to these programs—alongside a foundational focus on incorporating the perspectives of victims and survivors—are three guiding principles that shape the learning process: 1) The principle of co-construction, which emphasizes the active engagement of learners in the educational process; 2) The principle of cultural sensitivity, which ensures responsiveness to diverse socio-cultural contexts; 3) The principle of holism, which addresses not only cognitive development but also the psychological and physical dimensions of the learner

## Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA)—and abuse more broadly—has been the subject of inquiries across the globe. Responses to the abuse crisis vary significantly worldwide, influenced both by the level of priority assigned to the issue by local churches and by diverse cultural and political contexts. These contexts shape public opinion, which may either encourage engagement with the public sphere or contribute to its avoidance (Rinaldi & Zollner, 2022). One of the key challenges in implementing student prevention programs lies in addressing cultural diversity and the need for localized approaches to learning.

### 1. A brief overview of the practice

The Catholic Church has adopted a student formation strategy as a central policy measure to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practical approaches necessary to respond effectively to risks within community settings.

This strategy aligns with a systemic approach to abuse, with particular attention to the phenomenon of clerical child sexual abuse (Friberg and Laaser, 1998). The literature confirms the

importance of interpreting abusive relational dynamics beyond the simplistic perpetrator-victim binary, recognizing that “sexual offending emerges from a network of relationships between individuals and their local habitats and niches, and is not simply the consequence of individual psychopathology” (Ward & Beech, 2006, p. 53).

While it remains unequivocally true that responsibility for abuse lies solely with the abuser, a safeguarding perspective—which aims to promote preventive attitudes that contribute to the creation of safe and healthy environments and relationships—necessitates consideration of the environmental factors that may facilitate or inhibit the occurrence of abuse.

On one hand, this approach enables a deeper understanding of the underlying causes and fundamental structural and systemic dynamics that may lead to abuse. On the other hand, since these systemic dynamics arise directly from specific socio-cultural conditions, it is essential to promote intervention strategies tailored to each particular context, organization, and cultural setting to reduce the likelihood of abuse. In other words, it requires identifying, within each cultural and organizational environment, elements that may dysfunctional influence rela-

tionships and create a conducive environment for abuse, thereby highlighting the need to improve these conditions towards healthier outcomes.

In light of these considerations, the Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy, designs and delivers both onsite and blended e-learning formation programs aimed at fostering a safeguarding attitude toward the issue of abuse. This involves cultivating preventive attitudes that go beyond reactive responses to abuse cases and instead promote relational strategies capable of preventing abuse in every context.

Given, as noted above, the systemic nature of abuse and the consequent variation in responses worldwide, student prevention programming must incorporate cultural diversity and localize learning accordingly. Because the phenomenon of abuse can only be fully understood within the socio-cultural and institutional frameworks that enable it, training students from diverse cultural backgrounds in prevention first requires fostering a critical awareness of these factors. This empowers each student to develop appropriate attitudes, acquire relevant competencies, and

identify the most effective practical strategies suited to their specific context.

This is precisely the aim of the IADC’s onsite courses, including the Diploma and Licentiate in Safeguarding. Every year, candidates from around the world come to Rome to engage in person-centered learning and collaborative study of safeguarding topics, seeking to understand abuse from a systemic perspective relevant to their local contexts. Upon returning home, they implement preventive measures by developing tailored prevention programs designed specifically for their environments.

### 2. Type of practice: the student-centered approach, from students’ experience to a new attitude

The practice that has proven most effective for the IADC is the student-centered approach (Woods et al., 2024). Primarily, this entails providing prevention-based training that respects both cultural perspectives and a fundamental principle: namely, the need to acknowledge the competence derived from listening to the experiences of victims, who remain central to their own healing processes.

This aligns with the so-called victim-first

approach, which equips students with the ability to engage with victims in a manner “prioritizes listening to the victim(s), avoids re-traumatization, and systematically focuses on their safety, rights, well-being, expressed needs and choices” (UNHCR, 2020–2025, p. 6). At the IADC, students learn safe and effective methods to give voice to the voiceless, enabling victims and survivors of abuse to transition from the victimhood of traumatic experiences toward meaning-making, regaining their capacity for discernment and choice, and restoring a sense of trust.

Furthermore, IADC students are trained in trauma-informed practices designed to support victims in avoiding re-traumatization and initiating their healing processes. Here, the role of safeguarding professionals is to accompany and remain alongside the individual. As Suniega et al. (2022, p. 527) note, since child abuse can elicit diverse emotional responses, caregivers must remain attentive to victims’ signs and be prepared to respond in the most constructive manner. Consequently, caregivers and safeguarding professionals require training to understand the dynamics of victims’ responses and their implications, which span beyond psychology to encompass other disciplines integral to sa-

feeguarding. For this reason, IADC’s training is interdisciplinary and open to participants from diverse professional backgrounds. Suniega et al. also recommend that “A trauma-informed approach to evaluating, diagnosing, and treating child abuse within a multidisciplinary team is recommended” (2022, p. 527).

Regarding content, and given the diversity of contexts and backgrounds among students, another core principle of the student-centered approach employed by IADC is co-construction. This principle entails that students actively shape both the learning content and process. Practically, this means that training does not begin with top-down definitions but originates from the formative, cultural, and human conditions of individual students and student groups. From this starting point, a tailored itinerary is developed, which, through lectures, group work, and both individual and collective research activities, fosters students’ awareness of their training needs as well as the skills required to acquire and co-construct the knowledge and attitudes essential for effective CSA prevention.

A distinctive feature of the IADC experience is the didactical personal accompaniment offered to students. Weekly individual meetings be-

tween students and tutors provide opportunities to explore topics that are critical within the students’ own experiences and contexts, and that warrant attention to better understand systemic elements of abuse and systemic responses, with the aim of creating culturally sensitive preventive measures. Overall, this personalized accompaniment fosters a shared and enriching learning experience among students, teachers, and professors, facilitating the co-construction of learning content.

For such co-construction to be effective, recognition of the emotional significance of safeguarding is essential to promote a trauma-informed care model (Leitch, 2017). This necessitates the creation of a safe environment in which students feel comfortable communicating and sharing sensitive topics. Psychological support must be provided when necessary.

Addressing the psycho-emotional dimensions of this training corresponds to the holistic nature of the student-centered approach, which, as mentioned, engages the whole person rather than merely conveying content, proposing learning paths nourished by active student participation. The competencies and attitudes thus developed enable students to create their own

safeguarding models and apply them within their cultural contexts.

The student-centered approach is also a foundational strategy of the IADC’s blended e-learning program, which facilitates personalized learning processes supported by local instructors alongside the core e-learning content. International institutions such as universities, dioceses, seminaries, and formation houses interested in developing safeguarding courses for their constituencies may utilize IADC’s learning units, integrating them with locally organized on-site classes led by their own trainers. This blended educational model has been implemented by the IADC since 2015, when it was still the Center for Child Protection, and has proven particularly effective, combining the Institute’s educational resources with the local institutions’ responsibility to tailor the program according to their specific social and cultural contexts. This practice also reflects another fundamental principle of the student-centered approach, namely, cultural sensitivity.

Additionally, the blended format allows groups to address delicate topics related to abuse prevention, offering students the opportunity for in-person interaction, experience-sharing, and

personalized supervision rather than passive online content consumption alone.

Recently, this model has been enhanced through the development of a new blended e-learning program featuring a dedicated learning platform that enables user interaction and is enriched with interactive digital activities designed to deepen reflection on the subject matter. Furthermore, local institutions and trainers receive additional specialized materials promoting self-reflection and guidance for student supervision and on-site class facilitation.

In this way, new technologies and the internet serve as valuable tools for implementing student-centered courses (Kerimbayev et al., 2023), facilitating the dissemination of safeguarding training on an international scale and making such courses accessible to student groups unable to travel to Rome for various reasons.

### 3. Results and outcomes

After several years of activity in the formation of students and groups worldwide, the IADC can report numerous outcomes that merit description. First and foremost, a significant number of individuals have been trained from 2015 to the

present through residential programs (English and Spanish Diplomas, and Licentiate), who have subsequently returned to their home contexts to engage political and religious authorities, emphasizing the importance of implementing safeguarding measures to prevent abuse and promote safer environments. Since 2015, the IADC has trained hundreds of Diploma students. The Diploma course is a practice-based, one-semester program in Safeguarding, providing students with an introduction to the systemic elements of abuse and safeguarding. Students delve into the main dynamics exhibited by victims and perpetrators and analyze the (ecclesial) contexts in which abuse may occur.

Since 2018, the Institute has also trained dozens of Licentiate students. The Licentiate is a two-year academic program in Safeguarding that enables students to deepen their understanding and critically reflect on key topics related to abuse and safeguarding. It also prepares them to teach safeguarding principles within their respective contexts.

Both programs aim to equip students to develop operative methods and safeguarding measures tailored to the specific contexts in which they will work. As part of the Diploma's final require-

ments, students are tasked to draft a prevention plan adapted to the characteristics of their own context. Based on an assessment of principal risks and needs, students are expected to design actions to prevent abuse through various safeguarding measures, including training that promotes student-centered learning, supervision, and effective screening procedures.

Licentiate students are similarly required to draft culturally sensitive safeguarding guidelines, policies, and codes of conduct, which are integrated into the aforementioned prevention plans. This approach prepares students to return to their institutions equipped to deliver concrete and tangible outcomes to their superiors, who may appoint them as safeguarding representatives responsible for protecting children and vulnerable individuals.

Among the IADC's notable achievements is the growth of its alumni network, which expands annually following the conclusion of residential courses (Diplomas and Licentiate). Recognizing that safeguarding cannot be pursued in isolation but requires teamwork and global collaboration, the IADC encourages its alumni to maintain this network for sharing experiences, resources, seeking advice, and convening at in-

ternational platforms and conferences. The IADC's commitment to establishing safeguarding representatives in strategic regions worldwide continues to strengthen.

This objective is further supported through blended e-learning programs, which extend the reach of the IADC's educational efforts and serve as resources for alumni to organize training initiatives upon returning to their home countries. Between 2015 and 2025, thousands of students from four continents participated in these e-learning trainings. The institutions engaging with the former Centre for Child Protection—now the IADC—are located across Latin America, Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. Since the launch of the new e-learning platform in October 2023 and the introduction of new online courses and learning units, more than a thousand students have enrolled, predominantly university students seeking to deepen their understanding of safeguarding within academic contexts. As new online content continues to be added, the IADC receives increasing participation requests from institutions worldwide. This trend reflects a growing global interest in safeguarding issues and educational programs aimed at fostering the creation of healthy environments and relationships—envi-

ronments in which abusive dynamics are less likely to take root.

#### 4. Lessons learned and opportunities for improvement

Among the experiences gathered, IADC students and alumni may encounter significant resistance within their home contexts when attempting to implement safeguarding measures. Such resistance arises from various factors, including everyday life experiences, potential conflicts with authority figures, the inherent challenges associated with safeguarding professions, and the comprehensive nature of the safeguarding mission, which encompasses relationships, environments, and processes.

Safeguarding professionals must also contend with vicarious trauma—the secondary trauma transmitted from victims to those providing care—as well as the profound trauma endured by abuse survivors and shared with practitioners. These professionals are entrusted with the care of vulnerable individuals; however, it is equally imperative that they engage in self-care to sustain their capacity to effect positive outcomes in the field. Over the years, the IADC has recognized the critical importance of self-care. Safeguarders are not invulnerable; they are

human beings with needs and emotions that require acknowledgment and attention. Throughout onsite courses, IADC instructors devote time to guiding students through a human formation program comprised of workshops designed to foster reflection on humanity, emotions, and personal needs. This process enables students to develop self-awareness, recognize their identity, establish healthy boundaries, and deepen their understanding of how to cultivate healthy relationships. Additionally, students are supported in identifying signs of safeguarding and compassion fatigue, learning to recognize physical, mental, and spiritual indicators of exhaustion, and practicing self-compassion by acknowledging when it is necessary to pause and attend to their own well-being (Radlauer-Doerfler & VanDenBerg, 2020, p. 2).

Furthermore, through its accumulated experience, the IADC has become increasingly cognizant of the necessity to provide students with an experiential dimension to their learning and engagement with safeguarding topics. Although some students may initially anticipate a traditional lecture format featuring expert presentations in Rome, the IADC emphasizes experiential learning that encourages self-inquiry, contextual application, critical reflection, and, when

necessary, the deconstruction of preconceived notions to embrace an evolved understanding of safeguarding. This approach facilitates hands-on comprehension of the vital role safeguarding plays in creating safe environments, relationships, and processes, which are essential to preventing abuse, addressing vulnerabilities, and promoting safety within both the Church and society. As Hans Zollner and Peter Beer assert, “safeguarding is not understood as defence, but as protection from the perspective of an empowered self and a promotion of resilience that strengthens individuals and groups, such as parish communities” (2024).

Given that the concepts of safety and safeguarding vary across cultures, employing a student-centered pedagogical approach is critical. This methodology enables learners to experience safeguarding both personally and communally, empowering them to act integrally—engaging mind, body, and spirit—beyond mere acquisition of theoretical knowledge.

However, this richness of the student-centered approach also presents challenges. Zollner and Beer emphasize that “there is a need for cross-cultural understanding about what is meant by safety and safeguarding and how both

can be achieved” (2024). At this juncture, the concept of creating a virtuous circle of inculturation seems to arise. The diversity of students’ nationalities and backgrounds presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Sensitive topics such as sexuality, sexual identity, abuse, institutional responsibility, and accountability require IADC faculty to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and to foster a learning environment where students feel safe to share and collaboratively construct knowledge with mutual respect, thereby enriching collective reflection.

Safeguarding remains a nascent academic discipline. The IADC recognizes that abuse, sexuality, culture, and related safeguarding issues cannot be universally defined or framed by identical systemic or foundational elements across all global contexts. Therefore, a process of positive inculturation is essential, aimed at preparing the next generation of safeguarders capable of adapting safeguarding principles to enhance the foundational aspects of their own cultures and effectively transmit these principles within their communities.

This rationale also underpins the decision to offer e-learning programs employing a blended learning model, which provides the necessary

flexibility to tailor educational content to diverse cultural, social, spiritual, and linguistic contexts.

Moreover, involving local institutions in course implementation fosters shared responsibility. Training pathways are not merely passive adaptations of pre-existing content but rather evolve through co-construction, enabling the creation of formation and experiential programs best suited to each group.

This insight has emerged from years of experience addressing the complex challenges inherent in safeguarding training, necessitating a multicultural and interdisciplinary team committed to maintaining an open, self-reflective approach that is responsive to diverse cultural sensitivities. This commitment requires ongoing collaboration with global experts to cultivate a continually renewing perspective, enhancing sensitivity to emerging safeguarding challenges.

Above all, the IADC team remains dedicated to an authentic victim-centered approach, ensuring that the voices of survivors, the profound reality of their suffering, and the resilience they demonstrate in overcoming trauma fundamentally inform the institute's educational mission, ultimately contributing to a safer Church and

society.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION TRAINING INITIATIVE

## The Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU) Ignatian Leadership Seminar

Jeanne F. Lord, Brittany Fried, and Kevin D. Sullivan  
Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU)

### ABSTRACT

The AJCU Ignatian Leadership Seminar is a long-standing formation program for senior leaders new to Jesuit higher education. It combines foundational Ignatian teachings with contemporary leadership challenges, using the Universal Apostolic Preferences as a lens to prepare lay leaders for their roles in mission-driven institutions.

### MAIN GOAL

To ground leaders in Ignatian values, foster a cross-institutional network of peers, and provide tools for discernment in leadership.

### LESSONS LEARNED



#### Formation vs. Information:

Formation must be personal and lived, not just an intellectual exercise.



#### Communal Dimension:

The power of the seminar lies in the shared experience and the creation of a "community of practice."



#### Lay Co-responsibility:

Lay leaders are not just "stewards" of a legacy but "co-creators" of the future of Jesuit education.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

The Seminar uses the UAP's as a primary framework for its final modules. Participants apply the preferences (Showing the Way to God, Walking with the Excluded, Journeying with Youth, and Caring for our Common Home) to real-world challenges facing their respective campuses.

### METHODOLOGY

The program employs a "scaffolded" learning approach combining historical context with modern application. It uses the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Experience, Reflection, Action) and emphasizes communal discernment and storytelling.

### RESULTS

- ✓ **Mission Integration:** Participants report a deeper personal connection to Jesuit values and a stronger "professional sense of purpose."
- ✓ **Leadership Development:** Leaders feel better equipped to animate the Jesuit mission within their specific disciplinary or administrative lenses.
- ✓ **Networking:** It creates a lasting community of senior leaders who share a common language and foundation for collaboration across the AJCU network.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 🎯 Ensuring the program remains accessible and relevant to a diverse group of leaders with varying religious or non-religious backgrounds.
- 🎯 Continuing to adapt the curriculum to address rapidly changing pressures in the higher education landscape (e.g., sustainability and social justice).

# The Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU) Ignatian Leadership Seminar

## FORMATION & TRAINING INITIATIVE

JEANNE F. LORD, BRITTANY FRIED, AND KEVIN D. SULLIVAN

ASSOCIATION OF JESUIT COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

## ABSTRACT

For over twenty years, the Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities has offered an "Ignatian Leadership Seminar" as the core introductory formation program for senior leaders – both administrators and faculty - who are new to Jesuit higher education or to their leadership roles. The Seminar has both regularly evolved to meet the shifting needs and characteristics of higher education leaders and has also maintained a core curriculum and approach grounded in Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian approaches to leadership. In its most recent iteration, the program forms participants in foundational topics – the life of St. Ignatius, Ignatian spirituality, Jesuit history, Ignatian pedagogy, the global mission of Jesuit education – and then guides them in application to pressing issues facing higher education through the lens of the Universal Apostolic Preferences.

## Type of practice

The Ignatian Leadership Seminar (ILS) is one of four formation programs sponsored by the Association of Jesuit College and Universities (AJCU)<sup>1</sup>.

## Objectives and Methodology

The Seminar is a nine-month, cohort-based program that invites faculty and administrators from Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States and Canada to engage more deeply with the Ignatian values and principles that underpin Jesuit higher education. It prepares university leaders who are new to Jesuit higher education, or those who are newly-appointed to senior leadership roles in their home institutions.

The ILS has its roots in conversations led by Fr. Charles Currie—then president of the AJCU—with presidents of Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States in 1999. Recognizing the emerging challenge posed by the decreasing number of Jesuits available for the higher education apostolate, they proposed a professional development program for lay faculty and **administrators** who would be selected for their

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the program, please contact Jeanne Lord (lordj@georgetown.edu) and Kevin Sullivan (kds58@georgetown.edu).

leadership potential.

The first program, held at Santa Clara University, emphasized mastery of functional areas within the university. Through lectures by leaders representing a range of departments, participants were introduced to fundamental concepts including finance, university advancement and human resources.

Over the following years, the program evolved from a functional program to its current one—a more affective model emphasizing Ignatian spirituality and the foundations of Jesuit education that are the foundation for authentic Ignatian leadership.

The program has also undergone a structural change, now beginning with monthly online sessions and culminating in a 4-day in-person capstone.

At the program's conclusion, participants should return to their home institution able to articulate the foundations of Jesuit education, and more closely connected to and energized by colleagues and programs across the AJCU network.

## Description of the Practice

The Seminar is a nine-month engagement in two parts: didactic and experiential.

First is a series of eight virtual sessions covering foundational topics of Jesuit higher education that all Jesuit institution faculty and staff should be familiar with. Key topics include: Ignatian spirituality, the life of St. Ignatius, the history of the Jesuits, Ignatian pedagogy, the international scope of Jesuit education, and Ignatian leadership.

Originally an accommodation to the pandemic in 2020, the virtual component has become a permanent part of the Seminar.

The online sessions have been well-received by participants, who appreciate the opportunity to meet other cohort members before the in-person gathering. Furthermore, introducing foundational material prior to the capstone enables a more interactive in-person experience, particularly increasing time for substantive conversation, reflection, socialization and community-building.

Following the online component, the cohort meets in person at Loyola University Chicago for four days in May. The curriculum in Chicago

balances presentations, panels and collaborative workshops with reflection and socialization time. This model affirms the Ignatian commitment to being “contemplatives in action” by promoting cross-institution dialogue and relationship building, recognizing the affective nature of the capstone experience, and emphasizing reflective and restorative time.

The Seminar, rooted in the charism of St. Ignatius, is structured around the Society of Jesus' four Apostolic Preferences (UAPs):

1. To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment;
2. To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice;
3. To accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future; and
4. To collaborate in the care of our common home.

It highlights inspirational best practices from across the AJCU network. Past examples include:

- Student affairs leaders from diverse AJCU schools incorporated the spiritual exercises and discernment (UAP 1) in an interactive workshop about responding to on-campus

challenges, ranging from mental health crises to protests.

- A site visit to Arrupe College and subsequent student panel and lunch highlighted Loyola University Chicago’s innovative approach to walking with the marginalized (UAP 2).
- The Jesuit Prison Education Network Coordinator and a current Jesuit university president discussed actionable ways to accompany young people in hope (UAP 3) through their virtual session “Uniquely Ignatian Approaches to Higher Education Challenges.”
- Participants learned about Jesuit institution leadership in innovative environmental stewardship and visited Loyola University Chicago’s School of Environmental Sustainability (UAP 4).

The Seminar is informed by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), a holistic approach to education consisting of five elements—context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation—described below:

- Each person learns from within a specific institutional and personal context.
- Rooted in the individual’s particular set of experiences.
- Learning is dependent on and deepened by

reflection about those experiences.

- Learning is made meaningful when new knowledge is put into some sort of action.
- And finally, the learner evaluates those actions and related learning that has occurred.

Examples of how the IPP is applied in the Seminar are as follows:

**Context:** The ILS seeks to understand who the participant is within the Seminar experience. It intentionally brings together individuals from diverse roles—from faculty members to athletics directors to deans, federal affairs heads, and presidents—and institutions, and acknowledges the diverse path each took to and within Jesuit higher education. For example, each participant is paired with a conversation partner to meet with at least once between the virtual sessions. As such, they are encouraged to share their personal experiences, enabling their peer to better understand the context of other colleagues serving in Jesuit higher education.

**Experience:** Seminar participants are exposed to Jesuit higher education foundations through the virtual and in-person curriculum and accompanying readings. They are provided diverse avenues to share their personal experiences in relation to the content—through small breakout

groups, workshops, leading morning reflections. Additionally, participants engage in experiential learning, particularly through site visits to “best practice” examples.

**Reflection:** Opportunities for reflection are provided at the end of each of the virtual sessions, when participants gather in small groups to reflect on the day’s topic and then share with the larger group. This continues when the group meets in person, with daily Mass and with a prayer and reflection shared by a member of the cohort to open each day. Participants are encouraged to continue this reflection when they return to their home institutions.

**Action:** In the second part of the program, the cohort meets in person for four days. During this time, they engage with experts from the AJCU network whose work reflects a faith that does justice, the lived expression of mission in action. Moving from the lecture style online sessions, participants see the embodiment of St Ignatius’ words that love shows itself more in deeds than in words when they hear from colleagues working on environmental sustainability, feeding migrants at the border, educating women and men in prison, and providing a path to education for first generation and low-income

students. The program encourages participants to find inspiration in and build networks with peers across AJCU institutions, and also within their own institution cohorts. The intention is for participants to carry forward the program’s momentum and implement new learnings—from starting a new program to more intentionally integrating Ignatian practices into their team leadership or interactions with students.

**Evaluation:** In the final day of the capstone experience, participants are presented with a case study exercise and asked to apply what they have learned to an issue at their home institution. Following the Seminar, a survey is disseminated to collect program and personal reflections. Ongoing interaction is encouraged through an ILS Alumni LinkedIn page and inviting past participants to return to lead both virtual and in-person sessions for future cohorts.

**Results and Lessons Learned:** Over the period for which we have digital records (2014-2024), 342 faculty and administrators have participated in the Seminar. We estimate that as many as 350 colleagues participated in the initial Seminar years for which we do not have complete records.

The Seminar has been enriched by the participation of many colleagues in the Jesuit educators' community. We are grateful for their energizing presence over the nine months of each program and their commitment to becoming Ignatian formed leaders.

We are indebted, as well, to the talented Seminar faculty and administrators who give their time and share their wisdom and experiences year after year. We want to share particular gratitude for Kevin O'Brien, SJ's counsel and companionship since the Seminar's inception.

Through evaluations solicited at the program's conclusion each year, we have gained valuable insights and received thoughtful suggestions that have informed the program's content and structure. In addition to incorporating the previously referenced virtual sessions, we have:

- Incorporated more interactive sessions: less "talking to" and more dialogue;
- Encouraged connection and collaboration by assigning participants a conversation partner to connect with at least once between each session, starting in October;
- Included a "Teaching Mass" in the daily Mass schedule to make the liturgy more accessible to participants who are not Catholic; and

- Reduced the Capstone experience from five to four days, acknowledging the many professional and personal demands on participants, even in summer.

The Seminar is currently exploring more robust ways to engage alumni.

In closing, in a recent survey disseminated to ILS alumni from the past decade, 88 respondents thus far were still working in Jesuit higher education. Their reflections affirmed the Seminar's mission to invite faculty and administrators to engage more deeply with the Ignatian values and principles that underpin Jesuit higher education. We want to share our gratitude for our alumni, and invite you to read some of their reflections below:

“

"I have worked at Jesuit universities for over 20 years, and Ignatian spirituality has indelibly impacted my life. For two decades the Jesuit mission has been my professional North Star, an invitation to work for something greater than myself. But the truth is, prior to participating in the Jesuit Leadership Seminar, I viewed this mission as inherently belonging to the Jesuits, members of the Society of Jesus. After participating in this formative experience, I felt empowered to view myself as a partner in mission, a companion working alongside the Jesuits to offer an applied liberal arts education that will transform the lives of our students, who will then go out and transform the world."

“

"The Seminar was useful as a non-Catholic to understand the context of Ignatian spirituality and draw the link between my work and Jesuit values."

“

"Participating in the Ignatian Leadership Seminar was a transformative experience that deepened both my personal connection to Jesuit values and my professional sense of purpose. As a layperson, it helped me move beyond an intellectual understanding of the Jesuit mission to a more personal and lived appreciation of its call to justice, discernment, and accompaniment. I came to see more clearly how vital it is for lay leaders not only to carry forward this mission but to animate it in new ways, especially as fewer Jesuits are available to lead our institutions. The seminar reminded me that we are not simply stewards of a legacy; we are co-creators of its future, responsible for educating and empowering others to carry the mission forward with integrity and imagination."



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION TRAINING INITIATIVE

## The Deglman Initiative: Formation in the Spiritual Exercises for Faculty and Staff

Erika L. Kirby, Ph.D.; Fr. Gregory Carlson, S.J.; Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.; Kyle Mullins, Ed.D.; and Max Engel, Ph.D.  
Creighton University (AJCU)

### ABSTRACT

The Deglman Initiative at Creighton University provides a semester-long formation program for faculty and staff based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. By combining daily individual prayer, weekly written reflections, and group meetings, the initiative aims to embed Ignatian spirituality into the professional and personal lives of university employees.

### MAIN GOAL

To form faculty and staff in Ignatian spirituality, foster a reflective practice, and build a sense of mission-driven community across university silos.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAPS

The initiative directly supports the preference of "Showing the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment." It focuses on providing the tools of Ignatian spirituality to the laypeople who sustain the university's mission.

### METHODOLOGY

The program uses the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, Evaluation). It follows a structured 14-week schedule derived from Kevin O'Brien's The Ignatian Adventure, moving from the "First Principle and Foundation" through the four "Weeks" of the Exercises.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The weekly reflection papers are crucial for accountability and personalized spiritual accompaniment.

Faculty and staff are hungry for spiritual depth and "the kind of thing they came to a Jesuit university to find."

Group sharing fosters a unique vulnerability that strengthens institutional culture.

### RESULTS

#### Internalization of Mission

Participants report a deeper connection to the university's Jesuit identity.

#### Communal Bonds

The program breaks down departmental silos, creating a "community of seekers" among diverse staff and faculty.

#### Personal Transformation

Weekly reflections show evidence of spiritual growth, increased self-awareness, and a greater capacity for discernment in daily life.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Expanding the program to reach more participants across different shifts or remote locations.
- Creating "alumni" groups or follow-up sessions to sustain the reflective practice after the 14-week program ends.
- Developing more formal assessment tools to measure the long-term impact on professional practice and decision-making.

# The Deglman Initiative: Formation in the Spiritual Exercises for Faculty and Staff

## TEACHING & LEARNING

ERIKA L. KIRBY, PH.D.; FR. GREGORY CARLSON, S.J.; FR. LARRY GILICK, S.J.; KYLE MULLINS, ED.D.; AND MAX ENGEL, PH.D.

CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

The Deglman Initiative was created to form Creighton faculty and staff in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and encourage ongoing reflective practice. Throughout a semester, participants (a) commit to pray for 20-30 minutes each day, reflecting on the text of particular exercises, (b) write a brief weekly prayer reflection describing prayer experiences and receive written comments from facilitators, and (c) meet weekly as a group with a facilitator to share their prayer experiences. In this article, we outline the schedule of this program for all three components across 14 weeks. We describe the papers and meetings in more detail, with the goal that other institutions could replicate the program. We offer results from multiple semesters of pre-and post-experience surveys to illustrate spiritual development in participants because of the Deglman Initiative. Finally, we offer some lessons learned, particularly the idea of "spiritual accompaniment," and describe a few changes to improve the program.

**Description of/Type of Practice:**

The Deglman Center of Ignatian Spirituality<sup>1</sup> at Creighton University offers a formative opportunity for groups to experience the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius through the “Deglman Initiative.” In this one semester program, participants pray daily for 20-30 minutes, write about their prayer experiences, and then meet weekly for 75 minutes to discuss readings and reflections.

**Context for Practice:**

The Deglman Initiative was created by Fr. Gregory Carlson, S.J. and Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J. It was inspired by the success of their Theology course on the Spiritual Exercises for Creighton undergraduates (see Kirby, Mullins, Carlson & Gillick, 2024). Since that course proved to be a transformational experience for students, Fathers Carlson and Gillick wanted “to offer the same deepening experience to Creighton’s faculty, those most charged with carrying the University’s mission in the future” (Deglman Initiative Invitation). The experience was recently expanded to also include staff groups.

**Objectives and Methodology**

The objective of this practice is to ground Creighton faculty and staff in the Spiritual Exercises

of St. Ignatius and encourage ongoing reflective practice. In more spiritual language, the objective is “helping people be who they are created to be” (Fr. Carlson). This is accomplished in a 14-week format. During those weeks, participants (a) commit to pray for 20-30 minutes each day, reflecting on the text of particular exercises, especially as explained in *The Ignatian Adventure* by Fr. Kevin O’Brien, S.J.; (b) write a brief (confidential) weekly prayer reflection describing prayer experiences and receive written comments from facilitators; and (c) meet weekly as a group to share their prayer experiences, including struggles/tensions and insights/consolations.

The weekly meetings have a ritual; at the beginning, everyone stands in silence for about 30 seconds, after which a song is played, and a poem is read to bring participants into a prayerful, reflective space.<sup>2</sup> Once people are seated, there is a sharing of news where “joys are shared and griefs are halved.” The following week’s assignment is then discussed, and after that, the floor is open, and participants are “invited” to share what has come up in their prayer life over the past week (no one is ever obligated to speak). During that time, facilitators work to bring conversation toward the topics of the past week if/as possible and conclude with a “maxim” where one facilitator

shares their own spiritual wisdom for several minutes. The following is an abridgement of the methods of the Initiative, based on the Spring 2025 schedule.

*Week 1*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* pp. 1-28
- Discussing: Echoes of Ignatius in your own life, Hopes and fears for this process
- Writing: Describe your own turning points and your response to the Principle and Foundation in either of its formulations—what challenges or consoles you?

*Week 2*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* pp. 75-87 and “The Prodigal Son” (Lk 15: 11-32)
- Discussing: Life’s turning points, the Principle and Foundation, and Images of God
- Writing: Write about your experience of the Examen and what “The Prodigal Son” touches in you about being a “loved sinner.”

*Week 3*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* First Week, Days 2-5 with “The Colloquy” (pp. 91-96)
- Discussing: Examen experience and Prodigal

Son

- Writing: What is it like for you to pray over God’s love and your sinfulness?

*Week 4*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* “The Call of Christ, Our King” (pp. 153-57) and pp. 121-131, including “Day 1” and “Day 2” and praying over the Incarnation
- Discussing: Questions about sinfulness and God
- Writing: What is it like for you to pray the Exercise on the Kingdom of Christ? How are you moved to respond?

*Week 5*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* pp. 131-152; Pray with the birth and hidden life of Jesus and continue on to pray with Jesus as human, Jesus leaving home, and Jesus’ baptism (e.g. Matthew 3:13-17)
- Discussing: Kingdom, Incarnation, Annunciation
- Writing: What is it like relating to Jesus in your praying?

*Week 6*

- Reading/Praying: *The Ignatian Adventure* pp. 168-71; Reflect on Satan’s strategy, in your

life and around us, and in some of your praying, be with Jesus experiencing temptation in the desert (Mt 4:1-11)

- Discussing: Experiences with the human Jesus...and Satan's strategy
- Writing: Where can you see the Satanic strategy at work in your life before and now?

#### Week 7

- Reading/Praying: The Ignatian Adventure pp. 171-175; Reflect on Jesus' strategy, in your life and around us, and in some of your praying, be with Jesus proclaiming the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-16)
- Discussing: Follow-up on the Satanic strategy + reactions to Jesus' strategy
- Writing: Where can you see the Jesus strategy at work in your life before and now?

#### Week 8

- Reading/Praying: Contemplate several passages where Jesus invites a disciple, for example: Lk 5:1-11; Lk 9:57-62; Jn 1:35-51; Mt 9:9-13; Mk 1:16-20; also read the rules for discernment of spirits
- Discussing: The Jesus strategy at work in my life before and now + Beatitudes.
- Writing: Knowing that God "leads us through," how do you discern, own, and claim your deepest

desires?

#### Week 9

- Reading/Praying: Pray passages where Jesus rescues people from hiding and of Jesus with women: Lk 7:36; Jn 4 (Samaritan woman); Jn 8 (woman taken in adultery); Lk 8:40
- Discussing: Experiences of discernment
- Writing: What is your experience of Jesus with women and those rescued?

#### Week 10

- Reading/Praying: Pray with Jesus inviting others to decisions, like the rich young man; Pray with Jesus deciding: Jn 12; Pray the three classes of people as a way of responding to Jesus
- Discussing: Your experience of Jesus with women and those rescued
- Writing: "To what might Jesus be calling you?" (not vocational options, but the next step in your discipleship experience)

#### Week 11

- Reading/Praying: Pray Philippians 2, Journey to Jerusalem, Entry into Jerusalem, Controversies with authorities.
- Discussing: To what might Jesus be calling me?

- Writing: What is your experience of Jesus facing his difficult call?

#### Week 12

- Reading/Praying: Spend time with Jesus in the agony in the garden, then be a disciple following Jesus through his passion and death... or Simon of Cyrene... or a Roman soldier... or one of the disciples running away... or Peter in his denial of Jesus; also pray the Stations of the Cross and the four Servant Songs from Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12)
- Discussing: Jesus facing invitation
- Writing: What has your praying been like with the passion and crucifixion? Why did Jesus have to suffer?

#### Week 13

- Reading/Praying: Pray the fourth week (The Ignatian Adventure Week 27, p. 240) and read O'Brien's introduction to this "week" (p. 233); pray the resurrection, including Jesus' meeting with his mother and then continue risen life contemplations (The Ignatian Adventure, Weeks 27 and 28)
- Discussing: Praying the passion and death
- Writing: How has this experience affected what praying is like for you?

#### Week 14

- Reading/Praying: Pray the "Contemplation to Celebrate Divine Love" that closes the Exercises (The Ignatian Adventure, pp. 250-54)
- Discussing: How has this experience affected what praying is like for you? Has it affected your sense of God?
- Writing: What has been gift in this experience for you?

When completing their short writings, participants are encouraged to pray before writing the essay to write about their prayer experiences and ideally experience essay writing as a reflection on reflective prayer. Their expectations are to "go deep" into one or two experiences/ideas (versus many) and explore their feelings by (a) including specific examples from their Ignatian contemplation and imaginative prayer, (b) writing their questions as an opportunity to grow with God, and (c) using the first person "I/me/my" to make their reflections more personal.

#### Results Obtained

Erika Kirby and Kyle Mullins analyzed the writing done by Deglman Initiative participants (through 2023) on their pre-and post-experience. Specifically, people were asked two questions: (a) How aware are you of your "interior life" – of how you

approach yourself, other people, life and decision making? And (b) How would you describe God's relationship with you?

### **Awareness of "Interior Life"**

Before the initiative, many individuals described themselves as self-aware, with some noting they were "very" or "keenly" aware. Awareness was often linked to self-reflection, journaling, seeking guidance, or paying attention to interactions with others. However, many also acknowledged struggles and/or areas for growth. Some felt their awareness ebbed and flowed, and so approaching decisions often involved seeking logic, relying on others, or could lead to "analysis paralysis". After the Deglman Initiative, responses indicated several key shifts:

- **Increased Overall Awareness:** A notable number of individuals reported being more aware of their interior life, and some who felt aware beforehand described a deepened awareness.
- **Shift in Approach to Self:** This became notably gentler, accepting, and grace filled as participants moved from being harsh or overly critical of themselves. The concept of God's acceptance influenced their self-perception.
- **Shift in Approach to Others:** There was also a

move towards approaching others with more grace, kindness, understanding, and less judgment. For some, the ability to "find God in others" was a significant insight.

- **Shift in Approach to Life:** Many found more peace and gratitude in daily life as they learned to be more present in moments and saw challenges or "interruptions" as invitations. Participants had increased trust that God is present, which seemed to lessen anxiety.
- **Shift in Approach to Decision-Making:** Decision-making became more thoughtful, reflective, and centered on discernment. Participants learned to listen for God's guidance from within and became more comfortable with not having all the answers or immediate clarity.
- **Increased Connection to Spirituality/God:** The interior life was seen as directly connected to one's relationship with God. There was a growing awareness of God's presence in daily moments and a realization that nurturing the relationship with God was a priority.

Many participants explicitly stated that the Deglman Initiative, through practices like the daily Examen, reflection, prayer, and group discussion, was instrumental in bringing about these changes in their awareness and approach to their

interior life.

### **God's Relationship with You**

Before the Deglman Initiative, participants described their relationship with God in various ways. Many felt God was "always there" and saw God as unconditionally loving and accepting, a silent but faithful protector, guide, and source of wisdom. Some described God as a companion, but concomitantly noted feeling a lack of intimacy, like the relationship was superficial. They felt they needed to put in more effort to feel God's presence more richly; several people even acknowledged neglecting this relationship due to being busy or preoccupied with worldly things. A few felt the relationship was distant or tenuous, struggled with feeling God was present, or questioned God's existence. Some even felt God might be disappointed or frustrated with them, viewing it like a parent/child relationship.

After the Deglman Initiative, while some foundational descriptions remained consistent (e.g., God is unconditionally loving, accepting, present, and guiding), several significant changes and deepenings emerged in descriptions of "God's relationship with you."

- **Increased Closeness and Intimacy:** Many

described the relationship as much closer, more personal, and more intimate, shifting from being acquaintances or superficial to a deeper connection.

- **God as a Friend and Companion:** A prominent shift was describing God as a friend or companion, someone to listen to and "hang out with." This replaced (or supplemented) the more distant "guide" or "parental" views some had previously.
- **Shift to a More Bidirectional Relationship:** The relationship was increasingly perceived as mutual and bidirectional. Participants felt God was actively inviting them to conversation, was "knocking on [their] door", and even that God had a relationship with them, not just the other way around. The idea of God finding them, rather than just them finding God, became significant.
- **Greater Sense of Acceptance and Delight:** Responses often highlighted a deeper sense of God's acceptance, including learning that doubts and frustrations are normal...and not signs of failure. A profound insight for some was realizing that God likes them as well as loves them and delights in them. This replaced views of God being disappointed or judgmental.
- **Finding God in Daily Life and Others:** God's

presence “alongside me” was felt more readily in friends, family, and strangers and in small, mundane moments. The directive to “seek God in all things” was emphasized, particularly in relationships with others.

- **Increased Appreciation for Jesus:** There was an increased appreciation for God sending Jesus in human form. For some, the relationship became more Jesus-centric as they found themselves more comfortable talking with Jesus as a friend and a role model for humanity.
- **Changed Approach to Challenges and Difficulties:** Participants reframed challenges as “invitations” and reported being more likely to turn to God during hard times and feeling less anxious because of increased trust that God is with them.
- **Deeper Listening and Conversation:** While some struggled with consistent prayer before, many post-Initiative responses highlighted learning to listen for God within and engaging in more conversation with God. The desire for intimacy and regular communication returned or deepened.
- **Acceptance of Self and Imperfection:** A renewed understanding of God’s unconditional acceptance helped participants be less judgmental and critical of themselves and accept their shortcomings, knowing they are loved as

they are. The concept of being a loved sinner was a key insight, and realizations about not having to earn God’s love brought feelings of liberation and freedom.

Many explicitly stated that the Deglman Initiative was instrumental in these changes, helping them deepen their relationship, providing a different view on how to relate to God, and making God’s presence more perceptible and comforting. Overall, the shift reflects a movement from descriptions of a relationship that could be distant, dutiful, or inconsistent, to one characterized by greater closeness, intimacy, mutual presence, comfort, acceptance, and friendship.

### Lessons Learned

One lesson learned is the frame of “spiritual accompaniment” being helpful for facilitators who have not been formally trained to lead spiritual direction. This acknowledges that participants are volunteering to engage the Spiritual Exercises—but may not be sure what they are getting into—and so facilitators are “just accompanying them in this process to go more deeply into a relationship with God to the extent that they want to be accompanied” (Max Engel). It also helps faculty facilitators reframe their typical role as teacher; Fr. Carlson has mentored Max with lan-

guage like “you’re thinking like a teacher...you’re not thinking like a spiritual guide.”

Lessons have also been learned in how to provide written feedback on the papers, as that is the closest the Deglman Initiative comes to spiritual direction. Perhaps the biggest guideline is to ask questions and do not deliver answers—which can be counterintuitive for faculty. Part of accompaniment is to help participants discern what their desires mean, or to follow that desire further, and that happens through asking questions like “Where is this desire coming from?” and by encouraging the substitution of “want” when participants write things like “have/should/need”.

Outside of this central directive, lessons are to (a) be concise with feedback, (b) note important insights, (c) invite “I” statements, (d) remind participants that “indifference” leads to openness, and (e) affirm several things: gratitude in all forms, that doubts are a part of faith, that experiencing and recognizing feelings is good, and that recognizing temptation(s) is productive. And when someone self-denigrates, facilitators respond with something like “Would Jesus say that to you? No. Don’t let yourself say that to you, either.”

Facilitators have also learned lessons in adapta-

bility. One of those instances is when faculty who do not identify as Christian still decide to engage the Deglman Initiative. In those times, the (Christian/Catholic) language of the program is not re-framed, but the participants “take it in their own context” and facilitators respond considering that background (including agnosticism and atheism). Since the Spiritual Exercises are designed to meet people where they are, they can be flexible to help all sorts of people find and respond to what is working inside their hearts, in whatever vernacular or worldview resonates.

### Opportunities for Improvement

Across the years, “tweaks” have been made to improve the participant (and facilitator) experience. The Deglman Initiative now utilizes an online learning platform, and so papers can be turned in digitally, but more importantly, commented on electronically by each facilitator so they can spend more time posing questions to help the participants deepen their experience. Furthermore, there are suggested comments for facilitators to use in their responses for those who may be newer to the Spiritual Exercises.

An improvement that will start in Fall 2025 is to have a biographical survey of participants before the Deglman Initiative begins. While the introduc-

tory/getting-to-know-you session is helpful, facilitators sometimes still find out new things about people late in the semester that would have been helpful from the beginning. This shift is in keeping with the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, where context is central so that “as St. Ignatius directed, we [can] recognize how the time and space we occupy, and the socio-geo-political happenings of our day have relevance” (Colaccio, 2022). If facilitators have more context on their participants, it will ideally lead to deeper insights in the back-and-forth of discerning desires and “helping people be who they are created to be.”

It is the hope of Fathers Carlson and Gillick that other Jesuit/Ignatian educational institutions will take on this formative practice for their faculty and staff. The Deglman Initiative has been a welcome opportunity for many faculty who have found solidarity with like-minded others and encouragement across university silos (e.g., “This is the kind of thing I came to Creighton to find!”), and we imagine this will happen in other Jesuit universities as well.

### Endnotes

1. The Deglman Center for Ignatian Spirituality was created at Creighton University in February 1990 to “perpetuate the spirituality that the Rev.

Francis Deglman, S.J., exemplified and imparted to students...” by promoting, explaining and encouraging the Ignatian identity of our educational mission. The center provides spiritual direction, retreats, spirituality workshops and related services to students, faculty and staff.

2. Materials used in the Deglman Initiative are available upon request, including a more detailed schedule, songs, poems, sample paper feedback, etc.

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BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

## The Kircher Network Canisius Formation in Jesuit Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education

Susana Di Trolío, Ph.D., Lidia Fioravanti; Gonzalo Villagrán, SJ, and Josep Maria Serrano, SJ.; Kircher Network

### ABSTRACT

The Canisius Formation is an annual networking formation course offered by the Kircher Network for faculty and staff of Jesuit higher education institutions in Europe and the Near East. Set within a post-secular European context characterized by religious pluralism and institutional secularization, the program provides an integrative experience deeply informed by the Ignatian charism without requiring specific religious affiliation. It serves as a best practice for sustaining Jesuit identity through networking and reflective meaning-making.

### METHODOLOGY

The course follows the Ignatian Pedagogy (experience, reflection, action, and evaluation) through a hybrid design:

- **Hybrid Format:** Combines a three-day in-person immersive experience at symbolic Jesuit locations with a series of online webinars.
- **Three Dimensions:**
  - **Intellectual:** Lectures by scholars and curated readings.
  - **Interiority:** Structured moments for personal reflection, prayer, and the Ignatian Examen.
  - **Relational:** Using networking as a formative tool, emphasizing peer dialogue and small-group discussions to build trust and shared mission.

### MAIN GOALS

#### Foundational Knowledge:

To provide a foundation in Ignatian identity, spirituality, and mission, rooted in the life of St. Ignatius.

#### Institutional Depth:

To deepen the understanding of the core characteristics of Jesuit higher education, including mission-driven teaching, research, and governance.

#### Community Building:

To foster a sense of belonging to a global Ignatian community, strengthening the apostolic mission across borders.

### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

**Showing the way to God:** By introducing Ignatian spirituality and discernment as frameworks for professional life

**Walking with the excluded:** By encouraging institutional responses to social, political, and ethical challenges

**Accompanying young people:** By strengthening the mission coherence of those who directly lead and teach students

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### Cultural Adaptability:

The charism must be presented in forms that are meaningful across diverse European cultural contexts

#### Need for Reflection:

Participants require structured time to connect lived experiences with course content through prompts and dialogue

#### Practical Application:

Faculty and administrators seek concrete expressions of how Jesuit values are embodied in real-world institutional decision-making and socio-political contexts

### RESULTS

- ✓ Increased clarity regarding Jesuit identity and mission
- ✓ A deeper sense of vocational meaning in their professional roles
- ✓ An enhanced appreciation for networking and collaboration as essential tools for the mission

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Kircher Network plans to expand the program into a **year-round formation ecosystem** by:

- 🌀 Implementing regular webinars and online seminars on leadership and identity
- 🌀 Creating small-group discussion tracks to sustain peer learning between cohorts
- 🌀 Developing systematic alumni consultation to identify and respond to emerging formation needs

# The Kircher Network Canisius Formation in Jesuit Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education

## FORMATION

SUSANA DI TROLIO, PH.D., LIDIA FIORAVANTI; GONZALO VILLAGRÁN, SJ, AND JOSEP MARIA SERRANO, SJ.

KIRCHER NETWORK

## ABSTRACT

The Canisius Formation: Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education Institutions is an annual networking formation course offered by the Kircher Network to faculty and staff of Jesuit higher education institutions in Europe and the Near East. Designed within a post-secular European context marked by religious pluralism, institutional secularisation, and cultural diversity, the program provides an integrative formation experience that does not presume religious affiliation or faith expression, yet is deeply informed by the Ignatian charism.

Through a hybrid methodology combining in-person immersion and online engagement, the Canisius Formation integrates intellectual inquiry, personal reflection, and relational learning. Participants—faculty members and senior administrators from diverse national, cultural, professional, and spiritual backgrounds—are invited to connect their lived professional experience with the mission and core characteristics of Jesuit higher education. The program fosters reflective meaning-making around values, leadership, and institutional responsibility rather than confessional instruction.

A distinctive contribution of the Canisius Formation is its explicit use of networking as a formative methodology. Reflecting and learning alongside peers from different Jesuit institutions strengthens their mutual personal and institutional links and the participants' sense of belonging to a shared European, Near Eastern, and global apostolic mission, broadens institutional perspecti-

ves, and enhances mission coherence across borders. The Canisius formation gets inspiration and support from UNIJES<sup>1</sup>, 30-year-old tradition of working on identity and mission, but enriching it with a more European and universal perspectives. As the first European- and Near East-wide networking formation program in Jesuit higher education, the Canisius Formation constitutes a best practice for sustaining Ignatian identity and mission in diverse, post-secular academic environments.

<sup>1</sup> Association of Jesuit Universities in Spain.

**Description of the Practice**

The Canisius Formation: Identity and Mission of Jesuit Higher Education Institutions is an annual formation course offered by the Kircher Network, the Jesuit higher education network in Europe and the Near East and one of the six regional networks of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU). The program is conceived as an introductory, immersive, and hybrid formation experience for faculty and staff of Jesuit higher education institutions who wish to deepen their understanding of Ignatian identity, spirituality, and mission as lived in contemporary universities.

The Canisius Formation responds to a growing need within Jesuit higher education: to provide accessible, intellectually rigorous, and experientially grounded formation opportunities that foster a shared apostolic culture among increasingly diverse academic communities.

Rather than functioning as faith formation or catechesis, it offers a reflective space where participants can explore the meaning of their professional roles, personal values, and institutional responsibilities. The program is informed by the Ignatian charism while fully respecting religious, cultural, and worldview diversity.

First offered in 2024, the Canisius Formation represents the first European- and Near East-wide networking formation program explicitly designed for university leaders, faculty, and staff across Jesuit institutions. It integrates personal reflection, intellectual engagement, and relational learning within a networked context, enabling participants to situate their own institutional realities within the broader European, Near Eastern, and global Jesuit higher education ecosystem.

**Canisius Formation’s  
Template following the 2025 edition**

| Day 1  | Day 2  | Day 3  |
|--|--|--|
| 8:30 Prayer<br>8:45 Welcome/Orientation<br>9:00 Trust-building activity<br>9:45 Time for writing one’s own autobiography<br>COFFEE BREAK<br>11:15 <b>Session 1. Ignatius until his arrival in Rome. Reflecting on own vocation/purpose.</b><br>12:00 Discussion with the speaker<br>12:30 Personal reading<br>13:00 Small groups discussion: What have you learned from your “cannon ball moments” | 8:45 Prayer<br>9:00 Personal reflection: My experience in my institution<br>9:30 <b>Session 3: The mission of the Society of Jesus and the contribution of higher education to it.</b><br>COFFEE BREAK<br>11:00 Personal reading of texts<br>11:45 Small group discussion: Rereading my experience in my institution<br>13:15 Discussion with the speakers | 8:30 Prayer<br>8:45 <b>Session 4: Teaching, Research and Management in a University: Ignatian keys.</b><br>COFFEE BREAK<br>11:00 Testimonies from participants of teaching, research and management.<br>12:00 Personal reading<br>12:30 Small group discussion<br>13:15 Plenary  |
| Lunch  | Lunch  | Lunch  |
| 15:00 <b>Session 2: Ignatius as General in Rome. Developing our own vocation/purpose in institutions.</b><br>15:50 Time for personal reading and reflection<br>COFFEE BREAK<br>17:00 Conversation with the speaker<br>17:45 - 18:30 Visit to St. Ignatius birthplace.<br>18:30 - 18:45 Examen of the day at the conversion chapel.<br>19:00 - 19:15 Visit to Loyola Basilica.                      | Trip to Bilbao<br><br><b>Visit of Deusto University as a paradigmatic case study of Jesuit higher education</b><br><br>Visit to Bilbao city  | 15:00 Personal reading<br>15:30 <b>Session 5: Panel on Jesuit Higher Education Networking: The Kircher Network and the International Association of Jesuit Universities</b><br>16:15 Dialogue with the panel<br>17:00 Small group discussion: Canisius formation as a process<br>17:45 Ignatian examen of the day<br>18:00 Survey and evaluation<br>18:30 Eucharist at the conversion chapel |
| Dinner   | Dinner at Deusto University  | Dinner   |
| 20:30 Social   | Return to Loyola   | 20:30 Social   |

Apart from the in-person meeting, the Canisius formation includes participation in three webinars:

- **A preliminary webinar** where participants can get to know each other and the program can be presented.
- **Two subsequent webinars** by important

scholars on Leadership, focusing on two aspects: leadership as a secular field of research, and Ignatian leadership as our approach to this field.

**Type of Experience**

The Canisius Formation is both a formation course and a networking program. It combines

structured academic input, guided reflection, peer learning, and community-building activities.

The experience aims to develop an integrated pedagogy to help participants smoothly enter into the Jesuit charism through prayer, intellectual lectures, personal reading, small group discussions, plenary sessions, the Ignatian examen, and leisure time together. It also seeks to create deep links among participants that will help to build a larger network.

Its hybrid design includes:

- A three-day in-person immersive experience hosted at historically and symbolically significant Jesuit locations.
- A series of online sessions and webinars that extend learning, reflection, and networking beyond the residential component.

The course is offered annually and is open to faculty members, administrators, and institutional leaders of Kircher Network member institutions in Europe and the Near East.

### 3. Context

The Canisius Formation operates within the complex context of European and Near Eastern Jesuit higher education, marked by pluralism,

institutional secularisation, and cultural and religious diversity. Most Jesuit universities and faculties in these regions function in secularised environments where explicit religious language may be unfamiliar or even contested. At the same, these environments can be also described as post-secular in the sense that religious language is rediscovered anew in a fresh and positive way. Faculty and staff often come from a wide range of personal, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds.

In this context, the Canisius Formation wants to preserve and convey a particular charism and tradition—the Jesuit higher education tradition—presenting it in an open and inclusive way. It does not presume religious affiliation nor seek to transmit doctrine. Instead, it draws on the Catholic Christian tradition as expressed through Ignatian spirituality to provide reflective tools, interpretive frameworks, and shared narratives that help participants connect their work to a broader educational and social mission.

The program also addresses structural realities of European and Near Eastern Jesuit higher education: relatively small institutions dispersed across countries and linguistic regions, facing

common challenges related to governance, leadership succession, identity, and mission sustainability. By bringing participants together across borders, the Canisius Formation leverages the strength of the network itself as a formative environment.

### 4. Objectives and Methodology

#### Objectives

The Canisius Formation pursues three interconnected objectives:

1. To provide a foundation in Ignatian identity, spirituality, and mission, rooted in the life of Ignatius of Loyola and the historical development of Jesuit education.
2. To deepen understanding of the core characteristics of Jesuit higher education, including mission-driven teaching, research, leadership, and institutional governance.
3. To foster a sense of belonging to a European, Near Eastern, and global Ignatian community, strengthening participants' identification with the shared apostolic mission of Jesuit higher education beyond their own institutions.

#### Course Components

The academic and formative content is structured around four core components:

- Key moments in the life of Ignatius of Loyola

as a reference for vocational discernment and institutional mission.

- The Jesuit understanding of mission and the core characteristics of Jesuit higher education institutions.
- The Jesuit higher education network ecosystem, including the role of the Kircher Network and the IAJU.
- Key elements of the Ignatian Leadership approach.

#### Methodology

The Canisius Formation follows the best traditions of Ignatian Pedagogy, integrating experience, reflection, action, and evaluation.

Its methodology attends to three interrelated dimensions:

- **Intellectual:** lectures by distinguished Jesuit and lay scholars and practitioners, supported by curated readings and key documents.
- **Interiority:** structured moments of personal reflection, optional prayer opportunities, and guided discernment prompts.
- **Relational:** peer dialogue, small-group discussions, and informal exchanges that foster trust, mutual learning, and network building.

Pedagogical tools include summaries of key

texts, mind maps, and infographics to support accessibility and shared understanding. Participants are given dedicated time for reading, reflection, and group conversation, reinforcing depth over content accumulation.

### 5. Connection to the Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs)

The Canisius Formation contributes directly to three of the four Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences:

- **Showing the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment:** by introducing Ignatian spirituality as a reflective framework for personal and professional life.
- **Walking with the excluded:** by situating Jesuit higher education within broader social, political, and ethical challenges and encouraging mission-driven institutional responses.
- **Accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future:** by strengthening the identity and mission coherence of those who teach, lead, and accompany students.

### 6. Results

To date, the Kircher Network has offered two cohorts of the Canisius Formation:

- **First cohort (2024, Vienna):** 19 participants from 12 Jesuit universities and centres in nine European countries, including presidents, deans, general directors, and faculty members.
- **Second cohort (2025, Loyola Sanctuary, Azpeitia):** 17 participants from 10 Kircher member institutions across eight countries in Europe and the Near East (Sweden, Belgium, Poland, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal), with a balanced representation of faculty (8) and administrative leaders (9).

Participants consistently report:

- Increased clarity about Jesuit identity and mission in higher education.
- A clearer sense of vocational meaning in their professional roles.
- Enhanced understanding of the value of networking and collaboration for mission.

The 2025 edition was complemented by follow-up webinars on Ignatian Leadership and Mission, including sessions on leadership transitions and discernment-based leadership, reinforcing continuity and sustained formation.

### 7. Lessons Learned

Several key lessons have emerged from the

initial cohorts:

- Canisius Formation helps develop ways of presenting the Jesuit charism in forms that are meaningful across a plurality of cultural contexts. This involves learning how to integrate diverse habits, styles of social interaction, rhythms of daily life, perceptions of the Church, and practices of personal sharing, etc., that are present in the varied societies of Europe and the Near East.
- Canisius Formation highlights the need to develop a shared understanding of identity and mission among Jesuit universities across the European provinces, which have historically cultivated a wide diversity of approaches to institutional engagement, and it contributes to the formation of that common understanding.
- Participants need time and structure for reflection. In response, the second cohort introduced reflective prompts at the beginning and end of sessions, connecting participants' lived experience with course content through personal reflection, partner dialogue, and group conversation.
- Participants seek concrete expressions of mission. Faculty and administrators want to see how Jesuit values and documents are embodied in real institutional practices.

Reflection and discussion prompts are therefore most effective when explicitly connected to participants' own roles, decision-making responsibilities, and socio-political contexts.

These insights have strengthened the program's experiential depth and relevance, making the Canisius Formation both personally meaningful and institutionally impactful.

### 8. Opportunities for Improvement and Future Development

The Canisius Formation provides a structured framework that offers an important opportunity to organize and advance work on identity and mission both within individual centres and across the network as a whole.

Building on the success of the two editions, the Kircher Network plans to expand the Canisius Formation into a year-round formation ecosystem. Future initiatives include:

- **Regular webinars and online seminars** on identity, mission, and leadership to provide continuous formation opportunities.
- **Small-group discussions** to sustain peer learning, collaboration, and accountability between cohorts.

- **Systematic alumni consultation** to identify relationships, peer accountability, and a sense of belonging to a broader Ignatian community. emerging formation needs and relevant themes for future programming. Faculty and leaders leave the program with deeper clarity about their vocational purpose, enhanced capacity to align institutional practices with Jesuit mission, and a strengthened commitment to collaborative leadership.

These initiatives aim to consolidate a living community of practice around Jesuit identity and mission in European and Near Eastern higher education, ensuring that formation remains dynamic, contextually relevant, and responsive to participants' evolving professional and institutional realities.

### **9. Conclusion: Why the Canisius Formation Is a Best Practice**

The Canisius Formation exemplifies a best practice in Jesuit higher education because it combines human-centred formation, networked methodology, and strategic reinforcement of Jesuit identity and mission. By bringing together faculty, administrators, and institutional leaders from across Europe and the Near East, the program creates a unique space for reflection, dialogue, and collaboration—one in which participants learn not only about Jesuit identity in theory but also experience it in practice through shared encounters with peers.

Its hybrid design ensures that learning continues beyond the classroom, fostering sustained

relationships, peer accountability, and a sense of belonging to a broader Ignatian community. Faculty and leaders leave the program with deeper clarity about their vocational purpose, enhanced capacity to align institutional practices with Jesuit mission, and a strengthened commitment to collaborative leadership.

By leveraging the network itself as a formative tool, the Canisius Formation enhances mission coherence across institutions, providing a model for how universities and colleges can sustain and transmit Jesuit identity in increasingly diverse and post-secular contexts. Its impact is both human and institutional: participants grow personally and professionally, while their institutions benefit from stronger leadership, shared values, and deeper mission integration. In short, the Canisius Formation demonstrates how intentional, networked formation can reinforce Jesuit identity and mission in a way that is intellectually rigorous, relationally rich, and practically transformative.



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

### THL 471: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

Rev. Gregory I. Carlson, S.J. and Rev. Larry D. Gillick, S.J.  
Creighton University (AJCU)

#### ABSTRACT

The article describes a transformative academic course (THL 471) at Creighton University that allows senior students to fulfill an academic requirement while undergoing the Spiritual Exercises. Through a blend of prayer, journaling, and confidential group sharing, the course provides a deep spiritual experience that has been so successful it has expanded to include faculty and staff formation.

#### MAIN GOALS

To help students **experience the transformative power of the Spiritual Exercises** and to provide a **space for discernment** as they transition out of university life.

#### METHODOLOGY

The methodology includes:

- 1) Individual daily prayer (20-30 minutes)
- 2) Weekly reflection papers reviewed by Jesuits
- 3) Confidential small-group and large-group sharing, and
- 4) Ritualized class meetings that begin and end with specific Ignatian symbols or songs

#### CONNECTION WITH THE UAPS

The program is a direct implementation of "**Showing the Way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and Discernment.**" It provides young adults with the Ignatian tools to listen to their lives and find God in all things.

#### LESSONS LEARNED



##### Confidentiality is Crucial

Creating a "sacred space" where students feel safe to be vulnerable is essential for the Exercises to work in a classroom.



##### The Power of the Invitation

Personal recruitment by Jesuits is more effective than standard advertising.



##### Writing as Prayer

The requirement to write reflections helps students process their prayer and allows for personalized "spiritual accompaniment" from the instructors.

#### RESULTS

##### Life-Changing Impact

Students report profound personal growth and a shift in perspective regarding their future careers and relationships

##### High Engagement

The course consistently receives high academic evaluations and strong personal testimonies.

##### Expansion

The success led to the creation of the "Deglman Initiative" for faculty and staff, reaching over 140 participants

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



**Better Assessment Tools:** Developing ways to measure "personal spiritual growth" more accurately beyond standard university course evaluations.



**Sustainability:** Managing the growth of faculty and staff groups without losing the intimacy of the small-group format.



**Data Mining:** Continuing to analyze the decades of student answers to identify long-term patterns in spiritual development.

# Theology 471: An Experiment That Has Worked: The Spiritual Exercises as a Course for

## FORMATION

REV. GREGORY I. CARLSON, S.J. AND REV. LARRY D. GILICK, S.J.  
CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

This article reports on a successful course that combines academic knowledge of Jesuit spirituality with the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises. Experience has helped its two Jesuit creators to fashion a way of helping undergraduate seniors experience the challenge of the Exercises as they complete an academic requirement. The article describes various best practices that come together in making this an unusual and highly transformative experience for students. These include the selection and preparation of student participants, the requirements of prayer and writing, and beginning and ending rituals to the class meetings. Within those confidential meetings students share first in smaller groups and then in the whole group of 25. The article also describes "helps" including two of C.S. Lewis' works, meetings with spiritual guides, and theological reflections with one of the founding faculty. The two Jesuit writers reflect on what they have learned about young people today, their faith formation, and their spirituality. The authors describe finally what they have done to engage and form Jesuit and lay colleagues to guide this experience in the future.

### Context

Two experienced Jesuits have developed a course in which undergraduate seniors make the Spiritual Exercises as an academic course in the curriculum offered by Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska (USA).

Creighton University has more than 4,400 undergraduate and 4,300 graduate and professional students who have, as a community, enjoyed a lively shared sense of the Jesuit mission for a long time. By way of example, undergraduate students regularly congregate around Campus Ministry and the Schlegel Center for Social Justice, participate in large numbers in campus liturgies, travel on service and justice trips, and serve throughout the city of Omaha. Lay and religious Chaplains and Jesuits serve graduate and professional students. The Jesuit community remains large and dynamic, and non-Jesuit faculty talk regularly about the common mission.

### Occasion

We two senior Jesuits found ourselves at an unusual point ten years ago. One of us is a veteran teacher with experience in Classics, Literature, and Theology. The other is a seasoned

director of the Exercises and longtime leader of the Deglman Center for Ignatian Spirituality. He found himself searching for new ways to offer the Spiritual Exercises to undergraduate students. Both of us had offered, together and individually, many retreats, recollection events, and orientations. As is perhaps inevitable for people who have survived decades at a particular school, we were becoming known as “legends,” a description that makes us both smile.

### The Idea

Could we offer a course in which students actually make the Spiritual Exercises? Would these technologically-driven students experience the Exercises in a way that would be both transforming and educational? We did some heavy thinking, dreaming, and discussing. Our supervisor enthusiastically seconded the initiative, and we went to work.

Concurrently a new core curriculum was developing, and school authorities needed course proposals that fit a challenging niche in the new core: “Intersections.” Intersections was a distribution requirement into which many educational objectives were put that did not quite fit elsewhere (e.g., bringing various

educational experiences together, articulating a stand on social ethics, and reflecting on one’s experience at Creighton). A course incorporating the Exercises fit this niche. Thus, Theology 471, “The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,” was born.

### Key Features

**Praying:** The course is selective because it is demanding. Students must commit to praying 20-30 minutes each day in the semester. That commitment is satisfied only in a conference with either of us before the semester in which the student demonstrates (a) readiness for the challenges of the Exercises and (b) commitment to the requirement of prayer.

The course is open to serious students pursuing various forms of spirituality including those from non-Christian traditions. People of every kind of belief adapt themselves to the Catholic, Jesuit approach of the Exercises. They find spiritual nourishment and growth in their own traditions, in addition to gaining profound knowledge of Jesuit Catholic spirituality and belief.

**Writing:** We require a two-page maximum paper each week reporting on the student’s experience of praying. We comment and return the papers

overnight before the next class.

**Interaction:** Our two 75-minute confidential class gatherings each week consist preponderantly in students talking with each other about their experience of praying.

**Grading:** Students receive normal grades for the course (A through F). Grades are based on two factors. The first is the quality and depth of the 14 papers: quality of self-presentation and depth of sharing questions, struggles, temptations, and insights. The second is the frequency and quality of contribution in the classroom, whether insight, question, struggle, agreement, or disagreement.

### Beginning ritual

**Opening:** To facilitate this interchange, a ritual starts each class session. We begin with 30 seconds of silence for a communal act in the presence of God. We then listen to a piece of meditative religious music, for example from the St. Louis Jesuits. We read a poem, often from Rabindranath Tagore. This ritual invites a receptive, contemplative stance.

### Interactions

We invite students to share things close to their

hearts, like achievements or heartbreaks. We then distribute and walk through the next days' praying assignment, including in half the classes the writing prompt due four days later. These prayer prompts often employ Kevin O'Brien's The Ignatian Adventure, a helpful companion to their semester's praying. Our other textbook is George Ganss' Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works, including the life of Ignatius (read before the first class) and a good English translation of the Exercises.

### Maxims

We two leaders offer each a short maxim bearing on the experience of praying and negotiating an interior life, with a minute or two of comment. This is our "teaching" portion of the course. Some sample maxims are: "All Interruptions are invitations." "God does not have an exact plan for you." "Let Jesus be human!" and "Be present to the present of the present." Students remember maxims!

### Discussion

Students talk for six to eight minutes in groups of three or four about their most recent praying and reflecting. Then the whole class interacts on what they are learning, wondering about, and struggling with. Occasionally as a

starter we ask a student to read a particularly helpful paragraph from her or his paper that we have chosen beforehand and which the student agrees to share. We all agree that our discussions are confidential within the group. Outside the group, no one other than the faculty members is quoted by name.

### Closing ritual

Shortly before finishing, we ask for last comments, take a quiet moment, and offer a brief examen in the form of questions without answers about "How I came," "What I was given," and "How do I depart." We read the opening poem again.

### Helps

Several features now help the central work of this course. Of powerful help is the reading of two works by C.S. Lewis: The Great Divorce, shortly before encountering the Two Standards, and Screwtape Letters near the end of the semester. The former illustrates sinful attitudes that restrict people's freedom to receive reality and to grow. The latter dramatizes good advice not unlike Ignatius' rules for the discernment of spirits.

A second help is assigning students to two

experiences of spiritual companionship with a veteran staff or faculty member familiar with the Exercises. These relationships sometimes grow beyond the semester of the course.

Finally, one of us meets for a half-hour every other week with each of the students. These meetings aim at theological reflection on the new sense students are developing of God, prayer, and themselves. In one-on-one dialogue with a veteran, students personally appropriate the challenges that class and praying present.

### What students have learned

Students' experiential learning tends to gather most around three areas of the Exercises. First, Ignatian indifference comes as a graced challenge to students today. Generally their prior experience has not challenged them yet to look at the limited goods of life in the radical perspective the Principle and Foundation brings. The lesson keeps deepening in the course of the Exercises and, we hope, subsequently, in their lives.

Their theology of both God and Jesus gets a blessed overhaul in the Exercises. Despite the best efforts of earlier Theology courses, students often enter this course with unreflective images

of God as judge, scorekeeper, and punisher. Like Ignatius at the Cardoner, they find themselves invited into Jesus' relationship with God. Similarly, Ignatian praying, particularly imaginative contemplation, introduces them to a human Jesus whom they find far more relatable than what they have previously experienced. Potentially distancing statements that "Jesus was perfect" melt away as students pray with a Jesus who grew up and shared every dimension of our human life.

Finally, the meditation on the Two Standards provides an ongoing framework for discerning the interior movements of the two spirits, one toward self-absorption and the other toward graceful service. A personal examen becomes a look into the spirits moving our lives rather than a behavioral evaluation.

### Connection to the Universal Apostolic Preferences

How does this experience contribute to the UAPs? Though it was conceived without specific reference to particular Apostolic Preferences, the course has contributed to the Jesuit mission in powerful ways. As always, the Exercises show students a way to God, and that way involves ever-deepening discernment. The

adult leaders accompany these young people into a future of hope, particularly by shaping a reflective spirituality that deals maturely with their vocation.

Creighton students bring to the course significant experience of walking with the excluded. Reflecting on their experiences - that is, of recognizing the “enemy of our human nature” in action - they are more prepared to recognize and confront injustice in their personal and future professional lives. For many, the Exercises also focus their desire to care for our common home.

### **What we have learned about our students**

Our two answers tend to converge. One of us says that we see students as needing and wanting a spirituality to live by. They may not recognize that need and that desire until they taste them being met.

Creighton, like any Jesuit school, attracts people who are generous, ambitious, serious, and have learned well how to excel in our present culture. However, students bring unreflective assumptions about competing and winning, fitting in, being enough, making a profit, finding security, and being admired. What they do not

have is a spirituality from which to live. The Exercises provide that spirituality by offering a coherent view of life as invitation.

Today’s culture gives students a sense of family, of friends, of service, and especially of competitive success. Religion is not necessarily a part of these values, and students are often unsure of how their values fit together. Perhaps the student has not even faced the question.

Family has anchored the values of many students, but nothing in life has served to do what a spirituality does, to bring together one’s answers to basic questions in a way that explores deep desires and makes sense. Religion has not given them this spirituality. Religion for our students has largely been something which students leave aside when starting college and often find again a year or two later in ways closer to their own experience.

This course meets students in their developmental reality because it asks those basic questions and encourages students to bring together their best answers. The disparate values they brought to college are reconsidered and integrated into a larger view of life in terms of gratitude, reverence, and service in a personal

face-to-face encounter with the Divine.

The other of us says that students find in this course a way of belonging. Again, family belonging can be strong, but the college years ask for a larger belonging – not simply belonging to but belonging with and belonging at. Where and with whom do I find myself becoming ever more a “me” whom I enjoy and even love? This course does not initiate that belonging, but it gives students an opportunity and a stimulus to identify and embrace it.

We have found that these fourth-year students are highly competitive, not only with others but also with themselves. From the influences of family, religion and culture, they experience ideals or invitations which they feel they can never reach. They feel a kind of spiritual inferiority. “Never enough” describes this interior tomb. They also experience this inferiority due to a misinterpretation of Jesus and His teachings. They tend to meet Jesus, not as savior, but as instructor whose teachings they generally fail to live.

On the first day of the semester, students are invited to hand in their answers to two simple questions. “How would you describe God’s

relationship with you?” and “How would you describe your prayer?” Almost universally their response to the first invitation begins with the words, “My relationship with God.....” We asked them to describe “God’s relationship,” not their own. They see themselves as the initiators and sustainers of the relationship and they feel as though they fail in praying and leading a spiritual life. Praying the Exercises challenges these perceptions; they are surprised by the joy of receiving God as Seeker, Finder, Savior.

Their sense of belonging is highly influenced, of course, by endless comparisons on social media. “Compari-sinning” defeats a sense of belonging because the pictures of beauty, excellence, and friendship experienced through social media render the subjects isolated and unrelational. Thus, students tend to abandon themselves and to see themselves as unloved.

The result of this sense of social and religious negativity is a reluctance at the beginning of the semester to share their experiences of praying the Exercises. They presume failure, not measuring up, not being at the high level of the spirituality of their classmates. They find themselves on the outs, listening in. They love belonging to the group and find out slowly that

they all belong to a pilgrim group in which there is no evaluation or comparison. We find that they eventually love the Exercises because the retreat is about each of them, but differently and specially.

After the last class-meeting, we invite them to answer again the same two questions we asked on the first day. Smilingly, we read the opening words of their answers. Their sense of God has changed. They have changed. They know themselves more faithfully as sought-for, found, embraced, and belonging to God as Creator and to themselves as created. Their lives do not belong just to their isolated selves, but rather they belong with God and they belong in God's family.

### **What we have learned about our students' faith formation**

Our experience suggests that many Catholics learn basic doctrines in a one-sided way when they are young and have not developed a more holistic view as they mature. They are very aware of God the Creator "in the beginning" but not so aware of God as a constant worker and creator, Ignatius' laboring God. They are so conscious of original sin that it becomes a separator between Jesus and Mary as "perfect"

and us as "not all we should be." Indeed, their sense of Christianity may be better summed up in "shoulds" than in desires, gifts, and invitations. Their first response about their praying is "It is not enough, not what it should be."

At the beginning of the class our students are so aware of Jesus as God that they have not thought or prayed about what it was for Jesus to be human. Jesus may be more a teacher and model and less a companion along the way to our Emmaus village. "Salvation" almost immediately calls up "heaven" and may not go much further. Christian spirituality may be more about what I should do than about what God has done and is doing. Students' sense of God may be more of a score-keeper than of the father who, in Jesus' story, runs out to embrace the son who has insulted him. People who were consoled earlier in life by the bromide that a mishap or loss was part of God's plan may enter the class feeling that God has a single plan for them in life. They may even feel that, if they miss that plan, they are lost. They have not yet tried more mature ways to approach God's will, especially ways that include reverence for our own deepest and most sacred desires.

### **Learning with colleagues**

One of the developments from this experiment has us looking, in recent years, to other faculty, Jesuit and lay, who will direct the course when we are gone. It has not been hard to find good colleagues eager to do just that. As experienced retreatants, they generally sit in for a semester of the class. Following this, they have replaced one of us in stimulating classroom interaction. When the time comes for us to pass the torch, we will be leaving the course in very good hands.

For us as founders of the course, the learning of these colleagues has been instructive: directing is not teaching. Teachers come to this opportunity eager to share insight. A good director takes that brief moment of a maxim to offer insight but otherwise helps most by encouraging students to dig deeper into their own insights and their own experience. It can be hard to stop a teacher from talking! "Do not write your insight on the student's paper. Instead ask them a question that might surface a further insight of their own."

### **Results**

We have tried with varying success to engage busy faculty over decades to make time for retreats. Encouraged by the liveliness of our

student course, we began ten semesters ago to recruit faculty to commit to a similar experience, with the same praying and writing but meeting once a week in groups of about seven or eight across a semester. Some 140 faculty have embraced the experience, and we have begun creating staff groups as well.

A key moment in gathering these groups comes, we believe, when we visit a faculty member individually to extend the invitation to consider participation. It can be hard to say "No" to "legendary" Jesuits. Once they say yes, we are committed to creating an experience that will spiritually feed them now and in the years ahead.

A Creighton faculty member who is an award-winning videographer was so impressed by what he heard about the course that he asked if he could make a film about Theology 471. We noted that he could not be part of the confidential class sessions, but he managed a strong work-around by interviewing faculty and students who were part of the experience. The video gives strong testimony to the Exercises' life-changing impact. <https://vimeo.com/748976854>

### **Assessment**

Theology 471 undergoes the standard academic assessment process and receives high grades and strong personal comments from students. Those standard assessments are less able to measure personal spiritual growth. To assess our deeper goals, we have kept track of students' answers to the two questions posed at the beginning and end of each semester: "How would you describe God's relationship with you?" and "How would you describe your prayer?" Faculty and students at Creighton are mining responses to these questions for significant patterns and even publishing results.

**The experiment has worked!**



BEST PRACTICES IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION  
ISSUE 6.1: FORMATION PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND  
MECHANISMS IN JESUIT IDENTITY AND MISSION

TYPE OF PRACTICE: FORMATION

### Tutoring as a Mission: An Ignatian-Inspired Integral Proposal

Cecilia Eva Burga-Yuy, Gary Grandez-Rodriguez, and Benjamín Alcarraz-Buleje,  
Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University (AUSJAL)

#### ABSTRACT

UARM's tutoring system is an integral accompaniment model based on the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) that addresses academic, emotional, and ethical needs. By fostering dialogue and trust, it supports students from admission to graduation, helping them develop critical thinking and a sense of social and civic commitment in a fast-paced world.

#### MAIN GOAL

To support student adjustment and the creation of a **meaningful personal and professional project** while fostering **critical thinking, ethics, and intercultural respect**.

#### METHODOLOGY

Uses the IPP moments (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation) to transform the traditional university routine into a space for active listening and trust.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

There is a constant institutional need for reflection and dialogue within tutorials.

Updating curricula (e.g., Plans 2021 and 2025) and materials is essential to remain relevant to current demands.

Future efforts should focus on systematizing the information and experiences gathered through student and tutor focus groups.

#### CONNECTION WITH THE UAP'S

The program aligns with the Universal Apostolic Preference of "Journeying with youth"

It fosters a climate of trust for questions beyond the curriculum and mirrors the church's mission of encounter, listening, and welcome




#### RESULTS

Students report that tutoring creates a valuable environment for academic development and meaningful encounters with teachers and peers.

Tutors view the task as an opportunity for personal growth and for learning to offer more inclusive and flexible accompaniment.

The program has successfully integrated sensitive current topics, such as the pandemic, into its syllabus.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

-  Strengthening the inclusion of topics proposed by students during sessions.
-  Increasing institutional recognition and value for the Tutoring System Office and its activities.
-  "Socializing" products made by students (like posters and logs) to make their active contributions more visible to the university community.

# Tutoring as a Mission: An Ignatian-Inspired Integral Proposal

## FORMATION

**CECILIA EVA BURGA-YUY, GARY GRANDEZ-RODRIGUEZ, AND BENJAMÍN ALCARRAZ-BULEJE**  
ANTONIO RUIZ MONTOYA UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

The tutoring experience at the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (UARM) goes beyond the dimension of pedagogical strategy since it is constituted as an act of intimacy, care, and commitment to each student. Inspired by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), tutoring encourages an integral accompaniment that integrates academic, emotional, ethical, and vocational dimensions. This provides a space for dialogue and deep reflection for an education that trains integral people who understand their role in society.

Tailored to each stage of university life, this program supports students from their initial adaptation to their insertion into the professional world by strengthening critical thinking, introspection, and dialogue. Far from imposing answers, tutors pose questions, cultivate bonds of trust, and encourage autonomous thinking, all of which foster the development of a critical and committed conscience. In a context where haste and productivity predominate, tutoring offers a space for pause and meaning that humanizes the university experience.

Aligned with the Universal Apostolic Preferences, this model is presented as a transforming pedagogy in which tutoring is a means of guidance and caring rather than as a program.

### Description

At the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (UARM), tutoring is influenced by the Ignatian educational plan since it encourages the student's integral development. By providing personalized su-

port throughout their formative stage, it aims to go beyond the academic approach to encourage, in practice, a space for reflection, discernment, and personal and professional development. To this end, the tutorials' methodology is structured according to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), which combines the components of context, experience, reflection, action, and assessment. In this framework, the tutors, as close mentors, support the development of stories, a life project, and an ethical commitment to the world by helping to consider reason, emotions, bonds, and spirit. Tutoring is a living, human process that embodies Ignatian values and the UARM's spirit; it is by no means a course

### Description

At the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (UARM), tutoring is influenced by the Ignatian educational plan since it encourages the student's integral development. By providing personalized support throughout their formative stage, it aims to go beyond the academic approach to encourage, in practice, a space for reflection, discernment, and personal and professional development. To this end, the tutorials' methodology is structured according to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), which combines the components of context, experience, reflection, action, and assessment. In this framework, the tutors, as close mentors, support the development of stories, a life project, and an ethical commitment to the world by helping to consider reason, emotions, bonds, and spirit. Tutoring is a living, human process

that embodies Ignatian values and the UARM's spirit; it is by no means a course.

### Type of Experience

The tutoring experience aligns with an institutional program that is an essential component of UARM'S educational model. Since tutoring is presented as a key tool for students' development, it is not simply a course or a one-time initiative; rather, it is a systematic support that continues throughout the students' university life at different moments.

This program distances itself from traditional academic support as it facilitates a formative environment that places the student as the protagonist, embracing their needs, emotions, choices, and relationships. In this way, tutoring is developed as a human and formative

companion where students reflect on their life path, degree calling, and social duty.

A primary element is that the IPP support permeates deeply with a framework that blends context analysis, experiential living, critical thought, concrete action, and ongoing assessment. This is linked with various Ignatian values and principles, including discernment, cura personalis, and introspection.

This tutoring program also adapts to students' university life path at each stage. In the early years, tutoring supports students' adaptation to the academic environment; later, it helps clarify their professional vocation and connect it to the social world. It concludes the formative process by guiding the graduation profile and the transition into professional life.

From a reflective approach, this experience can transform students' lives since it encourages a comprehensive education that not only forges competent professionals but also empathetic, caring, and responsible human beings. In a context like ours, where students face social and emotional obstacles that challenge their permanence and academic success, this approach is essential. Tutorials so reveal

a necessary and solid formative basis with theoretical and practical roots, but above all, a deep human character.

### Context

Tutoring at the UARM is born in a setting of Ignatian tradition and a clear educational identity: integral development of persons. Therefore, this purpose is not satisfied with academic growth, but also seeks to embrace and enhance the human and socioemotional dimensions. For this reason, this tutoring program is more than just an additional course; it is the cornerstone of an idea that, with Ignatian roots, places the student first, considering their background, culture, expectations, and doubts as they enter the university world, which entails new responsibilities and commitments.

Each student arrives with their own "backpack." We mean all that is carried within them, not just books or notebooks. That is, each individual has a story and a particular reality, often marked by uncertainty, academic pressure, or culture shock when they first enrol in college. In fact, in our country, many times desertion does not occur due to a lack of competence. Instead, it happens because of inequalities, a lack of emotional support, or not having a

strong occupational focus at the beginning. For this reason, UARM understands that it is not enough to have a good curriculum or well-prepared teachers. More is required: to be there, to accompany, and to create a welcoming environment for the learner through tutoring.

In addition, different worldviews coexist at UARM due to the university's cultural diversity, which is enhanced by the presence of students from different regions, each of whom has their own languages and customs. Nevertheless, it reflects a more complex and challenging environment. In this regard, tutoring is adapted to this diversity and aims to be a bridge between the student and the institution, highlighting individual differences and valuing each person's uniqueness. Therefore, tutoring responds to a context that demands inclusion, active listening, and respect for individual paths.

Nowadays, individual success and productivity are idolized more highly than the collective well-being. Tutoring, in contrast, is practiced and developed as an act of resistance since it is based on dialogue, introspection, understanding others, and the shared construction of meaning that is aimed at the common good.

Therefore, the environment in which this experience is implemented is complex, demanding, and deeply human. Because tutoring is not only relevant but also fundamental, it is included in UARM students' education. It is a concrete and tangible response to a country where young university students face various obstacles. In other words, it is a solid response with soul, designed to forge not only professionals but also people who offer the best of themselves for a more equitable and inclusive society.

### **Objectives and Methodology**

One of the most valuable aspects of the UARM tutoring program is the clarity and coherence with which its formative objectives are defined. These are not reduced to traditional academic goals by encompassing deep dimensions of the university experience. From a critical and reflective perspective, this program aims to structurally intervene in the educational process with a horizon of meaning based on the integral development of the person, rather than only addressing specific difficulties faced by students in certain courses. In this sense, the program's general objective is highly significant: supporting students as they just adjust to university life and create a meaningful personal

and professional project while fostering skills like critical thinking, introspection, oral and written expression, intercultural respect, care for the person, and ethical commitment.

As important as the objectives are the methodology used, which is closely linked to the IPP mentioned above. This paradigm proposes a way of teaching and accompanying that is not based only on the transfer of content, but on a transforming experience structured in five fundamental moments: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. These elements are not only technical phases but are part of a logic of human growth. This methodology challenges the traditional university routine. It is not about the tutor being able to provide solutions but about generating spaces for dialogue, active listening, and respectful confrontation with oneself and with others.

Tutoring, in this framework, is not presented as an act of control but as an act of trust. It trusts that the student has the resources within themselves to grow, but they need time, support, and an optimal environment to discover them. This is perhaps one of the most profound contributions of this methodology: creating the

conditions for young people to find themselves in a world where everything seems to push outwards, towards the immediate, productive, and superficial. From a critical point of view, it must be recognized that this approach requires time, commitment, and serious training for the tutors. Not everyone who has not already forged their own path of reflection can support someone else. However, it is also true that this type of proposal is urgent in our educational reality, where many young people are faced with depersonalized systems that assess them with statistics but rarely question them in their human dimension. Faced with this scenario, the UARM tutoring program stands out as a courageous and audacious alternative since it centers the formative process around the individual's dignity and complete development.

In short, this educational experience's objectives and methodology are not only well-defined but also deeply aligned with an ethical and transformative vision of education and society at large. It involves more than just producing efficient graduates; it involves supporting real people in becoming integral, self-aware, environmentally conscious individuals who can apply their knowledge for the benefit of society. This is undoubtedly a goal worth sustaining.

### Connection with Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP)

The UARM tutoring system is aligned with the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus: “Journeying with youth.”

Although it is a space for academic accompaniment, the climate of trust that is sought to generate allows questions to be raised that go beyond the strict curriculum. Young students can contribute to their personal development in creative, healthy, and safe settings through tutoring.

Even though it is not a pastoral space itself, tutoring is an activity that illustrates the encounter, listening, and welcoming characteristics of the image of Jesus Christ and is proper to the Church’s mission.

### Results

In surveys and focus groups conducted over the years to find out how students feel about tutoring, they have emphasized that the sessions given by the teachers allow them to build a valuable environment for their academic development. Additionally, they regard this space as a key moment of encounter with their

own teachers and peers since they perceive that tutoring enables them to support their processes through dialogue and both group and individual reflection.

Students have also appreciatively expressed the significance of having a tutor who listens to them, proposes meaningful activities, and encourages them to go beyond the classroom. When properly planned and implemented, tutoring is conceived as a key element of students’ integral education. Therefore, it turns into that small lighthouse that guides amidst the complexity that comes with university life.

From the teaching experience, tutors indicate that carrying out this task is a valuable way for growth since each session has presented new challenges and opportunities for learning. This has led us to adjust strategies, rethink approaches, and continue training ourselves to offer a more inclusive, flexible, and relevant accompaniment while respecting diversity and considering the students’ processes. The changes that are made year after year show these adjustments. For example, we have been able to integrate current, sensitive, and necessary topics, like pandemics, into the tutoring syllabus. While many of the topics addressed

during that time are still being covered, there is an increasing emphasis on the Ignatian identity aspects that serve as our compass as a Society of Jesus university. Therefore, it is important to point out the value of the relationship that tutoring provides between teachers and students. It is an open, respectful, and trusting relationship. Perhaps one of the most powerful elements of this formative process is this bond, which is often woven with care and patience. A student’s dedication, motivation, and learning all increase when they feel heard, welcomed, and respected.

Since the planning, implementation, and assessment of tutoring requires cooperation from several departments and offices within the university, significant actions have actually been taken by the administrative area. Moreover, reports are prepared on the coordination carried out and often stress the effective and precise communication established with the people involved in the tutoring system.

Finally, the openness and flexibility to hold meetings with tutors is fundamental since these spaces allow them to learn about the development of their role with the students during the current semester and, in turn, foster

a supportive and encouraging setting.

### Learned Lessons

Tutoring has changed and adapted to the different contexts experienced in recent times: pandemics, political crises, etc. However, one of the first and most obvious lessons learned over the years is the need for reflection and dialogue in tutorials, which is a constant institutional practice. Similarly, updating curricula and materials and attending training sessions have not only been administrative tasks but have also provided us with the opportunity to improve our tutoring proposal to better meet the current demands and reinforce its pedagogical meaning within the IPP framework. Within this framework, we have updated the curricula for Plans 2021 and 2025 in an effort to remain current and committed to ongoing improvement. Thus, tutoring has been adapted to new topics, contents, times, and inputs to be implemented in the sessions. For instance, these changes are evident in the virtual teaching platform, which has enabled us to centralize resources and materials while also gradually adapting and enriching them.

We intend to start the process of systematizing tutoring in the future. In addition to gathering

information and experience, we also aim to fully understand them and use them as the basis for actual improvement. The participation of tutors and students in the focus group will be crucial in this process. This is because those who live tutoring daily have much to say and much to teach us.

### Opportunities for Improvement

Given the changes and adaptations we have been making, it is essential to recognize that one area that needs strengthening is considering the topics that students feel are necessary to cover during the tutorials. Tutors are encouraged to actively listen to their students while also considering the topics that they propose as the sessions progress.

In this sense, it is advisable to continue with the emphasis on the link established in the tutorials between teachers and students. This is evident in the opening and coordination of content that could be addressed throughout the academic semester.

Finally, the Tutoring System Office, which oversees all tutoring administration, has room for development due to its lack of institutional recognition. On the one hand, despite being

crucial to the UARM, the tutorial sessions are not always valued, which shows the need to rethink the strategies of communication and dialogue established with other departments and units, as well as with the university authorities. On the other hand, it would be advisable to socialize the same products elaborated by the students in tutoring; for example, the completed projects like posters and logs that are part of the assignments they deliver. Thus, making visible the active role of tutors and students would allow the latter's viewpoints and contributions to the UARM to be acknowledged.

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