

Leadership Studies

Daily *Examen* and Reflection: Gratitude in Leadership and Organizational Culture

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“Drawing on Xavier University’s Jesuit Catholic tradition, the [interdisciplinary] Leadership Studies Doctoral Program is designed to develop authentic leaders who use their expertise and skills to promote social justice and organizational change. The program emphasizes cultivating the whole person and his/her role in facilitating change and building leadership capacity within individuals, organizations, and communities.” The curriculum structure consists of core courses in leadership, research, and in a specialized area of application and practice.

Course Information: Organizational Metaphors & Contexts (LEAD 860) and Organizational Culture & Change (LEAD 881)

Since joining Xavier’s doctoral program in fall 2018, I have had the privilege of teaching both LEAD 860 and LEAD 881. LEAD 860 is one of two required specialization courses that students take in addition to other elective courses (such as in higher education, business, or K-12 education). This course takes “an interdisciplinary social sciences perspective on the nature of organizing in modern society and the variety of organizational forms that provide contexts in which leadership matters.” Students usually take this course early in the program as they start their journeys to understanding organizational metaphors, contexts; and how individuals, organizations, and societies organize. LEAD 881 is a leadership core course and “focuses on the role of leaders in understanding and managing the reciprocal processes of organizational culture and change.” Students typically take this course mid-way through the program, after they have acquired a better understanding of leadership theory and research methods.

Opportunity: Increase Student Knowledge of Ignatian Principles

Most students in the doctoral program are working professionals who typically visit campus only to attend classes. Thus, they often do not have the same opportunities as other students to experience Xavier's campus events, resources and activities. Therefore, I am especially observant of opportunities to infuse Ignatian principles into my teaching. As a new faculty member, I received a solid foundation of Xavier's mission and identity, especially at Manresa for Faculty and Staff. However, participation in the Ignatian Mentoring Program (IMP) provided me an even deeper understanding of the Ignatian vision. Furthermore, when I taught these two classes during the spring 2020 semester, I incorporated new strategies to better assimilate Ignatian principles.

In LEAD 860, I selected Xavier as a practical example to illustrate the culture metaphor. We examined Xavier's Jesuit values, mission and vision, its artifacts, and explored resources on the jesutiresource.org website. We also reflected on how they, as graduate students, feel a part of the community, and how the institution could improve that connection. I also routinely made other points of connection to the mission, such as how team projects support *solidarity and kinship*, and how intentional pauses provide the space to *reflect* on what students learn.

In LEAD 881, while studying cultural theory and while creating presentation teams, I assigned one team to represent Xavier University. Each team presented how its organization compared to and contrasted with the others, and analyzed its unique cultural artifacts, shared values, and underlying assumptions. (Schein, 2017). This assignment resulted in meaningful dialogue about Xavier's culture, with students gaining a better understanding of how to incorporate Xavier's Jesuit mission and identity into their personal and professional lives.

Lastly, in both courses, I further encouraged an understanding of Ignatian principles with an assignment that students could experience an even more personal connection: The *Daily Examen*.

Reflection Exercise: The Daily *Examen* and Reflection of Gratitude

Daily Examen and Reflection of Gratitude offered an opportunity for students to further experience the Ignatian principle of personal reflection. St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, and the *Examen* Prayer begins with gratefulness and reflections on living a life with an "attitude of gratitude" (Lehane, 2011). In recognition of this prayer, I assigned a weekly reflection assignment on gratitude. My goal was to have the students pause and reflect, as "we do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." (John Dewey). According to St. Ignatius, as interpreted by James Martin, SJ, the second part of *Examen* the prayer is as follows:

"Gratitude: Recall two or three things that happened today for which you are especially grateful. Savor them. Then thank God for these gifts."

Students were asked to read the following statement, upload their weekly responses to Canvas, and if comfortable, be prepared to share their responses in class:

"Gratitude: Please recall three things for which you are grateful for this week. Then discuss these items in 1-2 paragraphs, sharing things such as what they are, why you are grateful for them, and how they impacted your life; and anything else you'd like to share about them."

Results: Student Reactions to the Assignment

Students were challenged every week to continue their reflections on things for which they were grateful. The results were remarkable! They shared in both in writing and during class their gratitude for family, health, friends, career, freedom, faith, love, accomplishments, ownership, weather, and many other aspects of their personal, professional and spiritual lives. As this class

took place in the spring semester of 2020, and we transitioned to remote learning, students shared their gratefulness in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. They reflected on the appreciation they had for Xavier's response, and their gratitude for health, safety, and economic security, despite the challenges they faced. Many also shared inspirational stories of hope for the future. For example, one student said:

I am so grateful for sidewalks and the ability to safely walk or run during this time. It is encouraging to look outside and see dogs, kids, parents alike strolling up and down the street. I am thankful that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, no matter how far away it seems at times.

Acknowledgments

The adjustments I made to my courses resulted in deeper conversations with my students, and I gained a clearer appreciation of how my teaching connects to Xavier's mission. My experience as part of IMP has been rewarding and inspirational, and I am grateful for Tom Strunk, and his leadership as director of faculty programming at Xavier's Mission and Identity, for my mentor Niamh O'Leary and her advice and guidance, and for the university and the commitment to the Ignatian Mentoring Program. I savor and thank God for these gifts.

References

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