

History

Cura personalis, magis, and choice

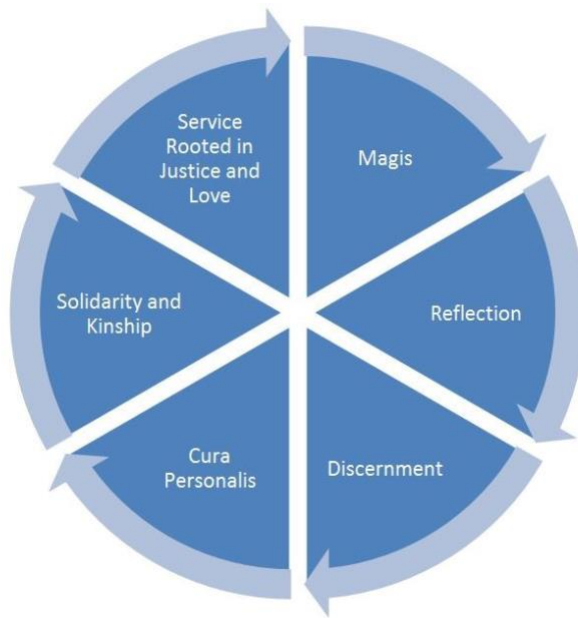
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Introduction

I began my Ignatian Mentorship year unsure how to articulate what I wanted out of it. I knew I wanted to know more about Jesuit pedagogy, to be a better teacher, and increase my ability to contribute to my community as an educator and colleague in the spirit of Ignatius Loyola. But what would that mean? Or what could it mean? At my first meeting with my mentor Michelle Brady, we chatted to get an idea of how to proceed in a way that would be most useful for me. It quickly became evident that my professional concerns circled around balancing teaching and research, and my concern of not getting enough work in on my book. We agreed to use the year of mentorship to focus on my research. I also decided to steer away from my instinct as a historian to read long historical and pedagogical texts – instead I have focused on resources made available through Xavier.

My process and the six Xavier Values

Although my mentor, Michelle, and I decided to focus on the process of my scholarship, I found myself constantly pulled towards teaching, not scholarship. I experienced a kind of breakthrough when I conceptualized that I could choose to see my research in the light of Ignatian pedagogy. I found particular benefit in examining, evaluating, and questioning on the six Xavier values, principally as they manifest in the visualization of a wheel.



My research not only gained deeper meaning when understood through the matrix of values, but it also reminds me of the importance of how scholarship, teaching, service, and leisure are part of my own *cura personalis*. This resonated strongly with messages I try to convey in my First Year Seminar, “Marriage: Crisis & Renewal.” I began to parallel the students’ struggles with college with my struggles to get “enough” scholarship done.

Mindful choice as Ignatian pedagogy

As I invite students to participate in the pedagogical endeavor of my class, I am sometimes painfully reminded that they do not make the choice to do so, or their choices are inconsistent. Often their choices undermine their own *cura personalis* and can undermine

other Ignatian values. However, for my research, I also have the power to choose, just as they do. I do not always make choices based on *cura personalis* or *magis*. The story of Ignatius Loyola’s discernment and choice over which master to serve provided a guiding narrative in my journey of Ignatian mentorship.

The question of which future Ignatius of Loyola would choose, that of a knight or that of a religious, came to an end at the feet of the Black Madonna in Montserrat, Spain. He laid his sword before her altar, confessed his sins from his previous life, and began a new life. While the story is familiar to me, Michelle's rendition of the story as a choice, and a choice of *giving up* rather than what to *pursue*, had new resonance for me within the framework of Ignatian values. Simply put: everything I choose to do as an educator, a scholar, or a colleague means I am just as significantly choosing to not do something. That in and of itself led me to the insight I must devote more time to understanding *magis* – *magis* not just as Latin for “more,” which reads as overwhelming to me unless I remind myself to reflectively anchor it in the context: “where is the more universal good?” My choices here and now about balancing teaching, research, and service should serve *magis*, and *cura personalis*, and not just of those around me. These have emerged as the foundational values for the balance of my work, in and out of the classroom, and private life.

In the following, I list the Xavier Values¹ and compare the approach I use for my First Year Seminar with the implications of choosing for my research project, “*Day by Day to Perfect Manhood*”: *Christocentric Masculinity and Laymen in the Late Middle Ages*.

MAGIS invites us to ask, “Where is the more universal good?” when making difficult decisions; it relates to the Jesuit motto, *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (for the Greater Glory of God).

Teaching FYS, I invite my students to ask “what is a greater good?” and “where is the more universal good” when seeking to understand marriage through a variety of disciplines; but also in how they see college, their vocation, and their decisions. [I do this through reflection assignments, readings, and in-class discussions.](#)

In scholarship, I choose if I ask “where is the more universal good” when I make choices about time management in regards to writing, research, and teaching. It forces me to consider implications beyond this day, week, or semester in both teaching and scholarship, but also my personal life.

CURA PERSONALIS invites us to care for others recognizing the uniqueness and wholeness of each person.

Teaching FYS, I invite my students to care for others, but above all themselves, recognizing the uniqueness and wholeness of each person they encounter in real life and through texts and documentaries. I also invite students to allow others to help them implicitly or actively. [I do this through readings, reflections, office hours, and in-class discussions. I also invite myself to care for my students – in addition to the above, through e-mails and student-concern reports.](#)

In scholarship, I choose if I care for others, recognizing the uniqueness and wholeness of each person I study and who will read my work, but also of myself and what I can give to my field, my project, and my intellectual curiosity. When I strive to be a well-rounded scholar with a schedule and productivity in my research, I may not have all the time to focus on grading, so I choose to be more transparent and present in the classroom. I must also choose if I care for myself outside of my vocation – and how I manifest it.

¹ “Xavier’s Values,” *The Center for Mission and Identity*, <https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/heritage-tradition/Xaviers-Values.cfm> (accessed 3/25/18)

DISCERNMENT invites us to be open to God's spirit as we consider our feelings and rational thought in order to understand and make decisions and take actions that will contribute good to their lives and the world around us.

Teaching FYS, I invite students to be open as they consider feelings and rational thought in order to understand the material we read for, and discuss, in class. I emphasize the significance of this as they make decisions and take actions that will help us understand, and contribute, good to their lives and the world around them. [I do this primarily through in-class discussions that the students lead based on goals I set, but also when I lead class and in their final project where they examine a marriage related topic and consider how it supports or undermines the greater good.](#)

In scholarship, I choose if I am to be open to God's spirit as I consider

- a) the feelings and rational thought conveyed to me through primary and secondary texts, which I examine critically to teach my present about religious and secular male gender ideation of the Late Middle Ages
- b) my own feelings and rational thought about my research project, process, and time management

in order to make decisions and take actions that will contribute good to my life and the world around me. Intentionality is key in how and why I make decisions about when I conduct research or write in a way that contributes good to myself and others.

REFLECTION invites us to pause and consider the world around us and our place within it.

Teaching FYS, I invite students to take the time to consider the worlds (time-periods and academic disciplines) our readings come from and the learning outcomes our assignments. We consider our relationship to these. [I do this through in-class discussions, written and verbal feedback, and written reflections.](#)

In scholarship, I choose if I pause and consider the world around me and my place within it. This falls into four main categories in contention with each other for my resources: a) an educator in relationship to my students, learning outcomes defined by my department, committees, and the mission of the university. b) a scholar in relationship to my discipline and the discourses of my field, as well as my tenure clock. c) a colleague in relationship to my peers and the service I can contribute to the university. d) as an individual in relationship to a spouse, parents, sister, relatives, friends, my non-academic communities, and a pet.

SOLIDARITY AND KINSHIP invites us to walk alongside and learn from our companions, both near and far, as we journey through life.

Teaching FYS, I invite my students to walk alongside and learn from scholars whose work we read, examples of marriages from the Ancient world, to those they see around them, and to consider the plethora of angles we can use to understand variety. Above all, I invite them to learn from their colleagues² in the classroom. [I do this by assigning a significant variety of texts, topics, and assignments. Most importantly, I invite my to participate: they create and revisit the class participation policy, participate, and reflect continuously on participation as a way to learn and contribute.](#)

² For me the term "colleague," which I use to my students when referring to other students, emphasizes solidarity and kinship in the spirit Ignatian spirituality.

In scholarship, I choose if I walk alongside and learn from the holy men and women I study, as well as my peers who have studied late medieval gender, spirituality, sanctity, law, and society. I choose if I am contributing to a larger conversation. I choose if the results of my work can offer understandings of masculinity that can productively steer our society and individuals away from toxic masculinity, in addition to teaching us about heroic virtue and medieval society.

SERVICE ROOTED IN JUSTICE AND LOVE invites us to invest our lives into the wellbeing of our neighbors, particularly those who suffer injustice

Teaching FYS, I invite my students to invest their lives into the wellbeing of their neighbors, particularly those who suffer injustices coded and structured around religion, gender, sexuality and race as well as injustices we inflict on others due to our lack of critical thinking outside our own experience. [I do this primarily through in-class discussions, but also readings, and assignments.](#) Of central importance is how I ask them to consider marriage in relationship to the US constitution: amendments I, XIV, X.

In scholarship, I choose if I examine how my scholarship summons me to invest into the wellbeing of my neighbors, particularly those who suffer injustice due to gendered social and religious expectations. Toxic masculinity as a manifestation of power and subordination victimizes women, children, and men.

Conclusion

Above all, I have come to consider with intentionality my choices, both the wise and the frivolous, the slow and the hasty, as by necessity a process of choosing to give up in order to pursue goals. Where I choose to direct my resources of time and energy are as much a question of Ignatian values as my teaching. With *cura personalis* and *magis* at the heart, reflection and discernment contribute to how I choose between giving up something of teaching, scholarship, service, or me-time. This year has taught me that through *cura personalis* and *magis* I can use discernment and reflection to choose in a way that is conducive to solidarity and kinship as well as service rooted in justice and love. As a result, I hope I am more confident as a teacher, scholar, and colleague in the choices I make because it steers me away from trying to do it all – that way lies madness.