

# ENGLISH

English - 305 Professional Writing: Jesuit Values as Revealed through  
Mental Health Services on Xavier's Campus

English – 205 Literature & the Moral Imagination: Revealing the  
Human Condition: A Literary Journey through the Spiritual Exercises

English – 101 English Composition: Writing within the Sphere of  
Ignatian Discernment: Social Justice, Society and Ourselves

*Jacki Lyon, MHPA, M.Ed.*  
*Mentor: Trudelle Thomas, Ph.D. (English)*  
2014-2015

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the Jesuit Mentorship Program is to develop a deeper understanding of the Ignatian vision and Jesuit education in the Xavier community. Jesuit ideals were integrated into each course through an emphasis on social justice issues. The Ignatian philosophy was incorporated into *Professional Writing* through a major proposal that addressed a single social justice issue on Xavier's campus: student access to mental health services through McGrath Health and Wellness Center. Considering classical and contemporary works in *Literature and the Moral Imagination*, students travelled through the Spiritual Exercises to: reveal their own inner landscape, identify what living in the Ignatian spirit means, draw clarity during times of desolation, and ultimately seek inner joy in concert with the Ignatian vision. Reading and writing assignments in *English Composition* focused on contemporary social justice issues so students could begin to assess themselves in relation to God and to our global community.

## **Unfolding the Ignatian Vision**

Determined to optimize the Jesuit Mentorship experience for my students and me, I set out to redesign course content to reflect Jesuit values. I recognized early in the process, however, that I needed to clearly understand the breadth of St. Ignatius's vision, which was revealed to me through key sources. Jim Manney's *God Finds Us* illustrated the Spiritual Exercises in a way that is relevant to life, here-and-now, while Father George Traub's *Do You Speak Ignatian?* provided a reference point of Jesuit vernacular. Margaret Silf's *Inner Compass* offered a practical and tangible reflection of the Spiritual Exercises. As a whole, the readings demanded that I honestly assess my relationship with God and how this bond is manifested in my life, both personally and professionally. Through this early exploration, I

came to realize that this mentorship would be successful only if I made an attempt to integrate the Ignatian philosophies into my own life as well as in the classroom.

### ***Students and the Ignatian Process***

Silf explains that we can enter the Spiritual Exercises at any point along the process. With my students, especially freshmen, I see a fluid movement among the four weeks. Most of us, especially young adults, fall into the trap of being “me” focused rather than “God” focused. This skewed focus throws many freshmen off kilter by midterms because they are not “God” focused when academics become challenging and risky decisions become tempting. As Silf explains, many of these young men and women are “splintering, shattering, breaking upon the rock” but not walking with Jesus in agony (29). Students who have weathered their initial breaking point of college seem to have a better understanding where God stands in their lives. Digging wells in Nicaragua for a week or reading to at-risk children every Friday allows students to walk with God in service by finding joy in ministry. However, a weekend of partying and bad judgment displayed on social media can quickly turn times of consolation into times of desolation. With this fluidity among students, I must be purposeful in my instruction so that students develop a sense of discernment and willingness to walk with God in times of consolation *and* desolation. If students come to rely on this process to find peace and joy, they may begin to carry out the Jesuit mission in their professional and personal lives.

### ***Course Design: Teaching to the Mission***

In developing course objectives with respect to the Jesuit mission, I kept in mind the personal demands of the Spiritual Exercises. In order to understand how Ignatian spirituality can be incorporated into our own lives, Silf breaks down personal assessment into four concentric circles to exemplify our “inner landscape” which are:

- Where am I? The facts and circumstances of my life, the things I cannot change.
- How am I? The areas of my life where I make personal choices and exercise some control.
- Who am I? The center of my being where I am when I am being truly me.
- I am. The person I most truly am before God.

Source: Silf, Margaret. *Inner Compass*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999. 21. Print.

Keeping these factors in mind, I consciously selected readings and assignments that would challenge students to assess themselves in relation to God and in relation to society. The personal assessment was to be revealed through class discussion and writing. Understanding their own “inner landscape” would allow them to begin to meet the demands of the Spiritual Exercises as characterized by Silf below:

- Discover who I really am
- Direct myself toward God
- Notice God’s actions in my life
- Respond to the movements of my heart
- Discover the nature of my deepest desire
- Seek God’s will
- Become free of all that distracts me from my deepest desire

- Make choices in line with my truest self
- Connect my experiences with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- Respond to God's love for me
- Find God in all things

Source: Silf, Margaret. *Inner Compass*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999. 15. Print.

Demanding this of students meant demanding much of me as an instructor. So, what do I ultimately hope for in this journey—"The Pearl of Great Price" where students find grace through discernment in their daily actions and in times of consolation and desolation.

### ***English 305: Professional Writing - Jesuit Values as Revealed through Mental Health Services on Xavier's Campus***

The Ignatian philosophy was incorporated into *Professional Writing* through a major professional proposal that addressed a single social justice issue on Xavier's campus: student access to mental health services through McGrath Health and Wellness Center. From an Ignatian perspective, teams considered McGrath's mission in offering mental health services within the sphere of the Jesuit values. On a personal level, students explored their own attitudes and experiences with mental health while at Xavier.

#### **McGrath Mental Health Services Professional Proposal**

Dr. Rose Wetterau, Clinical Supervisor, McGrath Health and Wellness Center, developed two topics for student groups to research, analyze and then offer recommendations to enhance student use of mental health services at Xavier. Issue 1 asked students to: a) identify the barriers which impede students seeking mental health services; b) identify interventions that would reduce or remove barriers to seeking mental health services. Issue 2 asked students to: a) inventory mental health services which are available on campus; b) offer suggestions as to additional services which could be added to the Xavier University mental health services; c) offer suggestions as to which services could be lessened or removed; d) provide a marketing plan to increase student, staff and faculty awareness of the mental health services which are available.

Students were broken down into four groups with two teams assigned to the same issue. Each team conducted academic and nonacademic research and surveyed approximately 100 students per team to determine the attitudes of mental health services on Xavier's campus. Research revealed that the majority of the students have not used McGrath mental health services and that the student body is largely unaware of services that are offered. Primary barriers included stigmas associated with mental illness as well as accessibility to existing services. Some key recommendations presented to Dr. Wetterau are as follows:

- Revamp the McGrath Mental Health Services website to accurately reflect services offered.
- Expand weekday services hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) to 6 p.m. and offer limited weekend hours.
- Add group therapy programs that address topics such as body image and anxiety/stress management.

- Collaborate with Active Minds to create signature events focused on normalizing mental health issues in effort to break down related stigmas. Active Minds is an on-campus organization that empowers students to speak openly about mental health in order to educate and encourage others.
- Advertise mental health services in Hoff Dining Hall as well as other high traffic areas.
- Hire a student intern to optimize social media by using Facebook and Twitter to promote mental health related events and to post bi-weekly social media posts to increase awareness.
- Change the name of McGrath Mental Health Services to “Sycamore House Mental Health Services” to create a distinct identity.

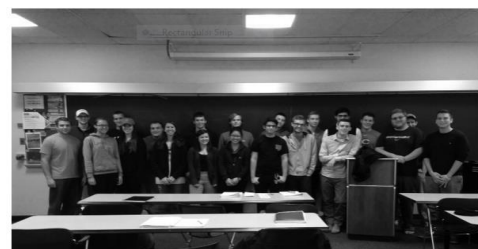
In the eight weeks dedicated to the project, students quickly became invested in their assignment to offer feasible opportunities to enhance mental health services at McGrath. In the process, many students discussed their personal struggles with mental illness and the social stigma that prevented them from seeking access. Others became more compassionate as they began to understand the pervasiveness of mental health problems on Xavier’s campus as well as other college campuses across the United States. Reflecting on the third week of the Spiritual Exercises, the project gave students the opportunity to see themselves or others “splintering, shattering, breaking upon the rock.” Ultimately, the students’ passion to bring about change in mental health services at Xavier revealed their understanding of their own power in helping others.

### **Project Outcomes**

The students’ dedication to the project resulted in an immediate impact on McGrath Health and Wellness Center mental health services. Following the presentations, McGrath clinical psychologist Dr. Tara Scarborough submitted a grant proposal to support an intern to promote and increase awareness of mental health services through social media and other advertising venues. Furthermore, both the proposals and executive summaries will be included in the McGrath Health and Wellness Center’s year-end report that is submitted to the Xavier Associate Provost of Student Affairs, David Johnson.

### ***English 205: Literature and the Moral Imagination: Revealing the Human Condition: A Literary Journey through the Spiritual Exercises***

*Literature and the Moral Imagination* provided a complex forum to explore the Jesuit mission because of the maturity of the students and the goals and objectives of the course. In this section, students explored how conscious discernment shapes our character and defines our relationship with God as well as our role in society. Using classical and contemporary literature, we travelled through the Spiritual Exercises with fluid motion to help students: reveal their inner landscape, identify what living in the Ignatian spirit means, draw clarity during times of desolation, and ultimately seek inner joy through rational desires that are in concert with the Ignatian vision.



## ***First Week: Assessing Self---Where am I? How am I?***

### ***Dante's Inferno***

Beginning with Dante's *Inferno*, students began to assess their own personal inventory regarding moral decision-making. We discussed the challenges of balancing reason over will and the effects when we veer away from our own inner moral compass. Through the allegory, we discussed how seeking rational desires can bring us closer to God while seeking irrational desires can lead us to the icy center of our own Hell.

### ***Shelley's Frankenstein***

Following Dante's journey, students read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the work moves through the Spiritual Exercises on key levels. Victor Frankenstein demonstrates to students the tragic consequences of our fallenness when we shun God and our moral duty to society. In the process of creating the Monster, Victor elevates himself above God, protesting that "A new species would bless [him] as its creator and source" (Shelley 52). The Monster, his progeny, showed students how other people and environment can skew our vision of right and wrong and lead us down dark paths. One student, Kelly Daniels, explored the dangers of falling off God's rational path by traveling down one that is motivated by personal power and glory by comparing misguided motivations of human cloning with Victor's misguided goals in creating the Monster. Daniels suggests that:

*Using knowledge as a tool, man wants to break the barrier that separates  
God from humans.—Kelly Daniels\**

Beyond the motivating factors of pride and glory, Victor Frankenstein and scientists involved with cloning can be compared to "Modern Day Prometheus." These individuals are ultimately seeking divine knowledge, thereby, attempting to become more powerful than God. In Dante's *Inferno* the Principle of Correspondence is formidable and explains that man is an imperfect representation of God. . . . Using knowledge as a tool, man wants to break the barrier that separates God from humans. The very act of creating life, which is attributed to God, would put man on par with God. In *Frankenstein*, Victor has an insatiable desire to seek the elixir of life. . . . [His] goal convinced him to act on his impulse and thus obtain the power of God. Yet, when he finally unlocked the key to the creation of life he was appalled at his subject and instead of acting as an accepting God, he abandoned his creation.—Kelly Daniels

\*Quote used upon permission granted by the student.

What I found important in Daniel's writing as well as class discussion is that these students began to assess themselves and to explore motivation and consequences of decision-making. By using *The Inferno* as a backdrop, the students were able to discuss what happens when God's sacred power and knowledge are perverted by people like Victor Frankenstein. Students were also able to see how

motivation (like power) in decision-making can draw you away from God. Through the Monster, students saw how we can turn away from God, even in our darkest moments.

## ***Second and Third Weeks: Who am I---The Center of My Being When I am Truly Me and Finding Myself in Desolation***

### **Jose Saramago's *Blindness***

Oftentimes, we live life in a state of crystal-clear consolation where we are fulfilling God's ministry by seeking joy through our deepest desires and service to others. As our lives become consumed with weighty responsibilities, inexplicable struggles or even mundane routines, we may unconsciously lose sight of our relationship with God and our sense of community. This loss of purpose and focus can lead us down perilous roads with no clear moral compass. Students read Jose Saramago's *Blindness* to visualize the dangers of losing sight of our ideals and sense of purpose, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Much like Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Jose Saramago's *Blindness* demonstrates how complacency in society and a lack of self-awareness allows destructive forces to seep into our lives. With the exception of a single woman, the story depicts an entire society that goes blind due to their state of veiled consciousness. Without a sense of hope, society falls into selfish calamity, destruction and death, similar to Dante's circles of Hell. Much like Virgil in the *Inferno*, the sighted woman guides a small group of people out of their blind Hell as their own illusive reality becomes clearer.

Initially, the students had a hard time relating the story to the Jesuit mission, but when we compared the blind affliction to St. Ignatius's injury, convalescence and spiritual reformation, they began to understand the allegorical concept of blindness. Furthermore, students also had a difficult time in being self-reflective as most believed that they already lived in a clear state of consciousness in their relationship with God and/or their duty to society. However, when I revealed my own unconscious disengagement from God when faced with a family member's illness, they began to recognize how easily we can be pulled away from the strength of humanity and God. Ultimately, students came to understand that people go through life believing to be living authentically with a strong moral and/or spiritual compass. However, the true test reveals our conscious reality when faced with tragedy and devastation.

### **Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow***

After spending the first half of the semester discussing key concepts of Jesuit ideals, students read about St. Ignatius' mission in action through Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*. On a mission of enculturation, Father Emilio Sandoz takes a missionary group to the planet Rakhat where life has been discovered. Much like French Jesuit Isaac Jogues who took his mission to the New World, Emilio was met with torture and the deaths of his missionaries. Finding himself back on Earth as the sole survivor, Emilio struggles with his faith in God, often calling on Mark 9:23 with, "Lord I believe. Help me in my disbelief." What I found important about this story with respect to teaching to the *mission* is Emilio's plight—he believed that he was following in the footsteps of St. Francis Xavier, Isaac Jogues and other Jesuit

missionaries by bringing the Ignatian vision to this new world. However, in return, he found disappointing silence from God magnified by the roar of desolation. As the central message of week three of the Exercises, students talked about their own desolation when bad things happen to good people or when they thought that they were making the right decision but bad things still happened.

To explore this sense of desolation on a deeper level, students were asked to track Emilio's mission as it applies to each week of the Spiritual Exercises and then reflect on their own life with respect to the process. Matthew Kelley discussed his spiritual journey at Kairos that was complicated by struggles with health issues and a family death while on retreat. He explains:

*It felt like God had betrayed me. . . . like I had fallen from grace.*—Matthew Kelley\*

I felt as if my relationship with God was completely severed. I couldn't understand why God would take my grandmother at this time, and it felt like God had betrayed me because of my concussion. Like Emilio, I felt like I had fallen from grace and lost my connection with God. I believed I was alone, and it wasn't until a few weeks later that I began to try to walk with God again. . . . I slowly began trying to pray and understand why God gave me such a tumultuous time, but I still can't answer that question; however, I think that perhaps God was testing me and showing me that I can handle much more than I previously thought, as long as I am walking with Him.—Matthew Kelley

\*Quote used upon permission granted by the student.

Clearly Matthew demonstrates much clarity with respect to his relationship with God. Unlike Matthew, however, another student admitted to rejecting the existence of God because of divorce and cancer that plagued his family. Nonetheless, I hope that through class discussions, students came to understand that there is light on the other side of desolation, and by finding strength in humanity and/or in God, we can resurrect ourselves.

### ***Fourth Week: Finding Identity, Seeking Rational Desires and Joy through the Ignatian Mission***

#### ***Ayn Rand's The Fountainhead***

To many people, *The Fountainhead* may seem to be the antithesis of all Jesuit philosophies as author Ayn Rand is a strident atheist. However, after analyzing the central character, Howard Roark, students concluded that many of Rand's ideas are in concert with St. Ignatius' ideals of finding inner joy by fulfilling our deepest desires.

As Silf explains in *Inner Compass*, there are ordered desires and disordered desires that lead us toward or away from God, respectively. By seeking desires that are ordered and modified by a strong moral compass, people will find joy and fulfillment as well as a more intimate relationship with God, which is consistent with the Jesuit mission (133). Rand, in a similar respect, distinguishes positive and negative

personal desires through the concepts of rational selfishness and hedonistic selfishness. Rand believes that man leads a joyful, fulfilling life by pursuing his own rational self-interest, which is, in essence, rational selfishness. She also believes that man has the right to pursue his own desires only if he is modified by a strong set of rational, moral principles that value human life. Contrarily, Rand contends that people who pursue irrational desires driven by self-indulgence display hedonistic selfishness, separating them from a communion with humanity (“Selfishness”). Taking into consideration rational self-interest and irrational self-interest, students read *The Fountainhead* as a means to find inner joy by pursuing their own desires defined by themselves, as adults, rather than those defined by others.

Initially, students struggled with Rand’s concept of “selfishness,” because we are taught that selfishness is wrong and altruism is right. However, when we re-categorized the definitions under ordered/disordered desires, they began to understand how and why God wants us to seek those desires that bring us joy. Howard Roark demonstrated to the students that inner joy should be our motivator of desire and that God wants us to seek this joy. They also came to understand that we may seek altruistic desires like helping the poor and feeding the hungry. However, when the motivation behind such altruism is power and recognition, these desires become hedonistic and disordered.

Understanding what brings us true joy is an important step in developing an honest sense of self and identity. Through *The Fountainhead*, students were challenged to honestly assess: what brings them inner joy, what factors motivate them and shape their character, and how they may stay true to their moral compass as a means of achieving a fulfilling life. Aaron McPheters, another student in *Literature and the Moral Imagination*, discussed his understanding of the inner joy below:

*Jesuit’s believe that we must be ‘men and women for others,’ but I don’t believe this means we must make others the prime concern in our lives.—Aaron McPheters\**

Jesuit’s believe that we must be ‘men and women for others,’ but I don’t believe this means we must make others the prime concern in our lives. Rand believes when we do this, we become “second-handers” that live off recognition from others. . . . On the surface, it doesn’t seem that a selfish disposition could be compatible with the Jesuit philosophy. However, Rand believes the word selfishness has been perverted. . . . Selfishness for Rand is what enables one to be virtuous. This is shown when Howard Roark says, “It’s so easy to run to others. It’s so hard to stand on one’s own record. You can fake virtue for an audience. You can’t fake it in your own eyes. Your ego is your strictest judge” (634). For Rand, the most moral person is that who is most connected with themselves. Their self-reliance enables them to have good moral and ethical discernment that Jesuits cherish.—Aaron McPheeters

\*Quote used upon permission granted by the student.

Reading Aaron’s essay was a fulfilling experience as an instructor, for I believe he drew from key concepts of Jesuit philosophies discussed throughout the semester and came to a clear understanding of himself and of his relationship with God. Teaching *The Fountainhead* with respect to Jesuit ideals seemed to be noteworthy for most of the students. In their first two decades of life, other people have



been defining their character, sense of morality, and directing their relationship with God. As independent adults, students are now faced with coming to terms with their own sense of identity, morality and relationship with God. Based on class discussion and written reflection, students found in Howard Roark the importance of staying true to their own ideals that bring inner joy and fulfillment.

***English 101: English Composition: Writing within the Sphere of Ignatian Discernment: Social Justice, Society and Ourselves***

I redesigned English Composition 101 by focusing both reading and writing assignments on specific social justice issues so students could begin to assess themselves in relation to God and society. In my course, students are required to write a personal narrative and four research-based papers including a definitional claim, causal analysis, proposal and the Freshmen Common Assignment. With the first four papers, students are required to read examples of each essay type as models for their own work. I selected readings that were limited to social justice issues and required students to select their own topics from an extensive list of social justice themes. The results were multifold.



Beginning with the personal narrative, students were required to assess their own personal landscape by selecting from the following two topics:

As humans, we are singular in nature with our unique sets of gifts, disabilities, foibles, fears and strengths. Consider a gift or strength that you possess and demonstrate how this trait is unique to you. In the essay, you will want to identify when you realized that this gift actually sets you apart. Discuss how you have used this for the good of yourself as well as others. Discuss how you may have exploited your talent resulting in a negative outcome. Discuss how this gift continues to manifest itself in your life. You will want to choose vivid, specific examples to show how this trait permeates your life.

In our life's journey, we are smacked, dragged and captured by fear. The origin of this fear is often rooted in a "hook" that is holding us back. This hook can come in the form of illness, an addiction, a needy girlfriend or boyfriend, bad choice of friends or even parents. Identify a "hook" in your life through a vivid example. Explain when you realized that this hook existed and that it was holding you back in developing as a complete, singular person. Illustrate how this hook has hurt you as well as possibly helped you in life in your relationships with others. Discuss how the hook continues to exist or how you have managed to let go.

Though this was the first college writing assignment for many, students were poignant and revealing. Most students chose to write about the "hook" in their lives that holds them back. These hooks, as Silf explains, suck the balance and energy out of our lives, preventing us from making choices in inner freedom (146). In class discussion, we talked about struggles and fears that hold us back in our lives.

Interestingly, 41% of students wrote about mental health problems while many others wrote about identity issues that challenge them each day. One student, in particular, explains how he has transformed a hook into a unique strength.

*“Dwarfism does not make me different but unique from those around me.”—Joe Woeste\**

During my years in the third to the fifth grade, there were a few of my friends who became my enemies. . . . This period of others diminishing my gift and throwing me down as a person only intensified my determination to reach farther and become a prominent figure that would surpass many on the road to achievement. [Dwarfism] helped me to reevaluate my inner self and rebuild my strength and fortitude to tackle the future events of adversity. The event of bullying showed me that your view of yourself stands stronger than any other view. You need to see and understand yourself in an accepting and fulfilling manner in order to achieve a life of success and happiness. —Joe Woeste

\*Quote used upon permission granted by the student.



For subsequent essays, students read about topics including human trafficking, race relations and environmental concerns. These readings along with requiring students to select from a list of social justice topics resulted in provocative papers. I no longer found myself reading about why marijuana should be legalized or why the drinking age should be lowered. Instead, students selected themes that challenged them socially and, at times, spiritually. One student who is contemplating gender identity issues discussed the role of feminism in a man’s life. The topic was derived from Emma Watson’s 2014 speech to the United

Nations where she characterizes feminism as a movement that seeks to achieve equality for both genders. Besieged by the pressure of hegemonic masculine roles in society, Ben found answers to his own questions as explained below:

*How many male teens must die or be forced into depression in order to uphold their masculine exterior in adherence to society’s demands?—Ben Weibel\**

The societal norm pressuring male adolescents to act more as masculine football players and less as feminine theatre performers has more costs than rewards. . . . Many male teens believe how society views them is far more important than their overall well-being. Conflicted by societal demands and self-preservation, male adolescents are forced into a vulnerable position by society. The destructive demand to fulfill a societal edict drives male adolescents to their breaking points and pushes them even further.— Ben Weibel

\*Quote used upon permission granted by the student.

Through his writing, Ben is coming to terms with his “hook”, releasing a greater sense of inner freedom and acceptance. Ben demonstrates just one example of the “Pearl” that I have found through my students this year.

As a whole, I do believe my students have begun to possess a greater understanding of themselves and of their role in society. Part of this process involves active discernment. Students demonstrated in their writing and in class discussion that they have begun to assess their own morals and ethics as adults, allowing them to shape their moral compass through thoughtful discrimination. Overall, the course realignment with a social justice focus was a great success that manifested the Ignatian vision in students' learning and writing.

### ***Acknowledgment***

The Jesuit Mentorship Program gave me the opportunity to develop an already valuable relationship with Trudelle Thomas, Ph.D. In this past year, Trudelle's spiritual direction helped me appreciate a deeper understanding of the Ignatian Mission that has become relevant both inside and outside the classroom. She challenged me to embrace the Spiritual Exercises through which I have examined my vision of Jesuit education and the evolution of my relationship with God. Ultimately, the mentorship process has inspired and enriched the focus of my teaching as well my own sense of spirituality.

### ***Sources***

Dante, Aligheiri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Charles Eliot Norton. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952. Print.

Manney, Jim. *God Finds Us: An Experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013. Print.

Rand, Ayn. *The Fountainhead*. New York: Plume, 1994. Print.

Russel, Mary Doria. *The Sparrow*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996. Print.

Saramago, Jose. *Blindness*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1997. Print.

"Selfishness." *Ayn Rand Instititue*. The Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), 1985-2015. Web. 12 May 2015.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. New York: Signet Classic, 1983. Print.

Silf, Margaret. *Inner Compass*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999. Print.

Traub, S.J., George W. *Do You Speak Ignatian?* Cincinnati: Xavier University, 2012. Print.