

ENGLISH  
Literature & the Moral Imagination: Focus on Marginalized Voices and Borderlands  
Mapping Xavier's Campus  
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**From Ignatian Mentoring to Ignatian Pedagogy**

I was fortunate to join the Ignatian Mentoring Program in the semester before I began teaching in English 205: Literature and the Moral Imagination. I knew that the IMP experience would be extremely helpful as I developed a course as part of Xavier's Ethics/Religion and Society Program. I wanted to create a Literature and the Moral Imagination course that would reflect the traditions of Ignatian pedagogy and the values associated with Xavier's Jesuit identity. On the E/RS Program's home page, I found the following description:

In keeping with its Catholic and Jesuit tradition, Xavier promotes critical attention to the underlying philosophical and theological implications of issues as well as encourages a worldview that is engaged with issues of peace and justice and oriented to responsible action. Xavier believes it is important for its students to learn to analyze societal issues critically in terms of human values and to develop a sense of compassionate solidarity and service.

The language here speaks clearly to the idea of teaching to the mission, and the course offered a wonderful opportunity for me to implement what I learned in the Ignatian Mentoring Program.

With my mentor, Dr. Rachel Chrastil, I prepared to teach English 205 to the best of my ability in a way that reflected the Jesuit mission. Together, we learned about the history of the Jesuit order and of Jesuit education in America, having many fruitful conversations as we read John W. O'Malley's *The First Jesuits*. We discussed the importance of reflection and

discernment and the specific embodiments of these values in the early history of the Jesuit order. Almost immediately, these ideas began to find their way into my classroom. Eventually, these conversations inspired me to develop two separate reflective assignments for my English 205 course, which formed the central application of my IMP learning.

### **Reflections on Xavier's E/RS focus and campus reality**

My first goal was to develop a course around provocative and diverse readings. I wanted to create a 205 that would meet the standards for both the Diversity Curriculum Requirement and the Gender and Diversity Studies Minor. Thus, I designed a course with a focus on cultural diversity and various forms of marginality. The readings were drawn from around the world (i.e., South Africa, New Zealand, Ireland, America), allowing the class the opportunity to engage with issues of diversity and marginality in multiple cultural contexts—both the foreign and the familiar. The course was challenging for both the students and myself, but quite fruitful in fostering conversation about what constitutes marginality and how ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, or sexual minorities can speak back from the edges of the dominant culture.

I wanted to incorporate the Ignatian values of **discernment** and **reflection** into my two sections of English 205. To set a reflective tone for the course, I assigned the following one-page reflective response due the second week of classes: “According to your own experience, describe the E/RS core and its importance to the Xavier identity.” To my surprise, I found that some of the students were not even familiar with what “E/RS” stood for. So, as a class, we looked at the E/RS program’s web page and discussed the central courses of the E/RS curriculum. After this clarification, the students completed their responses. Here is a selection of their comments:

- The E/RS classes “have a lot to do with how humans interact with each other”.

- “One thing that E/RS courses do is to force students out of their normal comfort zones. They address topics that are not easy to discuss, and they provide ideas and perceptions of these topics from a very diverse and exhaustive set of vantage points.”
- Through the E/RS focus, “students are able to actively engage in learning about peace and justice.”
- “The importance of the E/RS series lies in making connections between significant societal issues and the underlying philosophical and theological implications that may arise from such issues.”
- E/RS courses “challenge me to think critically about the world around me and how my actions impact society.”

We discussed these responses in detail, emphasizing the central nature of the E/RS mission to the content of this particular English 205. We considered the importance of asking ethical questions of a piece of literature, the capacity of art to convey ethical crises, and the ability of art to inspire responsible and just social action. In terms of our specific course, we discussed the ability of literature to represent diversity and marginality and to inspire awareness and a desire to act for change. These questions returned again and again throughout the semester. Thus, the initial reflective response helped raise a larger awareness in the students of the course’s contextual importance, putting all of our reading and discussions in this larger context.

Designing a course that would teach my students about Apartheid, Maori culture, the Potato Famine, the Great Depression, and the Mexican-American war, I realized that to properly fulfill the goals of E/RS and encourage my students to “develop a sense of compassionate solidarity and service,” I would also need to apply the course’s concern with diversity to the students’ own lived experience. I wanted the students to directly apply our understanding of the marginal to Xavier’s campus, translating our conversations about border crossings that were geographically or temporally remote to the here and now. So I developed a group project that

would take our discussions about the readings and translate those themes into their understanding of Xavier's campus.

Turning toward our own local culture, I asked the students to consider Xavier's campus as a community. I gave students campus maps and asked them to divide campus into at least five territories or neighborhoods with distinguishing characteristics, and isolate any potentially difficult border crossings. Then, I put them into groups that worked together over several weeks, through both in-class meetings and out-of-class work. They refined a group map, developed definitions for each territory, explored parts of campus they were unfamiliar with, and prepared a presentation and paper to share their map with the rest of the class.

As you might imagine, the discussions that resulted were fascinating. I asked the students where the most difficult border crossings existed on campus. They responded:

- "Hinkle & Schott, because that's where all the faculty are."
- "Crossing Victory to get to O'Connor, the Armory, and Elet, for those who are not athletes or Psychology majors. Some people see this as detached from Xavier"
- "Crossing from the second floor/cardio area of O'Connor to the first floor weight room, if you are a woman."
- "The basketball courts attract locals, rather than students, and makes it difficult for Xavier students to play there."
- "Crossing from Xavier into Norwood."
- "Between commuters and residents"
- "Between the Village and the rest of campus across Dana Ave."
- One group isolated not a geographic border, but a cultural one, for minority and international students who have to cross that cultural border just to engage in the full life of Xavier.

As we heard the group presentations and discussed the different maps, we also discussed how the difficult border crossings on campus might be overcome, and how each student could contribute to erasing borders, applying their own skills of discernment to understand and improve their community.

In the reflective portion of the group paper, students shared a wide variety of responses. Some stated they learned that “there are a lot more borders than we expected” and that campus is “more diverse than we thought.” Some felt that, “the further you progress here at Xavier the more concentrated you become in your major which indirectly separates you from everyone else.” Others felt there were “limited borders, because students are involved in so many clubs and groups,” and therefore the campus population comes together in many more ways than it stays apart. Or, “the way Xavier is structured it prevents the seclusion of groups. The campus is too small not to mingle with several different groups.” In discussing these different understandings of campus, as a class we became more attentive to Xavier’s community dynamic and our own individual roles within it.

My hope was that the campus mapping experience would live up to what my students’ felt a good E/RS course should be, as expressed in their initial reflections. In other words, I wanted the assignment to

- Challenge them to think critically about the world around them;
- Connect class material on ethics and society with their lived experience as Xavier students;
- Introduce them to a new and diverse set of viewpoints.

Students stated that they had a lot of fun working on this project and learned a great deal about how diverse each individuals’ experience of even so small a community as Xavier can be. And certainly that awareness of diversity, of marginality, and of potential difficulty so very close to home is, in and of itself, a positive outcome. I hope that the students from my 205s continue through their remaining semesters at Xavier more aware of how it functions as a community and

more conscious of their own role in that community. In this small way, I hope to have instated in them a further appreciation for the Ignatian gifts of reflection and discernment.

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