

How might a teaching professor assure the future mission and identity of Xavier University?

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When I transitioned from a practitioner to a professor in the fall of 2021, I approached the opportunity for a new beginning with equal amounts of excitement and anxiety. Throughout my professional career in the marketing and communications field, I had supported multiple Catholic organizations and had enjoyed the opportunities to leverage my skills to promote social causes and faith-based services for the benefit of the greater good of society. Key factors in my decision to join the faculty at Xavier University were the college's mission and Jesuit heritage. Soon after I joined the campus community and participated in the Manresa overnight for faculty and staff, I began to sense some differences in how Xavier expressed its mission and formed community compared to other Catholic institutions I had engaged with. The opportunity to join the AFMIX cohort XIII appealed to my interest in exploring these notions and gaining a deeper understanding of Xavier's mission and the Jesuit charism. I felt immediately welcomed into the community by Debra Mooney and Joe Schadle, who inspired me by their passion and commitment to Xavier's mission. I am extremely grateful that I was able to benefit from their presence on Xavier's campus.

As I complete my fourth year of teaching at Xavier and reach the conclusion of the two-year commitment to the AFMIX program, I would like to share how the AFMIX experience has benefitted me personally and professionally. Personally, I believe that AFMIX provided the bridge that I needed to connect my past experiences with my present opportunities by helping me feel more connected to the Xavier community and to the rich heritage of the Jesuit mission. Through the AFMIX program, I became a student of Jesuit history and mission expression. This benefitted me professionally as I was able to apply what I was learning in my approach to teaching in the classroom. Key components of the "Gifts of our Ignatian Heritage" became foundational to the structure of my course designs, from the student learning outcomes to regular classroom activities. The Jesuit values helped me to build confidence as an educator since they provided a foundation for me to base my interactions and relationships. I share the Jesuit dedication to education as a pathway for human flourishing, and I value the opportunity to continue my life-long learning while mentoring others on their vocational journey.

The AFMIX program has impacted my teaching in all three of the courses I regularly teach. In my senior-level advertising course, COMM 430 Creative Strategies for Advertising, I encourage students to explore the concept of "Magis" and consider the "universal good" by engaging in a critical examination of social and environmental responsibility. Students research potential corporate clients to understand how they may be contributing to the common good or potentially causing harm to the environment and the greater society. Insights from this research inform their communication strategy, but a greater goal is to provide a critical lens which students may use when they consider relationships with future employers or clients.

During the spring 2025 semester, I have guided students in my COMM 237 Elements of Copy and Design course to engage with a community partner to apply the values of "solidarity and kinship" as

well as “service rooted in justice and love.” Students are collaborating in creative teams to promote the mission of 1N5, a local nonprofit which focuses on mental wellness and suicide prevention. Since the advertising industry is often associated with negative aspects of consumerism and the capitalist economy, I value the opportunity to reveal the numerous ways that students may apply their communication skills in support of the common good.

In my COMM 235 Digital Design course, I have continued to incorporate an intentional focus on the Ignatian value of *cura personalis* and its connection with creativity through activities that were initially developed for my project through the Ignatian Mentoring Program during the first year of my AFMIX participation. In alignment with *cura personalis*, or “care of the whole person,” students are encouraged to engage in self-care practices and regular reflections to explore the connection between holistic wellness and creative confidence. In addition, students were encouraged to engage in “creative immersion” experiences, which included two opportunities that were inspired by my participation in AFMIX. Students enjoyed a visit with artist and Xavier Alumni Holly Schapker and a discussion of her paintings featured in the Mission and Identity office. One student’s written reflection shared, *“I was deeply inspired by Holly’s recent talk about her creative process. I found it comforting to know that the creative process isn’t linear. I also appreciated that even incredible artists can doubt themselves sometimes.”* Another “immersive” experience invited students to view the video housed on the Mission and Identity website about local sculptor Tom Tsuchiya before visiting his statues on campus. Many students shared that they gained a new appreciation for the beauty and symbolism the statues add to campus, with one student writing, *“These sculptures aren’t just objects to glance at—they tell stories, spark conversations, and invite us to reflect. The combination of art, history, and emotion turns the campus into a place where we can step out of our usual routine and engage with something more meaningful.”*

It has been a blessing and a privilege to participate in this time of learning, reflection and discernment. I know I will continue to reflect on the lessons learned and the insights gained. The mission is now a part of me as much as I am a part of the community. Although I am just one person among hundreds on Xavier’s campus, I am pleased to do my part to assure that the mission and identity of Xavier University continues to support human flourishing for future generations.