My AFMIX Experience 

I obtained my BSBA in marketing here at Xavier in 1986. During my time here at Xavier, I was always the type of student who started an assignment as soon as it was assigned, and finished it early. Why then, have I been having so much difficulty beginning the AFMIX Capstone Project? Upon reflection, I came up with two answers. The first is that I don’t want the AFMIX Program to end. It has been something I have looked forward to each week for the last 3.5 semesters. As the Business Manager for the Jesuit Community, prior to AFMIX, I spent most of my days in my office. My days consisted of accounting software, spreadsheets, emails, maintaining the Jesuit Residence, and interacting with the individual members of the Jesuit Community. My contact with students and other Xavier employees was almost nonexistent. Since I began AFMIX, I have expanded my interactions with other Xavier employees from all facets of the university, as ***AFMIX X*** is the largest cohort since the program’s inception.

The second reason I have been having difficulty beginning this assignment, is my inability to really see how I would take what I learned from AFMIX, label it, and then describe how it would affect my work. Coming up with a label or word description of what I learned seemed impossible. How could I put into words the transformation I feel in my heart? How then too, to equate that with the sometimes mundane/financially oriented tasks of my job - I was stumped. I realized that if I couldn’t really think of this in a professional light, it had to be more about me as a person (*Cura Personalis*). I was quickly able to label what I learned and how I feel since embarking on the AFMIX journey. I feel OPEN.

Although I attended Xavier, married a fellow Muskie, and have sons who went to St Xavier High School, I do not remember really learning a lot about the history of the Jesuits, or St. Ignatius Loyola. I really enjoyed that the foundation of the program was to delve into that history. As a Catholic, I also enjoyed the semester we talked about theology and the Catholic Church. We learned about Ignatius developing the Spiritual Exercises (Daily Examen) for the common people, to help them become closer to God. Then we took the summer off – I missed it.

The third semester, we broke into small groups to do an abbreviated group version of the Spiritual Exercises. This semester was perhaps the most meaningful and the most difficult for me. Getting to know the eight other people in my small group in such an intimate setting was wonderful. I learned so much from the diverse backgrounds and experiences each person brought to the table each week. It made me realize that in some ways, my world was very small and narrow. I was a Catholic who went to a Catholic college, married a Catholic, sent my children to Catholic schools, and was active in my Catholic Church. I was even working at a Catholic University for the actual Catholic Jesuit priests! Everyone in my circle was so similar – our looks, our faith, our demographics, our politics, etc. I didn’t necessarily set out to live my life that way, it just happened. The small group OPENED my eyes -to different faith experiences, to people with no faith experiences, to those who felt jaded and let down by their religion, to those with no real religion at all. It OPENED my eyes and mind to different political views, to different ideas about personal and global responsibility, to gender issues, to environmental issues. The list goes on and on. This was also a difficult time for me as a Catholic. It made me question much of what I always took for granted. It made me look at my faith, my religion and my Church in a more discerning way. It made me uncomfortable. I actually took about six months off from going to church. I questioned everything! I felt so connected to each and every person in the group as we shared our stories in a very candid, safe and confidential environment. It was life changing for me.

We are now in the final stretch of AFMIX. We have spent the semester listening to past AFMIX graduates and hearing about changes and practices they have adopted as a result of AFMIX. It has been very helpful to hear and see how others have taken their experiences and applied them to real life. Although we had been given a book entitled Reimagining the Ignatian Examen earlier in our cohort, I was unable to really find personal meaning when attempting the Examen using the book. I had trouble connecting. This semester Laura Ruwe introduced us to the idea of using YouTube to find guided Daily Examens online. It was like a lightbulb went off for me! I have now incorporated it into my evening routine. I find the reflection and deep breathing to be such a meaningful part of my day. It has also taught me how to appreciate more of the simple things in life, and to let go of the difficulties.

This year I taught GOA (the first year student seminar). This took me very far out of my comfort zone. I am also a volunteer at the student food panty and the committee for the Days of Solidarity. I am also taking part in the Mindful Self-Compassion workshop. All of these have led me to meet more wonderful Xavier employees and to be more involved on campus. I have also incorporated meditating and restorative yoga into my life. I believe I have truly OPENED my heart and my soul to God and all of those around me. I feel more like the 1986 version of myself when I was a student here, and realize that some of the responsibilities and stresses of raising a family and caring for aged parents and working full time, really closed me off from my best version of myself.

I am so very grateful to Phil and Beth Gasiewicz for funding the AFMIX program, to the University for offering it, and to the Jesuits who supported my decision to participate. There are very few work places where you can participate in a program that develops you personally and spiritually versus focusing on work oriented skills. I am thankful for all of the people who made presentations throughout the 4 semesters and especially to Doug Rischmann and Sheila Doran who led the cohort fearlessly.

As I feel so transformed, it is impossible to think that it won’t carry over into my work. It already has, as I am a more active rather than passive employee. I see that continuing to grow. I feel that in every area of my work and encounters with students, parents, fellow employees and Jesuits, I am better equipped to serve in whatever small or great way I can!

***Go forth and set the world on fire”***



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