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Spring 2025

Seminars on Ignatian Leadership Capstone Project

Ignatian Belonging calls for radical inclusion and invites us to engage thoughtfully in the *Universal Apostolic Preference #2: Walking with the Excluded*. As practitioners of the good work in building belonging and inclusion for all students, there are times when we challenge our own ideas and beliefs in order to engage in that space at the table made for everyone – not just those we agree with, personally.

Vice President Ivy Banks asked us to reflect on how we exercise Ignatian Belonging in our own work and I found myself considering the challenges of being someone with strong opinions and beliefs that, at times, are at direct odds of some of the students which I am serving. I have a core belief in my work that in order for any viewpoints to be recognized or shared, all viewpoints should be recognized and shared – even when I don’t agree. I think the Marketplace of Ideas, which we so often reference in academia, thrives when a person (student) has access to differing opinions, beliefs, cultural experiences, backgrounds, identities, etc. The more diverse (in all ways) a person can be exposed to new information, the greater context they can have for their own life and experiences, allowing them to synthesize their own ideas and beliefs and fortify them with information they gather through their own lives. All this is to say, Ignatian Belonging – *recognizing dignity, extending hospitality, nurturing belonging* – is aspirational but in alignment with how I see my own experience as a practitioner working with students of all backgrounds and ideologies.

But having an approach like this is really hard, at times. Because the reciprocal is often not true. How does one engage with someone who does not value that same sense of the Marketplace being open to everyone? While I personally have a more secular approach to my thinking, and what would be considered more progressive or liberal than many, I still believe that a student is on a journey of learning and that through exposure and experience, they build their own understanding and meaning of the world around them. To me, this is paramount to the educational process happening.

I think back to my own life, growing up Southern Baptist in a fairly religious, strict, and conservative household. While my family attended church 2-3x a week and I was deeply indoctrinated in my faith, I also was allowed to ask questions. I was allowed to have opinions. My parents valued my curiosity. I remember as I started driving and being more independent, I would want to explore different churches and different faith communities with other friends. My mom would say, “as long as you’re going to a church, I’m happy.” And so I would. I would experience different ways of worshipping, of taking communion, of experiencing the differences around me and meeting new people. That curiosity informed my understanding that there is not “one way” of thinking or living or being.

Although ultimately, I steered into a more secular life, the foundation was still established: the more people I meet, the more experiences I have, the more difference I encounter, the stronger my understanding of myself, my beliefs, and my values have become. Which leads back to the idea of college students engaging with one another in Xavier’s Marketplace of Ideas. When we establish opportunities, permit different voices, allow students to ask questions and be exposed to different thoughts and ideas – and especially those outside of a classroom with less power structures and less instructive direction – they learn, they grow, they engage, and they encounter God. Even in ways we don’t expect or understand… even when its in different ways than our own.