



Xavier's Seminars on Ignatian Leadership
2025

Incorporating Ignatian Principles In How We Use & Share Data

Final Capstone Project
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As a data professional, I gather, analyze, evaluate, and present data for and about the university. It is expected that I will not bring my personal biases or views into my analysis and present the data as it is. But that being said, one could argue that there is a difference between presenting data dispassionately and presenting data without bias. I would argue, that as leaders at a Jesuit, Catholic institution who embrace Ignatian ideals, we should strive to use and show our data without bias but with a certain level of compassion in what we do. That being said, I propose making use of Ignatian discernment, reflection and some of Xavier's "Curas" as a framework in which to conduct our work.



DISCERNMENT & REFLECTION

We need to take time to reflect on both how data is being used and how it will be perceived. This requires us to not only understand the data we are analyzing but also the audiences who will consume the results of our analysis. This is not to say that we should change the message of the data. Sometimes we have to deliver hard truths, but that does not mean that we should do it in such a way as to add "insult to injury".

Sometimes the data is simply being made available for general consumption (e.g. Census Enrollment Statistics) and sometimes more analysis and visualization work is being done (e.g. University Factbook). Data that is being simply shared may not require as much discernment and reflection work, but even "simple" data sharing can have implications in how it is displayed, decisions made about what is shared, how it's filtered, etc. Some of the questions we might ask are:

- What is the message we are trying to deliver with this presentation of the data?
- Are we singling out a particular community with the existing distribution of the data or in how the data is divided up? Is that the intention?
- How might one or more marginalized communities respond to what the data is saying?

Once you have reflected on how the data is being used, displayed, and possibly interpreted, we need to take some time to discern how we might better share the data without changing or diluting its message with our own biases.

- Are there visual choices (e.g. color, shapes, verbiage, etc.) that might be more appropriate given the data and/or intended audiences?
- If the data and/or visualization has a negative message, does this need to be said? Sometimes the answer is yes, but then how do we share this negative message while minimizing any harm we may cause with it?
- Is the presentation of the data easily understood or does it need documentation or a guide to help with interpretation?
- Is this a message that everyone needs to see or should its audience be limited? The suggestion is not to avoid transparency, but to be sensitive to privacy and confidentiality concerns. Some data should be protected and not shared openly.



CURA PERSONALIS

This is probably the first “cura” that most of us think of at Xavier. Caring for the whole person, as a unique, multifaceted individual who should be cherished for the gifts they bring to the table. As purveyors of data, we need to be cognizant of how the information we shape and share can affect the many individuals within our campus community. As mentioned above, sometimes these messages are difficult ones. That doesn’t mean we neglect to share it, but we need to be cognizant of the message we are sending and its impact. Care must be taken to not change what the data is saying while being sensitive to how it can be received.

- Could what the data is saying and how it’s presented be perceived as offensive, prejudiced, problematic, and/or hurtful? How can we share the data’s message in a different manner that mitigates or at least minimizes the negativity of the message?
- How is the data categorized? Are there categories that are problematic and, if so, can they be renamed? Are there categories missing and is this due to the data itself or due to decisions made in the analysis?
- Does the data “call out” certain individuals or groups? Is this the desired effect? If so, is it done in a way that delivers the message without being harmful or belittling the individual or group?



CURA APOSTOLICA

In the same way that we need to be aware of how data affects individuals, we also need to be aware of how data affects the university. In order for Xavier to continue to carry out its ministry of educating our students, we must use care in how we share and present data about our institution. While it is critical, and sometimes legally required, that the data we report meets certain standards and is defined certain ways, that does not mean that we can’t or shouldn’t consider how this data may affect the institution and its place in the world. Given the importance of data to everyone’s work, it is also incumbent on us to share the data with other areas if possible?

- Are there privacy, legal, or otherwise regulated concerns regarding the data we are sharing and/or the manner in which we are sharing it? Some data, due to laws like FERPA, GLBA, and GDPR, is protected from disclosure. Other laws, like HEOA and Student Right-to-Know, require an institution to share certain data in certain ways.
- If there isn’t a requirement to share data, how does this data speak to the mission and direction of the university? How does it reflect on Xavier? What is the benefit of sharing this data openly?
- Does the visualization of the data reflect Xavier’s brand (e.g. colors, wording, logos, messaging, etc.)?
- Is this data useful to other departments and can it be shared? Does it need to be aggregated or anonymized so other areas can make use of it?
- Is the data easily usable and understood? Would different naming conventions aid in understanding? Would data definitions help to avoid misinterpretation?



CURA STUDIORUM

As an institution of learning, we are called to be both educators and learners in the academic enterprise. Data can be a valuable component of that work and care for how it is or could be used within that work is important. There is a balance to be found between making data easily understood and making data detailed enough to be explored and analyzed. To further complicate this balancing act, the nature of the data and how it is to be shared may dictate what and what level of detail can be shared.

- Are there restrictions on what or how the data can be shared and/or is there a limit on the level of detail that can be shared (i.e. does the data need to be aggregated, anonymized, or restricted in some way)?
- Will this data be of use in a learning environment (students or employees)? How can it be better prepared to make it more useful as a learning tool (e.g. common sense naming, data preparation, data definitions, etc.)?
- Is the data useful in furthering the educational mission of the university? Can it provide insight on the student experience or its outcomes? Can it help provide insight to students regarding an important or difficult concept?



MAGIS

Discernment, reflection and each of these Curas ultimately ask the question “Does this data lead to the greater good?” Magis calls us to ask that question and to pursue the path that leads us there. Data, by itself, is just facts and statistics. When we make data available to others through our efforts, we give it context and interpretation that can be helpful or harmful.

- Is the data being shared in a way that is respectful, supportive, and understanding of the individual, the institution, and the educational mission of the university?
- Does it tell the truth?
- Does it avoid being unnecessarily disrespectful or hurtful while delivering its message?
- Are we thinking about how data will be perceived and its impact on others?

These are just some of the questions that should guide us as we analyze, prepare, and distribute data. As a university that is dedicated to being “for and with others”, it is critical that we bring that concept into our data work as well. It’s important to deliver the truth that can be found in sound data analysis, but it is equally important to think beyond the numbers to the people who can and will be affected by the results of this work.