

Vision and Themes for Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability

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We are in crisis and failing at our mission

Our present economic and environmental trajectory is unsustainable. The challenge is urgent: As leading scientists noted in a June 2017 *Nature* article, "Should emissions continue to rise beyond 2020, or even remain level, the temperature goals set in Paris become almost unattainable." Those temperature goals are necessary to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius to avoid tipping points that would lead to catastrophic climate change inundating seaside cities, lessening agricultural production, increasing storm severity and frequency, worsening food and water insecurity, and pushing vulnerable communities further into poverty.

Destabilization of the planet goes beyond climate. In January 2015, Will Steffen, Johan Rockstrom, and others published an update on their research into planetary boundaries, noting that human societies have crossed four out of nine planetary systems that sustain human and other life posing great risk to all: climate change; loss of biodiversity; land-use changes; and, altered biogeochemical cycles (phosphorous and nitrogen).

Pope Francis, building on his predecessors Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI, has declared it a moral responsibility to address the ecological crisis. [*Laudato Si'*](#) is an extraordinary document, supporting a call to action grounded not only in the Catholic tradition, but also in rigorous scholarship in the natural and social sciences. Just as *Laudato Si'* reaches out to other faith traditions, voices from those other traditions have issued urgent calls to action for the sake of our future and our souls. Jesuit universities have responded in a variety of [ways](#).

But we believe that in addressing these threats, we cannot rely on the same ideas and technologies that have created them. Our students know this in their souls and in their bones. We must be the leaders and co-educators they need to respond to the large-scale challenges of global climate destabilization. We are living in a different world, undeniably altered by human impact. The challenges on *Eaarth*, as Bill McKibben calls this new planet, demand a different education.

Preventing environmental catastrophe will require collective action. Yet individually, and in our various collective endeavors in the Jesuit educational network, we often worsen the situation. We need to rededicate ourselves to our cooperative educational mission to support the full growth of students so that they might act for others. In 1993 the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education gave The [Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm](#) a practical orientation. Now more than two decades later, in light of our mounting global challenges, a practical orientation in educating for a sustainable future is well past due. We in higher education are training shepherds for a flock and a pasture that we are failing to protect. By not teaching the civic, ecological and spiritual skills and dispositions needed to preserve the commons, we are contributing to the tragedy. This is a glaring mission failure for Jesuit educational institutions.

We need a new educational model; we need resilient citizens

The Chinese ideogram for “crisis” is comprised of two symbols: “danger” and “opportunity.” Students sense the *danger*: they know that they are standing at the threshold of something unknown and likely chaotic. If the world’s systems crumble, what will be there to take their place? This is where our mission must change to meet the crises. We need to provide our students with a new vision, not more growth at all costs, but something more cooperative and humane.

We must grasp the *opportunity* to provide a civic education grounded in spiritual, ecological, and economic approaches appropriate for these times. We must help students acquire the intellectual and ethical tools necessary to thoughtfully consider and address future challenges. Currently, these topics are generally taught as separate entities, with little interdisciplinary focus or contemplation. Here our intellectual tradition must be re-invigorated so that students learn both the “Arts of the Word,” the Latin Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric and the “Arts of Quantity,” or the Latin Quadrivium of arithmetic, astronomy, music and geometry. These are now commonly referred to as the Arts and the Sciences or the Humanities and STEM in our schools but such divisions serve to reinforce the narrow thinking that has led to near planetary collapse.

Mere information on the scope of the climate crisis is not sufficient. People interpret information through partisan lenses; their media networks filter information to amplify pre-existing biases. By posing pressing questions and demanding practical answers, cooperative inquiry and cooperative action can cut through these biases.

To prepare our students to meet and address this crisis with hope and determination requires forms of multi-disciplinary, artistic and scientific, experiential learning that higher education has not readily been able to offer. Towards this end, the five themes below, when explored and integrated by students into their own experiences and passions, will allow them to become ecological and spiritual citizen entrepreneurs instead of mere cogs in a growth machine. We need to shape responsible, risk-taking graduates who will be intrinsically spiritual, social, and ecological in their relationship with themselves, their communities, and the earth. They will be citizens not consumers. They will be entrepreneurs, not cyphers in large immovable organizations. They will be informed and inspired by what Pope Francis calls a culture of encounter. They will be prepared and committed to act in concert with others to create change and form resilient communities.

In its report on [*The Promotion of Justice in the Universities of the Society*](#), the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat for the Society of Jesus calls all Jesuit institutions to work at changing the systems, structures, and policies in the world. While holding our national leaders to account is critical, we must also act and teach our students to act in every context available to us. The Jesuit network offers an existing structure for collective action at many levels. The Jesuit educational mission provides extraordinary normative support. The orientation towards considering the interests of the poor and marginalized

emphasizes the need for action: those who did the least to contribute to environmental degradation are likely to suffer the most. It is also in the self-interest and long-term wellbeing of the Jesuit network and organizations, and of humanity in general. We all lose if the pasture is destroyed.

AJCU Schools: Rooms in “Our Common Home”

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis encouraged the faithful to embrace the concept of “Care for our Common Home.” However, the ways organizations communicate and educate their members to accomplish this feat has not been well defined. By “Thinking Globally, and Acting Locally,” the network of AJCU institutions is well positioned both geographically, and through its shared mission and identity, to achieve this purpose. By breaking down the “Common Home” into a series of “Rooms,” each AJCU institution can experiment with approaches that help improve the economic, ecological, social, and spiritual wellbeing of its inhabitants in ways that are tailored to its own unique social and cultural spheres and ecosystems. Our unifying sense of purpose must be to make each “Room” a better and more connected part of the “Home,” while building and celebrating the unique sense of place that each “Room” offers.

A necessary first step in this process is defining what constitutes the “Room” that each AJCU institution should bear responsibility to begin caring for. Each Room might be best imagined as an ecoregion. The key landscapes and waters that best define and support the ecology and biodiversity of the region and provide the deepest sense of cultural heritage and identity should be singled out for reimagining our relationship with these areas. For areas lacking a strong AJCU presence, partnerships could be established with other faith-based academic institutions with similar service missions to ensure all Rooms have a means to more fully connect and complete the picture of Our Common Home. Collaborations between these institutions and community organizations (places of worship, NGOs, etc.) can provide the membership and support to meet the mission at the local level.

Pope Francis notes that our environment is a member of the world’s poor, and that solutions to environmental challenges are necessarily entwined with solutions to human poverty and inequality, including material, community, and spiritual poverty. The Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability that is proposed here is well suited to guide and inform students to address these forms of poverty, and by applying this approach each AJCU institution can focus on improving the economic, social, spiritual, and ecological welfare within its own Room. These inherently local initiatives are consistent with the Catholic social doctrine of subsidiarity, and should be articulated in that framework. Sharp contrast should be drawn between this principle, and current models that favor “top-down” organizational decision-making and policies that favor large corporations and the well connected, with all its downstream negative implications to social justice and the environment.

Spirituality/Faith and Arts/Culture

Our Ignatian worldview and mission emphasizes “finding God in all things,” with all this implies for the relation between religion and science, the economy, the polity, and other structures related to the current environmental and related crises. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis stresses the need for a change of heart as a prelude to fundamentally rethinking our behaviors and practices so that we may preserve our Earth and the life on it, human and otherwise. The mainstream approach to address these crises is to continue operating within the current mechanistic paradigm, which is antithetical to the Ignatian worldview and thereby treats symptoms (at best) rather than the root causes of our environmental and related crises. Both spirituality/faith and arts/culture provide valuable pathways to the human heart and a way beyond mechanics and dualism. The sustainability community has just begun to use these valuable resources. Creative and artistic endeavors must play larger, more pivotal roles in illustrating how each AJCU institution fits in its ecoregional Room and how we might live sustainably and Our Common Home.

We must develop educational opportunities that foster experiential learning and engagement to promote social justice, economic sustainability, and ecological renewal within each institution's ecoregional Room. We need more courses that discuss the relationships between religion and science and the critique of scientism if religion is to play an intellectually coherent role in addressing the environmental crisis. We must expand direct, enriching experiences with nature and its wonders to allow students to engage ecology on a more personal level, coupled with more intentional time for deep reflection and conversations on spirituality and faith that are common to, but transcendent of, all religious traditions. As St. Ignatius said, “For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul.” Through thoughtful dialog and heartfelt learning, and direct action and advocacy, faculty, staff, students, and community members involved in these programs can develop a greater sense of hope and resilience. These tangible experiences can help students not only find solace, they can illuminate the divine wonder of our world.

Pedagogical Development: Turning Desolations into Consolations

The pedagogy outlined below was developed through a series of intentional conversations among faculty who teach courses on the topic of sustainability in programs including, but not limited to, environmental science, environmental studies, and/or sustainability studies. Our approach was to, first, locate a community of scholars who have engaged the subject in the classroom and, then, to develop and hear reports about these teaching experiences. The participants were asked to notice themes in the reports and to articulate these themes. The themes were written into a white paper and then shared with a broader community of scholars, asking for amendments, revisions, and further commentary.

The original themes were characterized as a series of, to use the Jesuit discernment term *desolations*, or aspects of teaching that the scholars experiences as obstacles or challenges, that were widely shared when teaching about sustainability. With

these common desolations in mind, and with widespread agreement about their presence in the sustainability classroom, we reformulated the themes as *consolations*, proactive and positive targets, goals, and outcomes that would transform the learning experience for students in their study of sustainability. As such, our thematic development provides a resource for pedagogy, for classroom intention, for connection with community and nature for any faculty, whether teaching at a Jesuit institution or not, for identifying opportunities and outcomes for sustainability instruction.

Five Themes of Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability

Ignatian Pedagogy is a style of teaching that seeks personal growth through ethical orientation no matter the discipline, institution, or Room. Given the severity of the present situation, we propose a broadening and deepening of this pedagogy to explicitly link personal growth (expansive self-understandings) to civic responsibility. We stress civic responsibility as important as social justice, which too often takes the form of palliative remedies (easier and shorter-term) rather than institutional change (harder and longer-term). Ignatian pedagogy and the Jesuit mission generally, in theory at least, have been aimed at social systems and social structures (as passages above illustrate) but this work—and the action it implies—is not as prominent in our institutions as it must be. “To achieve our goal as educators in Jesuit schools,” the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education wrote twenty-five years ago, “we need a pedagogy that endeavors to form men and women for others in a postmodern world where so many forces are at work which are antithetical to that aim.” We believe that is more important than ever in light of our mounting environmental challenges.

As the International Commission’s noted twenty-five years ago, teachers need ongoing formation as well if they are to provide a formative pedagogy for their students. Our intent is to re-start the dialogue and re-embrace the Commission’s call for ongoing formation, beginning with ourselves and focused on the challenges of sustainability and resilience. In this spirit we outline the following themes for an Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability that is explicitly pointed at providing an education that directly addresses the pressing issues of our times.

The Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm (IPP) calls for integration of context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. The salient element of our collective context and lived experience is an unsustainable ecological, ethical, social, and economic trajectory. Such a context is debilitating and unhealthy. The education we offer has to provide another kind of experience to build resilience and capacity to act, both reverse course and adapt. Reflection enables us to draw the following Five Themes into the existing pedagogical paradigm for use, evaluation and refinement.

There are at least two ways to integrate IPP into pedagogical practice with our five themes. The first, outlined below, is to link together specific themes with each of the IPP elements noting opportunities for exploration because the themes provide inherent points of intersection in the study of sustainability. For instance, IPP calls for the development of EXPERIENCE. Our Theme 2 in the Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability welcomes and honors multiple modes of knowing. Thus, Theme 2 calls for

enhancing and enriching experience through a multitude of sensory experiences without the unnecessary privileging of just one or a few of those ways of knowing. Taken together, Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability (IPS) works in concert to enrich a holistic learning experience for students coming to terms with notions of sustainability. Second, our conversations have made clear that in a given activity, practice, or instructional moment, there may be an intensive focus on a particular theme in the pedagogy and, thus, the faculty member may choose to engage with the IPP on a single theme. For instance, in addressing Theme 3: Time, concentration, and imagination, faculty have developed activities that encourage a social media fast as a practice necessary to create the cognitive space for necessary for addressing big questions of sustainability. In this instance, the students engage in a process of context discovery, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation about their own digital identities and practices in order to develop the autonomy necessary for creating space for reflection. In short, all five elements of the IPP are applied to the single theme.

Below, we outline IPS themes making note of the relevant dimension of IPP. The themes are articulated in the positive, as a consolation to seek or strive for in the classroom, with students in the community, and as the ideal relationship between students and faculty who are teaching subjects in sustainability. Each theme is listed by name, with a short elaboration of the main idea, and with summary description that was developed through facilitated conversations about teaching.

Theme 1 (CONTEXT). Truth, honesty, and humility

Being honest with ourselves and our students and being co-learners with everyone; assuming a position of humility in the face of planetary challenges that remind us there are no simple answers.

In our classrooms, most of us feel a great tension between facing the facts of climate change, political gridlock, and economic determinism while also promoting hope and resilience. We must say to our students that we are not going anywhere; we are not laying out challenges and then saying it is up to them to solve them. We are in the trenches alongside them. But we also want to take the full measure of where we are. We must deliver the news with no hint of cynicism or impatience with ignorance, but with a tenderness that must be central in our teaching. Part of that tenderness is a determination to keep trying, to not despair, to not give in to fatalism or resentment. We must all face the bad news, including the news that personal sacrifices (driving a Prius, pushing for bike lanes) are only a small part of averting the coming catastrophe. Individual action can illuminate what is possible to those who have started to despair, but to be effective it must build community and embrace collective action.

Reflection on this educational challenge leads us to communicate to our students our vulnerability as individuals and as members of communities. No one, regardless of Room or financial security, no matter how carefully distanced from the common fate, is exempt from the existential threats of deteriorating soils, disappearing forests, declining supplies of fresh water, and a warming globe. One immediate expression of a warmer atmosphere filled with heavier and heavier loads of moisture is the generation of more and more extreme and unpredictable storms and damage from wind and flooding. This

can happen at any moment to any of us. Picking up the pieces will require resilience and cooperation.

With truth, honesty, and humility, we acknowledge the context and experience (both intellectual and emotional knowing) of our destabilized planet, invite our students to share their truths and vulnerabilities, while developing for all a set of skills for meaningful reflection and action essential to creating resilient citizens for a sustainable future. In the end, it is essential that our students deem us trustworthy guides.

While we are making ourselves vulnerable, we must also make use of the Ignatian approach to gratitude. St. Ignatius found ingratitude to be one of the worst possible sins. Gratitude, too, must be communicated to our students alongside truth, honesty, and humility.

Theme 2 (EXPERIENCE). Multiple modes of knowing (scientific, embodied, spiritual, cultural, artistic, humanistic, experiential)

Integrating multiple modes of knowing ensures (as do the above) that we and our students are engaged heart, soul and body.

We are educators and researchers, advocates and practitioners. We are motivated by our faith and we are interdisciplinary by design. Our form of education is not about specialized disciplines. It focuses on *studia humanitatis*, the study of our humanity, a curriculum about “our human strivings, failings, passions, and ideals—about wonder,” as the distinguished historian of the Jesuits John O’Malley explains, “as expressed especially in poetry, drama, oratory, and history.” Concern for the public good stood as a central principle in the educational philosophy of the first Jesuits. It aimed to create responsible citizens of every status, capable of identifying and articulating the common good and prepared to make sacrifices or take a leadership role as circumstances demanded.

Rhetoric, vocabulary, interpretive skills, eloquence, even some philology, served the tasks of persuasion and consensus building. All this implied that the cultivation of written and spoken expression could not be separated from the process of thinking itself. The humanistic school produced public persons, engaged in the life of their communities. In honing skills in communicating worthy ideals and goals, rhetoric became known as “the civic discipline.” Such an education, complete in itself, came to be seen as essential preparation for participation in public affairs.

What this version of humanistic education is missing is scientific, embodied, and artistic learning. In agreement with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, we find it hard to explain why the social sciences have been detached from the natural sciences. Both embodied and artistic pedagogies are scientifically proven to promote human welfare. Depression results from too much head learning and not enough applied learning, particularly through the work of the hands. Art, music, and dance are millennia-old ways of connecting mind, body, and soul and elevating positive feelings.

Instructors will incorporate not just multiple disciplines but also multiple ways of knowing within each course, seeking to create spiritual and ecological citizen entrepreneurs. This can be accomplished by co-teaching but also through the efforts of an individual professor willing to learn alongside the students, demonstrating vulnerability and a willingness to learn and grow.

Theme 3 (REFLECTION). Time, concentration, and imagination

Taking time for prayer, reflection, meditation, self- and other-compassion, for focusing on what really matters, and for envisioning and then moving into the lives we want to live; removing the barriers in everyday life that limit focus on important concerns

Political philosopher Matthew Crawford makes the point that we find ourselves fragmented in a fragmented world. Crawford argues that attention is taken from us or we too easily give it up, resulting in a loss of authority to control what, when, and how much we attend to, which fosters an incapacity for self-responsibility. Technology and globalization increase the challenges of sustained attention to ourselves, each other, and the pressing challenges at hand. This is an important element of the context in which we and our students find ourselves.

As a result, even more than twenty years ago, Ignatian pedagogy must include direct access to strategies and practices, such as meditation, mindfulness, discernment, and general self-care. These strategies must be part of class time, assignments, and integrated into evaluative and assessment measures. Instructors will afford opportunities for deep concentration and reflection as ends in and of themselves but also as a prerequisite for creativity, imagination, and collective action. Such experiences and reflection will facilitate effective action by spiritual and ecological citizen entrepreneurs.

Theme 4 (ACTION). Community, service, obligations

In many ways, the above will be fully realized only in service to communities to which we feel a sense of belonging and obligation and to which we devote some of our energy and time for common goals and purposes. These can be families, neighborhoods, cities, religious communities, political parties, nonprofit organizations, schools, universities, etc. This assumes a long-term obligation to others regardless of uncertainty.

Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability comes to essential engagement with damaging structures, institutions and values with this theme, grounded in humility and resilience, self-care and other-care (including the earth), and a commitment to interdisciplinary, artistic, and embodied learning. Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability comes to fruition when we and our students are ready to belong and act in community.

Here we call attention to a dimension of relation necessary for honest and ethical interaction among disparate and unique communities. Gary Brewer writing about environment in an early issue of the journal *Sustainability Science* wrote, “No one has any idea whatsoever of what human systems or decision pathways will look like 25, 50, or

even 100 years from now.” The future is uncertain but that is in no way a justification for inaction; instead it is necessary to act in the face of uncertainty. It is with this premise in mind that individuals and community groups must, then, assert long-term commitment to one another while simultaneously subscribing to the notion that no one involved has a true sense of what the future holds.

Democracy, civic and communal life all require the artful deployment of an enormous range of interactional, political, and relational skills. And moving to a more sustainable future requires Jesuit-educated students to build, contribute toward, and enliven our civic institutions and commitments, including those within the Jesuit network.

The Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm highlights action. In an Ignatian Pedagogy for Sustainability, we emphasize a certain kind of action, leading our students to collective action to change institutional structures for planetary and human welfare, ensuring that these include opportunities to experience and learn from working with their hands and bodies. This does not mean that other kinds of action are not important and necessary but that educators in all disciplines and all Rooms should require students to engage in such work as part of their education. Such political action and advocacy work would involve various political activities (e.g., writing letters, meeting with political officials, working on campaigns), working for community organizations, building student coalitions around pressing issues, leveraging the Jesuit community for local, national and international advocacy and action, and greening their faith communities, among many other initiatives. Embodied work might involve environmental restoration activities, creating and tending community gardens, repairing bicycles for a community cooperative, cleaning out a polluted stream, and building homes for Habitat for Humanity.

Community obligations and service, integrated into a four-year higher education curriculum, provides paths towards vocation, through exposure to a wide variety of people and opportunities, as well as application of values and ideals. A sustainability pedagogy for the 21st century should give students a strong foundation for discerning and locating vocational opportunities upon graduation.

Theme 5 (EVALUATION). Integrity with nature

Recognizing and acting upon the scientific and spiritual truths of our interdependence on the natural world around us; attentive to the lessons we receive when we are reflective about being part of and interacting in nature

Laudato Si' is firmly grounded in science and asserts that planetary stewardship, an integral ecology, must now be the animating principle for our spirituality and economic systems. From the beginning of Pope Francis's papacy, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has regularly addressed the climate crisis. The moral charge is squarely aligned with scientific evidence and a comprehensive transformation of our carbon-fueled economic system will both serve the common good for all and establish a path to a sustainable future.

We must answer Pope Francis' moral call to care for creation and prioritize the needs of the poor and vulnerable most damaged by environmental harm and least culpable in creating it.

In our assessments and evaluations of our teaching and our students' learning, we must start from the premise of our interdependency with the poor and vulnerable and the natural world. Drawing on the wisdom of Native Americans and perennial polyculture, we use nature as measure, land as pedagogy, emphasizing belonging to the land.

The following are some possible assessment questions: How has our course, our classroom discussions, our students' civic engagement promoted an integral ecology? Promoted the understanding of humans as nature? In what tangible ways are we witnesses and bearers of a changing consciousness? In what tangible ways is our Room a more resilient, integrated, and honest place to live, work, and play?