



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Special Section: Cura Psychologia: Jesuit Education and the Work between Theology, Philosophy, and Psychology

Cura Psychologia: Imagining a Jesuit Approach to Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This document introduces *Cura Psychologia* as a Jesuit-informed framework for reimagining psychology through the lens of *cura personalis* (care for the whole person). Drawing on the *Cura Psychologia* Project (2022–25), it situates the psychological humanities as an interdisciplinary and formational field integrating psychology with philosophy, theology, and the arts. In response to reductive trends in contemporary psychology, the authors propose guiding principles to foster interdisciplinary scholarship, cultivate formative academic communities, and reshape curriculum and institutional life. The document advances a vision of psychology oriented toward ethical, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human flourishing.

Keywords:

psychological humanities; interdisciplinarity; *cura personalis*; psychology; philosophy; theology; arts

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We are often asked to define the term “psychological humanities.” As scholars working in a Center that helps set the discourse for the field, it is understandable why. Yet as is the case with any of the disciplines that have emerged from the rich tradition of the liberal arts, the psychological humanities resists simplistic articulation. And as a field that seeks to enhance both our theoretical understanding of the human person and our practical approaches to caring for one another, it is an ever-evolving discipline—one that must be continuously imagined anew.

Nevertheless, it is important to offer some reflections on what constitutes the psychological humanities and what possibilities we believe can be opened up by this burgeoning field. To do so, we have asked colleagues from six Jesuit universities, all of whom participated in the Cura Psychologia Project (2022–25),¹ to come up with a list of guiding principles to be utilized by institutions and departments that would like to see the work of the psychological humanities continue to reshape our understanding of the field of psychology. This is what we came up with:

1. The Spirit That Animates These Principles

As the title of this Project suggests, the Jesuit emphasis on *cura personalis* (care for the whole person) stands at the foundation of both the work we have undertaken together and the transformation we hope to inspire in how the discipline of psychology is theorized and practiced at our Jesuit institutions. A belief in the unity of truth, and thus the conviction that we must bring together scholars from a diverse array of disciplines around the fundamental questions at the heart of the human condition, is also central to our understanding of how that transformation will take place.

The following principles and suggestions for how they might be implemented come from both the activities undertaken as a part of this Project and recommendations made by our Faculty Ambassadors as the Project drew to a close. Each principle offers a goal and gives some examples of how that goal might be achieved.

1 The six Jesuit universities are Boston College (Chestnut Hill, MA), College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA), Fordham University (Bronx, NY), Georgetown University (Washington, DC), Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA), and Seattle University (Seattle, WA).

2. Creating Formative Learning Communities

Goal: To facilitate the development of faculty personally, spiritually, and intellectually with a particular aim of enhancing their capacity to meaningfully engage with the deeper questions of human life from various angles and disciplinary approaches. This can be achieved through:

- The organization of faculty retreats and pilgrimages;
- The development of faculty reading groups and facilitated discussions of art and literature;
- The arranging of shared meals for faculty from different disciplines.

3. Incentivizing the Production of Psychologically-Rich Interdisciplinary Scholarship

Goal: To encourage faculty to produce cross-disciplinary research with peers and colleagues that speaks to the fundamental ethical, spiritual, and social questions of human life. This can be achieved by:

- Weighing such interdisciplinary work more heavily in rank and promotion;
- Building Provost initiatives that provide small grants to incentivize cross-department research;
- Hiring new faculty with the capacity for and interest in interdisciplinary work so as to move away from the specialization model;
- Offering facilitated writing retreats that encourage interdisciplinary writing and engagement.

4. Developing Cross-Disciplinary Offerings

Goal: To engender a curiosity at each of our Jesuit institutions about the psychological humanities by organizing programming that highlights its significance for the development of virtues and the cultivation of character. This can be achieved through the organization of: conferences, public lectures, learning groups, workshops, faculty highlights.

5. Reforming Curriculum Content and Design

Goal: To develop a psychologically capacious curriculum that draws from the wellspring of the humanities-rich Ignatian pedagogical tradition and pushes back against the reductive scientism of our day. Making such an approach to psychology a distinctive of Jesuit education will undoubtedly provide our institutions with great enrollment opportunity. This can be achieved by:


- Integrating psychology into the service learning opportunities that already exist at our schools (for instance, the PULSE Program at Boston College);
- Developing new degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- Creating a Minor in Psychological Humanities;
- Designing co-teaching opportunities for professors from the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, and theology.

6. Reconceptualizing Psychology on Jesuit Campuses

Goal: While all of these initiatives aim at the reformulation of the discipline of psychology at our institutions, there are significant opportunities to work the psychological humanities ethos—and its concern for formative character education—into the identity of the institution itself. This can be achieved by:

- Developing Ignatian-infused trainings for faculty in the Psychology Department;
- Rethinking the philosophies that govern our counseling centers and providing humanities-rich trainings for their staff;
- Offering interdisciplinary student retreats that help attendees think about their own flourishing in relation to more complex intellectual traditions and histories;
- Encouraging the development of psychological humanities student groups and research labs;
- Making interdisciplinary education a vital part of how our institutions conceive of student formation and character development.

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