



REFLECTION ON THE LIVING TRADITION

Special Issue: *Legal Education and the Society of Jesus*

Invite Ignatius in to Strengthen Your Law School Course

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Jesuit Ideals for the Law Classroom

Most discussions of law involve justice at its core, and our concepts of justice in the United States often emerge from the Judeo-Christian belief system and history. This proposal is for Jesuit law schools to lean into those beliefs and to be different in a better way. I will discuss five principles of Jesuit education that mold well with legal education: *cura personalis*, discernment, *magis*, creating agents of change, and being with and for others.

The Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person, emphasizes the importance of integrity, mental health, and overall personal well-being. Law schools and universities generally offer many services, including mental health counseling, career services, financial aid guidance, and events targeting student enjoyment. To a Jesuit institution, these actions are a modern take on *cura personalis* and deserve to be labeled as such.

Using the *cura personalis* label helps students appreciate that these support structures are essential to their institution's foundation. For law schools, the reason for doing so is critical to our purpose. We train students to become counselors-at-law. Instilled by example, they can carry that mindset throughout their legal careers.

The principle of discernment comes from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In their classic form, the spiritual exercises involve meditations, prayer, and often retreats, which may be overly religious for some in a law school class. However, practicing discernment is valuable for all to learn. Learning legal concepts, weighing facts and feelings, and listing advantages and disadvantages allows learners to grapple with a

DOI: 10.51238/jeq.8YXoIhx

Received: 01 June 2025 | Accepted: 21 August 2025

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legal concept honestly. Discernment often utilizes an iterative process that pairs well with many legal concepts. For example, the basic tenets of contract law are offer, acceptance, consideration, awareness, capacity, and legality. In determining the validity of a contract, a student must evaluate (or discern) if each of these tenets is met and then stack the principles together to support a contract. In this way, critical legal thinking is a form of discernment. However, for Jesuits, discernment goes hand in hand with the concept of *magis*.

Magis, in the Latin translation, is “more” or “greater.” Jesuit tradition gives *magis* many meanings,¹ but for these purposes, we will focus on “more.” The idea of zealous advocacy in legal practice is strongly paralleled with *magis*, as both ideals require lawyers to move beyond the norms. The American Bar Association rules of professional conduct call on lawyers to advocate zealously.² As part of the Jesuit tradition, *magis* also requires ethical discernment of whatever is being examined. Likewise, attorneys who are zealous advocates must remain ethical in carrying out this advocacy.

The Jesuit concepts of discernment and *magis* lead to the formation and education of agents of change. This is a near-perfect fit for the training of lawyers. Throughout time, those who create, practice, and adjudicate the law are among civilization’s most significant change agents. Repeatedly reminding law students of the great opportunities that they have to bring about change, to be Ignatian, can inspire them in the short term and build the opportunity to address systemic inequalities in the longer term.

The Jesuit maxim of being “with and for others” originated in a speech from Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in 1973.³ This maxim emphasizes service, empathy, and community engagement. The practice of law involves service to others. A lawyer prosecutes or defends a case, advocates for or protects an aggrieved person or their property or rights, or develops policy or plans to help shape society. Jesuits see “with and for others” as a command to walk with and help those in need retain their rights and dignity. It emphasizes the pro bono requirements (either aspirational or mandatory) imposed by many bar associations.

1 For a quality discussion on the definition of *magis* see Barton T. Geger, S.J., “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters,” *Jesuit Higher Education* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16–31.

2 See the comments to ABA Rules of Professional Conduct 1.3, Rule 1.3 Diligence, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/rule_1_3_diligence/comment_on_rule_1_3/.

3 See Catherine Sullivan, “Everyday Ignatian: A Community For and With Others,” Jesuits, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.jesuits.org/stories/everyday-ignatian-community-others/>.

These are just a few Jesuit ideals; many others, such as the 4 C's of Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.,⁴ may be used to connect Ignatian philosophy and legal education too.

Why Is This Needed?

Our students need this training to help form them into more complete humans, humans that can create a better world, whether on a large scale or simply in their own families. Our universities must distinguish themselves in a crowded field of higher education providers. It is foolish not to utilize the advantages of 500 years of Jesuit identity and support in attracting and retaining new students.

How I Incorporated These Ideals in My Classroom

In the spring semester of 2024, I incorporated several of the principles discussed into Loyola New Orleans College of Law's Advanced Legal Research Class. I did this after participating in the Ignatian Syllabus Challenge, held at Loyola New Orleans and led by Dr. Tom Ryan, the University Chaplain. In this challenge, a cohort of non-Jesuit professors studied and discussed Ignatian principles and how to possibly implement the ideas into the classroom. The combination of thoughts from professors in English, business, music, education, and law created a robust discussion.

Ignatian improvements to my class included adjusting the syllabus text, adding new supplemental readings, carefully selecting exercises focusing on different legal topics, incorporating new guest speakers, and making time for short classroom discussions to tie some lecture topics to Ignatian topics.

The initial change from previous iterations of this class was to the syllabus. The syllabus now includes the quote, "The aim of Jesuit education has never been simply the acquisition of a store of information and skills or preparation for a career, though these are important in themselves and useful to emerging Christian leaders. The ultimate aim of Jesuit secondary education is, rather, that full growth of the person which leads to action—action that is suffused with the spirit and presence of Jesus Christ, the Man for Others."⁵ This addition sets a tone reflective of the Society of Jesus, which did not exist in previous syllabi.

4 See Ross Jones, S.J., "Our Four Compass Points," Australian Province of the Society of Jesus, 2025, <https://jesuit.org.au/our-four-compass-points/>.

5 International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, "The Characteristics of Jesuit Education," Curia Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù, 1986, §167, https://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/characteristics_en.pdf.

The Advanced Legal Research class I teach divides the subject matter into six distinct modules. In addition to the regular readings for each module, students were assigned one or two short readings that discuss Jesuit ideals. The brief selections brought a repetitive infusion of these ideals to improve the probability of retention by the students. Examples of these readings include: “What is Ignatian Discernment,”⁶ an excerpt from *Laudato si’*,⁷ and a selection about the Universal Apostolic Preferences.⁸

Supplemental readings were an easy way to introduce Ignatian concepts to law students who may not have been exposed to them before. The readings, usually one page, were kept very short to counter possible student resistance. More often than not, the students engaged with the material as they realized the commitment was small. The complementary piece to these readings was that the class would discuss the reading in less than five minutes for each unit in a short segment. This totaled to around thirty minutes during the semester. When students realized there would be a discussion about the reading, it reinforced that reading these selections was essential to the class. The discussions also allowed the instructor to inform those who did not read, but most importantly, made the connections between the Ignatian idea and the research module.

I changed the examples used in class to touch on scenarios that reinforce the Ignatian ideals and values in the practice of law. This incorporation worked well. Most class sessions involved a portion of lecture and then a portion of either demonstration or students working through exercises. When discussing local ordinances, we examined finding and comparing ordinances involving the unhoused. When talking about regulations, I focused our research on environmental issues. When discussing statutes and statutory interpretation, the research focused on immigration statutes at the federal level and criminal sentencing at the state level. In some of these classes, I do not mention anything about the subject matter fitting the Ignatian ideals; in others, I will verbally make the connection. This is meant to be a gentle, yet repetitive way of reminding the students that they attend a Jesuit institution and to seek justice constantly.

6 Doug Leonhardt, S.J., “What Is Ignatian Discernment?,” Marquette University, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.marquette.edu/mission-ministry/explore/ignatian-discernment.php>.

7 Pope Francis, “*Laudato si’*,” Encyclical Letter (The Holy See, May 24, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

8 “Universal Apostolic Preferences,” Jesuits Global, accessed May 8, 2025. <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/>.

Another avenue to bring Ignatian ideas into the classroom is to find guest speakers who fit both the Jesuit mission and the class's research objectives. Each semester, my Advanced Legal Research class brings multiple guest speakers in to give a practitioner's perspective. Students are usually very engaged during these sessions. One new speaker who brings Ignatian ideas to the forefront is a discussion led by a Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) member. JSRI has several legally based projects, such as policy work to improve correctional conditions and assistance with migration and poverty issues. This discussion removes the abstractness from the Ignatian and legal principles. Guest speakers like this bridge the law and the Ignatian ideals we seek to promote.

I also added a component to the class where students were asked twice during the semester to watch a video out of class and then provide a reflection on how the video may be informative for their upcoming career. One video selection was explicitly chosen to reinforce the Jesuit apostolic preference of walking with the excluded and was introduced to the class before we examined unhoused ordinances. The other video was a news segment that discussed the environmental impact of regulatory decisions, which paired well with the apostolic preference of caring for our common home. The reflection portion of these two exercises introduced the concept of reflection, mentioning the Jesuit Daily Examen in the instructions.

Assessment

In addition to the positive engagement, I felt from students when implementing these ideas, there is some assessment data. This idea was created in response to participation in the Ignatian Syllabus Challenge at Loyola New Orleans in early 2024. The director of the challenge provided a survey both before and after the semester for students enrolled in each participating class. The assessment results were combined with the other courses in the Ignatian Syllabus Challenge to provide a larger sample size of data. Most respondents selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the course enhanced their understanding and appreciation of Loyola's Jesuit and Catholic missions. Open-ended comments contained both praise for professors and thoughtful critiques, including concerns about student engagement and the difficulty separating what is unique about the Jesuit mission from the Catholic mission. Overall, the data reflect a positive and valuable experience by the students and the professors teaching the classes.

Conclusion

As legal education evolves, including the decrease in the number of teaching Jesuits, Jesuit law schools are well-positioned to reaffirm their distinct

identity by intentionally integrating Ignatian pedagogy. The principles of Jesuit education remain highly relevant and provide advantages to modern legal instruction that more secular competitors cannot match.

Embedding core Ignatian concepts such as *cura personalis*, *magis*, the formation of agents of change, and the commitment to be with and for others into each layer of instruction helps create a rich learning environment. These Ignatian concepts align closely with the moral and professional responsibilities expected of lawyers. They also offer students a scaffold for understanding their role as soon-to-be advocates in pursuing justice.

The implementation of these ideas in the referenced Advanced Legal Research course demonstrates the pedagogical benefit and viability of this approach. Through deliberate but modest alterations, students were introduced to the rich Ignatian ideals as a lens through which they can view the world.

In a world urgently needing ethically grounded leadership, the strategic incorporation of Ignatian ideals offers Jesuit institutions both a re-affirmation of mission and a roadmap for forming graduates prepared to serve with conscience and compassion. The invitation to “invite Ignatius in” is more than symbolic; it is a call to renew the transformative potential of Jesuit education in American law schools. I welcome the opportunity to share resources, experiences, and strategies to increase the spread of Ignatian ideals with any instructors interested in implementing them into their courses.

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