

An Ignatian, Anti-Racist Instructional Template in the Language and Cultures Classroom

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Overview

This template is the result of a project aimed at implementing an Ignatian, anti-racist pedagogy in the languages and cultures classroom at Marquette University. This endeavor was made possible by funding from a Diverse Course Development grant from Marquette's Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (Spring 2022) and a Faculty Mission Integration Fellowship from Marquette's Office of Mission and Ministry (Fall 2022). During the spring semester, I taught Spanish 3310 (*Peoples and Cultures of Latin America*) with an anti-racist emphasis. During the fall semester, Spanish 3310 became my "laboratory" for the implementation of an Ignatian, anti-racist pedagogy. In the spring semester of 2023, I once again taught the course with an Ignatian and anti-racist emphasis.

Ignatian Context

An underlying assumption of the work leading to the creation of this instructional template is that anti-racist instruction is essential to the Jesuit educational apostolate in the United States. Speaking in Ignatian terms, this should be understood as a call to action from a place of imaginative contemplation of a racially-just world. The tragic circumstances of George Floyd's death in 2020 serve as a stark reminder that anti-racism ought to be embraced as a powerful sign of the times. The Jesuit ministry of education is specifically called to foster the formation of young persons of solidarity committed to the work of social justice. In the words of Arturo Sosa, S.J., "The love of God is made manifest through fraternity, justice, and a life of dignity for all" (2021, 149). This commitment is very much in tune with "the third of the new Universal Apostolic Preferences" that calls to accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future. Throughout my career as a college professor, time and again I've seen that using the classroom as a platform to empower students to think about issues of social justice critically and sensibly is something that gives them hope and even joy.

Connection to Marquette CORE

As a Foundation-level ESSV 1 (Engaging Social Systems and Values) MU Core Curriculum course, Spanish 3310 is ideally positioned to explore the possibilities of the work for social justice that is at the hearts of both Ignatian spirituality and anti-racism. As Ibram X. Kendi states: “Racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas. Antiracism is a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas” (21). When students learn that racism is not primarily about discrimination for the sake of discrimination but rather about an instrumental reason that seeks to derive profit from the exploitation of others, they are usually both shocked and enlightened. My course is structured around this decolonial understanding. As we begin to explore the historical development of Latin America, we grapple with Christopher’s Columbus’s voyage in 1492 as the first capitalist enterprise at global scale. We also examine the way this capitalist European venture relied on the instrumental reason that enacted racism in the Americas.

Courses at the Foundation-level ESSV 1 recognize that to become fully-fledged citizens of the world, students must engage globally with people who are fundamentally different from them. Spanish 3310 delves into the awe, shock, and trauma brought about by the encounter between pre-Columbian peoples and the European conquerors. As Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes states, if the Europeans discovered the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the reverse is every bit as true. We explore the ramifications of the colonial wound, but we also spend intentional time exploring the long-lasting legacy of resistance and of the creation of beauty through the rich and multifaceted cultural expressions of the original dwellers of the Americas.

Course Units

Spanish 3310’s focus on social justice allows students to engage more fully with BIPOC value systems and cultural formations in Latin American and Latinx contexts, while fostering values of intercultural curiosity and social humility. The course’s thematic and multidisciplinary approach to the study of Latin American civilizations and cultures from pre-Columbian times to the present is ideally suited for the establishment of a self-reflective Ignatian, anti-racist practice for engagement with other cultures and ways of being. The thematic units of the course –as stated in the syllabus– are reflective of the course’s emphasis on the challenges and hopes posed by the work of social justice:

- ❖ Anti-Racism and Ignatian Spirituality: A Dialogue about Social Justice
- ❖ What is Latin America?
- ❖ The Colonial Wound: The Violence of Racism and the Trauma of the Conquest
- ❖ The Latinx Experience

- ❖ Latin American and Latinx Art: Beauty, Resistance, and Transformation
- ❖ Latin American and Latinx Social Movements
- ❖ Latin America in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Challenges and Hopes

Course Design Rationale

- a. **Ignatian instructional course design** – The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm (IPP) was quite helpful in the process of conceiving of the course design of Spanish 3310 as an Ignatian, anti-racist course. The IPP lays out a scaffolding of the learning experience from a preparatory phase that involves becoming familiar with the background information or context all the way to an evaluative step at the end of the learning experience. This deliberate and gradual model informed the process of planning the course. Each of these steps allowed me to reflect about the desired learning outcomes for the course in an Ignatian way:
- ❖ **Context** – creating the right context to enhance the learning experience of students in an Ignatian, anti-racist class involved, first and foremost, establishing a sense of safety in the classroom as a space welcoming of diversity in all its expressions. This safety factor was crucial for establishing a vulnerable classroom experience based on embodied learning. By “embodied learning” I am referring to a holistic approach to instruction that invites students to experience knowledge first with their hearts and emotions, and thus with their bodies as holders of the emotional landscape of who each of them is, and then and only then, with their minds. To bring about bodily awareness into my instruction, I, for instance, invited students at times to loosen their shoulders and breathe deeply, and to attribute a feeling and a color to that experience. Then, I would go in a rapid-fire session asking them to name their feeling and color without further explanation. We sometimes did this for no other reason than to bring awareness into the bodies present in the classroom. Other times, I would introduce this activity after discussion on topics fraught with emotional difficulty, as ways of modeling a soothing, self-regulation mechanism to students. I also established a practice of allowing myself to smile, to strategically disclose aspects of my personal experience, or to allow for periods of shared silence, as the classroom dynamics called for it. I would customarily thank students who took the risk of vulnerable sharing with the class.
 - ❖ **Experience** – In Ignatian spirituality, imagination plays a central role, as it allows the practitioner of the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius to envision their own selves in the middle of the scriptural scenes with which they pray. I imported this notion of Ignatian imaginative contemplation to the classroom to facilitate experiential learning connected to the Ignatian idea of contemplation of place. Being fully present in the classroom, in

mind, heart, and body, entails a contemplation of self and others in a learning community that offers both safety and intellectual growth. I designed prompts that encouraged the use of contemplative imagination. For instance, I had students write an abolitionist dialogue between the Black female poetic subject in “Mujer Negra,” a famous anti-racist Cuban poem by Nancy Morejón, and Sojourner Truth. Students were asked to think of themselves as “scene directors” organizing the dialogue and conferring a sense of characterization to each woman. They were asked to infuse a vivid sense of the emotions and humanity present in a dialogue of that nature. Other learning experiences included Ignatian, anti-racist class colloquies, meetings that will be further explained in the next section on “Selection of course materials.” Students were also asked to write group essays and do activities such as writing anti-racist lamentations together as a group. For a class like this, it was of the utmost importance that students would be afforded experiences of communal reflection and learning.

- ❖ Reflection – Reflection is at the core of Spanish 3310 as an Ignatian and anti-racist course. Students were asked to produce deliberate reflection with home assignments, or by giving them a prompt to prepare at home and write individually or in groups during the class period. Other times, they were asked to offer spontaneous responses during class activities and conversations. The introduction early in the semester of Fr. Saint-Jean’s “examen for racism” furnished students with a tool that they could choose to use in their private lives, as in fact some of them revealed they were doing. This tool will also be further discussed in the next section on “Selection of course materials.”
- ❖ Action – For the final project of the class, students had to write an anti-racist action plan including short term and midterm projections of how they intended to use the knowledge they acquired in the class to promote anti-racist change. Students were given a detailed prompt with guiding reflection questions for this assignment. I was moved by the creativity, vitality, and candor present in most of the responses. I’m also pondering the possibility of including an anti-racist serving learning option in future iterations of the course.
- ❖ Evaluation – The final action plan project also fulfilled the purpose of having students evaluate their personal growth in connection with the class material. In a future iteration of the course, I would have a fourth colloquy to allow students to evaluate the experience of writing their action plans and to provide a space for them to feel free to share about the challenges that such a call to action involves for each of them personally.

- b. **Selection of course materials** – Most of the materials selected for the course’s D2L reader were of open access or in observance of the Fair Use doctrine that establishes that using 10% or less of the total work “does not curtail the profits reasonably expected by the owner” (Webster). This choice responded to the goal of fostering greater educational equity since a larger number of the students in my classes are Latinx and first-generation students in college.

In the introductory unit of the course, “Anti-Racism and Ignatian Spirituality: A Dialogue about Social Justice,” students were introduced to source materials that exposed them to the notion of “race” as a social construct and a biological myth with pernicious, oppressive ramifications ([See BBC Ideas video “The Myth of Race”](#)). In this introductory unit, students also had the opportunity to reflect on the idea of racism as “soul sickness” or “that profound warping of the human spirit that enables us to create communities that favor one racial group, white people, over darker skinned people,” as it is described by Rev. Brian Massingale in an interview with Bill McCormick, S.J. ([See “Racism as Soul Sickness: Interview with Brian Massingale”](#)).

In that unit, students were also exposed to Fr. Patrick Saint-Jean’s powerful anti-racist adaptation of the Ignatian examen ([See “An Examen for Racism”](#)). As a follow-up, in-class activity, they wrote group reflections on the viability of this Ignatian, anti-racist tool to produce lasting social change. The prompt also asked for consideration of whether this tool could be adapted and used by people who are not religious. The overwhelming consensus supported the usefulness and desirability of daily personal reflection on how our actions support or don’t support an anti-racist agenda.

Students were also coached into writing anti-racist group lamentations during this unit. This exercise was predicated on the notion that collective lament can be a powerful initial step toward meaningful and lasting social change. Students reported feelings of vulnerability, discomfort, and healing while doing this exercise. We also studied the section on Jesuit student formation in the document *Promotio iustitiae/ The Promotion of Justice in the Universities of the Society*. Students were asked to comment on which of the four pivotal qualities in the formation of students in Jesuit universities appealed the most to them personally. As stated in the document, the universities of the Society of Jesus are called to form “persons who are conscientious, competent, compassionate, and committed” ([See *Promotio iustitiae/ The Promotion of Justice in the Universities of the Society*](#)).

During the semester of spring 2023, I added the book *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope*, by Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J. to the assigned readings. As a Haitian-born Jesuit in the United States, Fr. Saint-Jean examines the painful process of his gaining awareness about how the insidious legacy of racism has found its way not only into society at large but also in the Catholic church and in the Jesuit order. Each chapter of this illuminating book

ends with an Ignatian examen that encourages students to connect the chapter material with their own experiences.

Throughout the semester, we had a total of three Ignatian, anti-racist colloquies. In the context of the Spiritual Exercises, the Ignatian colloquy invites the exercitant to imagine Christ in from of her, and from a place of vulnerability and humility to enter in deep conversation with him. Adapted to the Ignatian, anti-racist classroom, the three colloquies I held with the students functioned as temporal interruptions of the normal academic compass to invite participants to pause, reflect, and deeply connect with each other from a place of vulnerability. The first colloquy was held on September 30, 2022, and the topic discussed was the importance of opening safe spaces to sustain courageous and difficult conversations on the topic of race. In preparation for this colloquy, students read the chapter “Beginning Courageous Conversations about Race” ([See chapter here](#)). In the second colloquy, which was held on October 14, 2022, we discussed the connection between identity, language, and linguistic racism. In preparation for the colloquy, students read the chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” from *Borderlands/ La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa. The third and last colloquy of the semester was held on December 5, 2022, and in preparation for it, students read the article “The Ignatian Witness to Truth in a Climate of Injustice” ([See article here](#)), by Fr. Bryan N. Massingale. We used this article as a springboard for a discussion on the role Jesuit education ought to have in face of the climate of racial injustice that is pervasive in the United States. These three colloquies served as an invitation from both mind and heart to discern in common about concrete ways in which a Jesuit education must foster the idea of *magis* as a call to “being with others” (Saint-Jean, *The Spiritual Work*) in the context of the anti-racist struggle.

c. Class syllabus: More Than a Contract – Something I learned from my experience of teaching Spanish 3310 as an Ignatian, anti-racist course is that the class syllabus offers the potential to be much more than a “contract.” In fact, it has the makings of a sacred space to build awareness on the importance of inclusion and of social justice. It can also be a space to incite creativity as a crucial building block of a learning experience built holistically and humanely. This creative aspect involves the visual presentation (color, artistic design) of the document as a dimension that can positively impact student engagement with this roadmap of the course. During the first week of classes, I give students a syllabus assignment to ensure they read the document thoroughly.

Conclusion

The purpose of this template is to provide a framework for Ignatian and anti-racist course development. Although the model provided is based on the intermediate Spanish language and culture classroom, the structure that has been laid out could be adapted to other subject matters. A holistic educational experience involving mind, body, heart, and spirit is my response to the anti-racist struggle as a sign of the times. Ignatian teaching and learning calls for reflection and contemplation as paths toward being *with* and *for* others. Such outward movement transforms the classroom into a place of possibility fueled by the courage to dream, hope, and act.

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