

Philosophy

Jesuit Adult and Continuing Education

The founder of Jesuit education began his university studies at 35, with no financial aid, attending four colleges over the course of nine years before earning his degree by examination. St. Ignatius of Loyola demonstrated his own commitment to quality education by walking from Barcelona to Paris, so that he could study at the best university of his time. He perceived clearly that personal development of one's full potential is a necessary prelude to service and social change.

In the Jesuit mission of today, higher education in all of its diversity still seeks one common goal: to embody the Creator's love for humankind through self-improvement and service to others. With its spiritual foundation, its insistence on excellence and its capacity for adaptation, Jesuit education is committed to the student and to service to the community at large.

Adult and continuing education in Jesuit institutions shares each of these characteristics in a distinctive way. Rooted in the Ignatian vision, it is an integral part of the humanistic tradition which boldly asserts that every human being is worthy of dignity and respect. This educational vision brings together secular and moral leadership by espousing personal transformation. Moral leadership asserts itself when it is based upon clear thinking, communication skills, leadership training and ethical understanding. Today, this history and the Jesuit reputation for quality and prestige attracts thousands of busy adults and working professionals to Jesuit institutions. In the Ignatian spirit, the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities (see page 85 for list) currently serve nearly 50,000 adult students each year through both traditional and non-traditional programs.

Adult and continuing education is marked by the diversity of people who seek educational opportunities. Its hallmarks are seen in the need to adapt programs to alternative times and develop strategies for achieving the learning goals people are seeking in this world so jarred by change and turmoil. Adults are seeking to improve career possibilities while enhancing personal and professional potentials. Their interests vary from very specific short-term, non-credit career training and skill enhancement to wide-ranging, long-term academic degrees and certification. For some, a professional degree will be sought in the evenings that span a decade, while for others, an intensive workshop will open up a vista harboring opportunities and promise. No single path can satisfy the time constraints, career aspirations and personal needs of adult learners. They are as varied as the age, socio-economic status and ethnic background of the individuals involved. Adults challenge educators to respond with creativity, innovation and practicality: the exact demands called for in the Ignatian vision of education.

Education which is faithful to this vision remains open to the demands of diversity and works with individuals in their pursuit of excellence. Any academic discipline or any art of the practitioner that shares in this vision and allows for service to humanity is a legitimate endeavor within the Jesuit tradition. This vision and service were a part of the Jesuit tradition found in the early missionaries who poured out of Europe carrying the gospel to America and those fostering inculturation in Asia and elsewhere. The Americanization of the Jesuit mission in education exemplifies the Jesuits' ability and desire to adapt to the culture within which they are working. The most current development in this ongoing Americanization process is demonstrated through the various colleges and divisions of continuing education: a movement necessitated by cultural needs and demands.

At the heart of the Jesuit vision and tradition is a love for individuals, a commitment to excellence and a care for addressing the needs of people everywhere. It is this vision and tradition which is embodied within the people and programs of continuing education on the Jesuit campuses throughout America.

