

Encountering our Neighbors and the Sacred in the City: Developing a Lasallian Liberatory Pedagogy of Exploration & Engagement

Orienting question

At the time of our original proposal the Department of Religion (now Religion & Theology) had a secure position in the core with a required two courses for every undergraduate student. We therefore began with the question of how best to integrate the Religion & Theology Department within a wider framework of engaged learning that had a liberatory pedagogy at its heart. We asked how we could join with colleagues across the university, inclusive of both faculty and staff, to develop and implement liberatory pedagogies for exploring community spaces and engaging Philadelphia communities that interpret our Lasagna charism in the context of Philadelphia's racial, economic, and religious diversity. We understand the Lasallaian charism to have the following implicit commitments: 1) social justice, 2) civic responsibility, 3) meeting students where they are (association), 4) not leaving students where they are (providing tools of self-criticism), and 5) formation (holistic liberal arts education).

Actions taken

Over the course of Spring 2016, a core group of four (Maureen O'Connell, Jack Downey, Anthony Paul Smith, and our student intern Katie Milideo) in the Religion Department undertook a process of consultation across the university with potential advisers, partners, and collaborators. From here we were able to identify that there was a profound need for some common vocabulary and a Lasallian framework that might give coherency to these disparate but valuable efforts as well as sharing them out in organized manner. We curated a resource binder with readings and activities to be given to our cohort. Finally, we invited a cohort of six (in addition to the core of four) to meet with us at the end of the Spring Semester for an off-campus workshop. These colleagues then went on to implement ideas from the workshop over the course of the Fall and Spring semesters and participated in various check-in sessions.

In the midst of these actions a new core was unexpectedly and quickly passed. It is based on core competencies and centered around Institutional Learning Outcomes. It became clear that there were new opportunities for our project and in Spring 2017 we convened a second, larger group inclusive of our original ten to create guidelines for those ILOs housed under the "Active Responsibility" heading:

- #10 Evaluate ethical Issues from Multiple Perspectives
- #11 Demonstrate increased cultural and global awareness; and
- #12 Engage in respectful collaborations to address issues of personal and public concern.

We presented these guidelines to the Provost over the Summer and are now moving forward with a structure to help colleagues develop, vet, execute, and evaluate courses.

What we have learned

As a group we have identified that the following are required for a successful curriculum of Active Responsibility in light of our Lasallian charism:

1. Ongoing reflection, particularly critical self-reflection.
2. Partnerships (in and out of the classroom) animated by Lasallian value of "together and by association" and characterized by reciprocity and mutuality.
3. Opportunities to develop skills that allow students initially navigate and eventually collaborate in relationships beyond the boundaries of the campus.
 - i. This requires that we listen carefully to our partners.
 - ii. We must dialogue; learning to speak the vernacular of various communities.
 - iii. We must develop a historical consciousness and empathy.

4. Structural analysis to perceive, evaluate, and respond to social problems (not limited to these courses but required of them).