

Jesuit Essential Characteristics of Honors Programs

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Although no single or definitive honors program model can or should be superimposed on all Jesuit institutions, the AJCU Honors Consortium has identified a number of essential characteristics that still might inspire our honors programs, and thereby unify our diverse efforts. Yet no matter what form the various programs take, each is firmly committed to the goals of forming well educated men and women of intellectual depth who embody a solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, a firm commitment to a faith that does justice, and a life of servant leadership with and for others.

The following characteristics can be understood as more detailed expressions of the essential Ignatian character underlying our programs:

- **The Ignatian Tradition:** Students understand that there is a congruence between their individual day to day lives, the long and deep strands of the Jesuit tradition, and the wider channels of the liberal arts. Jesuit honors programs help students to see that these are traditions to which they belong, and by whose perspectives and values they are formed. At the same time, these traditions and canons are living things to which all can contribute, both constructively and critically.
- **The Intellectual Apostolate:** In keeping with what Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach has called the intellectual apostolate of Jesuit institutions, Jesuit honors programs bear witness to the intellectual integrity of a worldview rooted in the Ignatian tradition, which affirms a harmony between reason and faith, between the life of the mind and the life of the spirit, between the thirst for knowledge and wisdom and initiatives for peace and justice. As part of their concern for knowledge in its own right, honors programs at Jesuit institutions should also work against exclusively professional views of education. At the same time, these programs should also foster an Ignatian sense of vocation that calls students to bring their intellectual talents into service of the world's great needs.
- **Compassion and Wisdom:** Jesuit honors programs should, in the words of Superior General Fr. Adolfo Nicolás engage in the "hard work of forming communities of dialogue in the search for truth and understanding." In so doing, they should also seek to relate their wider intellectual concerns to the Ignatian goals of service, compassion, and wisdom - such as by including in their curricula courses on moral and social issues and opportunities for service learning.

- **Integrative Learning:** Given the interdisciplinary and integrative orientation of many honors programs, a special contribution of honors programs at Jesuit institutions is to illuminate the ultimate connectedness of all knowledge and the universality of truth, both of which can be seen as being rooted in the Ignatian search for God in all things.
- **Engaging Christian Humanism:** Many honors programs at Jesuit institutions incorporate a great books or great ideas approach in their curricula, while others focus on timeless, great questions. These approaches allow programs to engage the Christian humanism so central to the Ignatian educational tradition. Jesuit honors programs foster discussion of such issues as the relationship between the classical and the Christian intellectual traditions, as well as the relationship between faith and reason. A concern for both western and non-western cultures also fits well with the history of Jesuit engagement with the world and the Ignatian commitment to inculturation.
- **Reflection and Discernment:** One hallmark of honors education is its encouragement of active and independent learning. As a way of extending this to the whole person, honors programs in Jesuit institutions should normally provide opportunities to learn about Ignatian methods of reflection and discernment and strive to incorporate these methods into their courses and their extracurricular activities.
- **A Community that Cherishes *Cura Personalis*:** Most honors programs seek to form a distinctive honors community. In a Jesuit institution, such honors communities should be distinguished by the fact that they encourage care of the whole person, not just by faculty for students but by all members of the community for each other. In such a community, personal and intellectual relationships will reinforce each other as the community's diverse members grow in friendship and compassion. Such a community will also be distinguished by its inclusion of and respect for individuals from a variety of backgrounds and points of view.
- **Catalysts for their Institutions:** Honors programs are guardians of tradition even as they serve as generators of new ideas. In keeping with Jesuit ideals of service, honors programs at Jesuit institutions should seek to make contributions to their larger institutions, modeling commitment to the wisdom of tradition while providing leadership in the development of innovative pedagogies and community-based extra-curricular initiatives.