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Spring 2017

Ignatian Pedagogy Certificate Final Project

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Recommended Citation

Hendrickson, Mitchell A., "Ignatian Pedagogy Certificate Final Project" (2017). *Ignatian Pedagogy Educational Resources*. 10.

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Ignatian Pedagogy Certificate
Final Project Paper
Mitchell Hendrickson

Sullivan High School is home to perhaps the most diverse student population in all of Chicago Public Schools. Serving as the “Welcoming High School” for CPS, Sullivan serves 722 students who come from a wide range of cultural, ethnic, religious and experiential backgrounds. Sixty-nine percent of students who attend Sullivan speak a language other than English in their home, and 43% of Sullivan students are designated as English Language Learners (ELLs). Walking through the halls at Sullivan, one might hear any one of the 41 different languages spoken by students there. Along with languages common in Chicago schools like Spanish, Polish and Arabic, Sullivan students also communicate in languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Bengali, Pashto, Tagalog and Rohingya.

While the diversity housed within Sullivan provides a culturally rich learning environment, the unique student population is accompanied by a similarly unique set of student and family needs. The issues most students and families deal with during the high school years become much more daunting for students and families at Sullivan High School where communication barriers, financial strain, uncertain immigration status and clashing cultural norms can complicate matters immensely. Thankfully, Sullivan’s administration has made it a priority to create a student-centered school culture that is focused on delivering an individualized educational experience for each student in the school. A key component of this strategy as applied to English Learners at Sullivan is the school’s English Language Learners Department.

As a welcoming school, Sullivan has been given access to additional resources from the school district to better serve the large number of immigrant and refugee students that attend the school. Included in the additional resources provided by CPS is funding for a fully staffed English Language Learners Department consisting of six ELL teachers, two ELL paraprofessionals, an ELL Department Head and a full-time social worker dedicated solely to ELL students. Providing support for this team and the

students they serve has been a point of emphasis for the Schools 2020 initiative since it began in earnest in the spring of 2017.

Currently, Schools 2020 along with Loyola University Professor, Dr. Ambareen Nasir, has been supporting the ELL team through a series of professional development workshops focused on EL defining the departmental mission, vision and evaluation strategies, EL curriculum building, alignment across language benchmarks and Social and Emotional Learning for EL students. The collaboration has resulted in the creation of a new ELL Department vision that establishes three primary Social and Emotional Learning goals for English Language Learners, as well as guidelines for how each teacher can incorporate the SEL goals into instruction in their content area. The three goals are: 1) Explore My Identity, 2) Participate In Society, and 3) Be A Leader. These newly established SEL goals, along with the unique cultural makeup of the school provide important context that helped shape the Ignatian Pedagogy Final Project outlined below.

This project materialized in a relatively unconventional way. I had originally planned to report on a project being developed with Gale Elementary and Women In Leadership Loyola (W.I.L.L.) that would have provided a series of five SEL workshops for middle school girls. The Gale project was put on hold when the school's schedule shifted mid semester to accommodate staffing changes. Thankfully, I was approached by Sarah Quintenz, the head of Sullivan's ELL Department, who needed to "get these kids out of the building" for a day. With that, I agreed to host 90 Sullivan EL students on Loyola's Lakeshore campus for a day while their non-EL schoolmates were busy with testing. Once we established that we could make arrangements for the students be on campus on the requested day, we developed a plan to create an experience that would provide students with information they could use as they begin their preparations for post-secondary life.

The primary Domain of the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm addressed with this project is Context. Without a thorough understanding of the unique student population visiting campus from Sullivan, the

visiting students could not have had an experience that addressed their unique circumstances. Given the incredible diversity housed at Sullivan, especially among EL students, and given the unique challenges faced by these students, my focus for the project turned to creating an experience for our visiting students that was exciting (or at the very least, not discouraging), relevant to their unique needs and circumstances, and understandable. With this in mind, I began reaching out to various departments around campus to solicit their support for the project.

To help make the experience exciting, I enlisted the help of Allen Green, who works Loyola's Student Transitions and Outreach. Allen provided a fun overview of what life is like on Loyola's campus during his introductory presentation. Allen also shared Loyola's open and welcoming tradition as a Jesuit institution, and how that tradition could support students like our visitors should they choose to attend Loyola. To keep students from being discouraged by the price of attending college, I invited Viviana Arellano from the Financial Aid office to discuss the financial aid options available to immigrant and refugee students whether documented or undocumented. Of course, no campus visit is complete without a visit to the cafeteria. Our trip to the cafeteria provided perhaps the most excitement from our visitors. Besides the thrill of evacuating the building for a fire-drill mid meal, many of the Sullivan students stared in awe at the cereal selection and ice cream machine as we entered the Damen Cafeteria.

In order to make the experience relevant to the unique circumstances of our visiting students we tried to anticipate the students' priorities and concerns then invite Loyola staff who might be able to address those priorities and concerns. We invited Joe Saucedo and Paige Gardner from Student Diversity and Multi-Cultural Affairs to discuss the programs offered in their department that might be able to support immigrant, refugee, first generation and EL students. We invited one of Loyola's Admissions Counselors, Benito Amaral to talk about how students can prepare themselves for college and what steps they need to be taking now as sophomores and juniors to make sure they are on track.

Anticipating some of our visiting students might want to live at home during college in order to save money, we also invited representatives from Off-Campus student life to talk about how they help maintain a sense of belonging and community among students who choose not to live in the dorms like most Loyola students. We also asked eight Loyola students to provide tours to students in small groups that could give our visitors a more intimate experience with campus and would encourage questions from Sullivan students.

Finally, after focusing on creating an exciting and relevant experience, we needed to make sure the experience was accessible and understandable for our guests. Given the limited practice most of our visiting students have with the English language, we asked all of our participating Loyola staff to adjust their presentations to overcome the language barriers. We also asked each participating staff member to shorten their presentations to allow plenty of time for students to ask questions.

The project proceeded largely as planned with only a few minor hiccups. As stated previously, the initial objective for this project was merely to provide a field trip opportunity so that English Language Learner students from Sullivan High school could have an educational experience outside of school while their non-ELL schoolmates were taking tests. From that initial objective the project expanded to incorporate additional goals of providing an exciting, accessible and relevant experience that would encourage our visiting student to keep their post-secondary options open.

In order to encourage further interaction with and reflection from the Sullivan students, we distributed fliers with offering three different options for connecting with Loyola after the visit. The flier contained a link to a survey about the event, a link to share photos by students taken during the event, and Schools 2020 contact information for students interested in connecting about future programs, events and activities. We did not receive many survey responses but we did receive student photo submissions. We will continue to seek feedback from students about the event with the help of Sullivan's EL Department staff.

I was very impressed by my Loyola colleagues and their eagerness to participate in the project. Moreover, Loyola staff were happy to alter their usual presentation content to better serve the audience. They represented Loyola in the best possible light. This visit showed me that there is the capacity to create more future visits tailored specifically for unique and traditionally under-represented populations. Schools 2020 arranged a similar visit for Sullivan's Health Care Professions students, but that trip was limited to the scope of Loyola's Nursing School. The ELL trip proved that we can be more ambitious with future campus visits.

We will continue our engagement with the English Learning Department at Sullivan High School and all of the students who they serve. Plans are in the works to continue and expand our support for ELL curriculum development. This project has helped strengthen the connection between Loyola University and Sullivan High School. Hopefully the project will also be the first of many opportunities for our friends from Sullivan to experience our University as a resource and an ally.