Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal

Volume 9 | Number 1 Article 12

May 2020

Cura Personalis as Institutional Practice

Julia Bninski Ph.D.
Loyola University Chicago, jbninski@luc.edu

Jennifer R. Wozniak Boyle Ph.D.
Loyola University Chicago, jboyle5@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe

Part of the Academic Advising Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, Humane Education Commons, and the Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Bninski, Julia Ph.D. and Wozniak Boyle, Jennifer R. Ph.D. (2020) "Cura Personalis as Institutional Practice," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss1/12

This Praxis is brought to you for free and open access by ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal by an authorized administrator of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact epublications@regis.edu.

Cura Personalis as Institutional Practice

Julia Bninski
Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
Clinical Assistant Professor of Writing and Literature
Arrupe College
Loyola University Chicago
jbninski@luc.edu

Jennifer R. Wozniak Boyle
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Director of Operations
Arrupe College
Loyola University Chicago
jboyle5@luc.edu

Abstract

Founded by Loyola University Chicago in 2015, Arrupe College is a two-year program that continues the Jesuit tradition of offering a rigorous liberal arts education to a diverse population, many of whom are the first in their families to pursue higher education. Using an innovative model that ensures affordability while providing care for the whole person—intellectually, morally, and spiritually—Arrupe prepares its graduates to continue on to a bachelor's program or move into meaningful employment. From the beginning, *cura personalis* has been a priority at this new institution. In this article, drawing on their experience as faculty members and administrators at Arrupe College, Julia Bninski and Jennifer Boyle argue for expanding the definition of *cura personalis* to include not only individual decisions and behavior, but also institutional policies and procedures.

Introduction

If you work on a Jesuit campus, you've heard of *cura personalis.* If we're honest, sometimes we repeat this term thoughtlessly, reducing it to a buzzword. More often, we invoke it sincerely to guide our decisions. As faculty members in Jesuit higher education, we believe that we have a responsibility toward students that goes beyond classroom transactions, a responsibility that includes caring, empathetic mentoring, and relationship-building. But regardless of how we use this term, we invariably define it as an interpersonal practice.

In the literature on *cura personalis*, emphasizing interpersonal interactions is standard. To cite a typical recent example, in their 2014 article about Ignatian values and faculty roles, Lora Claywell and her colleagues at Regis University argue that "The depth of faculty caring facilitates development of students' intellectual, affective, and spiritual aspects of their lives."[1] After reviewing a range of U.S. Jesuit documents, Barton T. Geger, S.J. concludes that although *cura personalis* has more than one definition, it most commonly refers to an individualized education, one in which students' unique identities are respected.[2] Geger traces this interpersonal definition back to the 1930s, when the term *cura personalis* first appeared in print. Superior General Wladimir Ledóchowski, S.J.—who seems to be responsible for coining the term in his 1934 letter to U.S. Jesuits—listed *personalis alumnorum cura* as one of several tools for fostering students' moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. Ledóchowski defined *cura personalis* as "*The personal care of students*, by which [Jesuits], beyond the teaching and example provided in the classes, endeavor to direct and help individuals by means of counsel and exhortation."[3] Likewise, the 1986 document "The Characteristics of Jesuit Education" equates *cura personalis* with interpersonal caring. This document extends *cura personalis* to lay faculty and administrators at Jesuit schools, emphasizing that people in these roles "are involved in the lives of the students. . . . They are ready to listen to their cares and concerns

about the meaning of life, to share their joys and sorrows, to help them with personal growth and interpersonal relationships," ultimately concluding that "'Cura personalis' (concern for the individual person) remains a basic characteristic of Jesuit education."[4]

We agree that interpersonal caring plays a crucial role in Jesuit education, as it does in many progressive and critical pedagogies. But we do not see interpersonal caring alone as an adequate definition of *cura personalis*. In this article, we argue for expanding the definition of *cura personalis* to include not only individual decisions and behavior, but also institutional policies and procedures. We begin by briefly exploring the history of *cura personalis*, asking why it is traditionally limited to interpersonal practice. After exploring the practical and ethical rationales for expanding *cura personalis*, we formulate a new definition that includes both institutional and interpersonal practice. Our expanded definition draws on the writings of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. Lastly, we give practical examples of our theory in action, based on our experiences as faculty members and administrators at Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago. Although we focus on faculty roles, our arguments apply equally to staff.

Why is *cura personalis* usually defined in interpersonal terms?

Many of us working on Jesuit campuses are so accustomed to hearing about *cura personalis* as a central Jesuit principle that it is surprising to learn that the term is fewer than one hundred years old. Not only did it first appear in the 1930s, but it was rarely mentioned before the 1990s.[5] The term's focus on individuals and its abrupt rise at the end of the twentieth century force us to ask how much *cura personalis* owes to Ignatian tradition, and how much it owes to American individualism in the sense of our national tendency to prioritize personal liberty, to believe that individuals control their own destinies, and to understand the common good in utilitarian terms, as the adding up of all the goods enjoyed by individuals. In this article, we do not seek to trace a direct line of historical influence from Ignatius's writings to Ledóchowski's 1934 coinage. Nonetheless, it is worth investigating how much our contemporary understanding of *cura personalis* as an individualized, interpersonal practice resembles foundational Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit practice.

As it turns out, our contemporary understanding of *cura personalis* does have recognizable roots in the life of Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, and in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*.[6] Ignatius prized one-on-one conversations as a tool for spiritual growth, and the Jesuit order has a long tradition of adapting spiritual direction to the needs of the individual.[7] In the Exercises, a spiritual director accompanies retreatants as they seek God, but refrains from imposing his or her own views, thus leaving the retreatants to experience and communicate directly with God. As Howard Gray, S.J. explains, the director and the retreatant must trust one another.[8] Likewise, the educational practice of *cura personalis* requires that teacher and student trust one another and trust the process of transformative education. Furthermore, as with a spiritual director who refrains from imposing his or her own will, the ideal faculty member guides and supports students as they pursue knowledge and understanding—a goal that students must achieve for themselves.

Placing the Jesuits' individualized, interpersonal approach to spiritual direction in its historical context, John W. O'Malley, S.J., argues that the early Jesuits viewed their preaching and ministry in a way that was deeply influenced by humanist rhetoric. In both its classical and its early modern forms, rhetoric is a discipline that requires adapting to one's audience. As described by O'Malley:

> One aspect of the rhetorical *forma mentis* was its imperative for accommodation, an aspect that coincided with the Jesuits' way of proceeding on a profound and pervasive level. . . . Essential to this success was the orator's ability to be in touch with the feelings and needs of his audience and to adapt himself and his speech accordingly. Beginning with the Exercises themselves, the Jesuits were constantly advised in all their ministries to adapt what they said and did to times, circumstances, and persons. The "rhetorical" dimension . . . was a basic principle in all their ministries, even if

they did not explicitly identify it as rhetorical. The *Constitutions* identified it as a hallmark of "our way of proceeding."[9]

Given this historical emphasis on individualized conversation as a tool for spiritual growth, it is not surprising that we usually define *cura personalis* as an interpersonal practice. As O'Malley indicates, attention to and accommodation of the individual resembles the kind of adaptation to one's audience that was practiced in classical and renaissance rhetoric; after all, orators are more persuasive when they adapt to their audiences.

The rationale for expanding *cura personalis*

Why should we expand the definition of *cura personalis* to include institutional practice along with interpersonal practice? We see many practical and ethical reasons.

- First, institutional practices shape interpersonal practices, whether for good or ill. If we want faculty to put *cura personalis* into interpersonal practice, then we need to ask how our institutions are aiding or impeding them.

- Second, most faculty, staff, and students at U.S. Jesuit universities have not gone through Jesuit formation. As a result, we cannot take for granted that all university stakeholders have an in-depth understanding of *cura personalis*. Many faculty and staff may encounter this term primarily as a marketing ploy or as something that is relegated to campus ministry, the wellness center, or some other department—not as something for which we all share responsibility. Caring for the whole person is "everywhere," which can mean that it's "nowhere." Despite what our marketing materials may tell prospective students, an institution cannot be caring or affectively warm, no matter how kindly individual staff and faculty behave. A clear definition that combines interpersonal and institutional practices will make it easier for us all to understand what *cura personalis* means in terms of our different university roles.

- Third, as we mentioned previously, the term's focus on individuals and its speedy popularization in the 1990s raise concerns that *cura personalis* owes a debt to American individualism. Or, to put the matter more precisely, although *cura personalis* is rooted in Ignatian tradition, its sudden popularity and its more facile manifestations reflect a disinvestment in the communal good. Theorizing *cura personalis* as an institutional practice avoids the kind of limited moral imagination that can only envision "the good" as a matter of individual choices or individual responsibilities.

- Lastly, defining *cura personalis* primarily as interpersonal caring can reinforce gendered and racialized expectations about authority, helpfulness, and affective warmth. For female faculty, the expectation that we practice interpersonal *cura personalis* can resemble a demand that we conform to gendered expectations regarding emotional availability. Furthermore, male faculty may receive more credit—from both colleagues and students—for demonstrating an identical degree of warmth and approachability because their emotional fluency is not taken for granted in the way that women's often is. These gendered effects can be compounded by racial and ethnic stereotypes.[10]

Expanding the definition of *cura personalis* to include institutional practice is not a totally new idea, but it remains under-theorized.[11] In the rest of this article, we clarify our definition of institutional *cura personalis*, explore the challenges of institutionalizing *cura personalis*, and report on our progress in institutionalizing *cura personalis* at Arrupe.

What does it mean to institutionalize *cura personalis*?

In the simplest and most obvious sense, institutionalizing *cura personalis* means providing holistic support services. Caring for the whole person requires us to realize the different factors that shape students' educational paths. Although there is room to debate how much responsibility colleges and universities bear for their students' wellbeing, there is no denying that U.S. higher

education is starting to recognize how many students face issues like hunger and mental health. Here at Arrupe, this recognition has led us to offer on-site social workers, emergency hardship funds, a free meal program, and affordable spiritual retreats. Recently, thanks to cooperation from a local foodbank, we were able to open a food pantry.

If offering holistic support services is one simple definition of institutional *cura personalis*, a second simple definition involves designing work conditions that encourage faculty and staff to form personal relationships with students. For example, small class sizes and small student-to-advisor ratios make it easier to get to know students. Professional development and performance incentives can also make it easier for faculty and staff to build these relationships.

These two definitions of institutional *cura personalis* are worthwhile. They deserve time, attention, and resources. There are drawbacks, however, when we imagine institutional *cura personalis* solely in such simple terms. For example, when we focus on students' holistic needs, we lose the sense that *cura personalis* is a two-way street in which both the giver and the receiver exercise agency. *Cura personalis* is not unidirectional, as we will discuss below. Rather, it is rooted in the dialogic practice of Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises. Particularly when working with students who face disadvantages, we are tempted to focus on their deficits and to understand institutions like Arrupe College as a generous benefactor poised to uplift students. In this paradigm, students are defined by their needs, not by their strengths; they have opportunities to receive, but never to give. Similarly, if we imagine institutional *cura personalis* primarily as the responsibility of frontline faculty and staff who are expected to demonstrate individualized care for students, then we run the risk of reducing *cura personalis* to a demand for emotional labor.

What if we imagined institutional *cura personalis* in more complex and expansive terms? The thinking of former Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., offers a possible starting point.

A new definition

In 2007, Kolvenbach gave a speech that was published under the title "Cura Personalis."[12] Kolvenbach treats *cura personalis* as an established concept grounded in Ignatius's teachings about one-on-one spiritual conversations. Drawing on the *Constitutions* and the Spiritual Exercises, Kolvenbach explores what *cura personalis* entails for spiritual direction. Specifically, he describes *cura personalis* as a guiding principle for the interpersonal dynamics between the spiritual director who administers the Exercises and the retreatant who receives them.[13]

Kolvenbach locates *cura personalis* as one of the many tensions that are foundational to Ignatian spirituality. In Kolvenbach's account, Ignatius's own thought is the source of these productive tensions:

> To maintain a spiritual momentum and an apostolic dynamism in the sense of the 'magis', Ignatius has written into this way to God a whole series of tensions which do not allow us to stop or to be satisfied with what has been achieved. Because of these tensions we are impelled to do more, or rather to let God do more, in us and with us.[14]

In other words, these tensions—which include familiar pairings like action versus contemplation and the universal good versus particular goods—are productive precisely because they always remain unresolved.

So, what exactly is the tension that we call *cura personalis*? Kolvenbach defines it as the tension between our need for accompaniment through our spiritual development and the fact that our relationship to God is ultimately a personal rather than a communal one. In the context of the Spiritual Exercises, this tension manifests differently for the spiritual director and the retreatant. For the spiritual director, *cura personalis* requires developing a personal relationship with the retreatant. The spiritual director should not rely on his or her own institutional role, authority, or credentials when deciding how best to help the retreatant. Instead, the spiritual director should be guided by his or her relationship with, and

knowledge of, the individual retreatant. For the retreatant, *cura personalis* requires a willingness to accept assistance from another. Kolvenbach describes the difference between these two roles as a "binary relationship between two persons—one who gives, one who receives."[15]

Earlier, we claimed that *cura personalis* is a two-way street, rooted in the dialogic practice of Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, and that focusing too narrowly on students' needs prevents us from seeing them as people who also have something to give. How do we reconcile this claim with Kolvenbach's assertion that *cura personalis* entails a "binary relationship"? Although Kolvenbach's definition does not always sound dialogic, he does emphasize that the spiritual director's authority must not compromise the recipient's agency. The retreatant needs and receives help, but this fact is not a sign that the spiritual director possesses something that the retreatant lacks. Needing help is a universal human condition, one that the spiritual director shares. Furthermore, in Kolvenbach's account, receiving help requires agency, not passivity. "Paradoxically, it is this call for the other person's help which should lead to my being put in charge of what I myself want," Kolvenbach explains.[16] He continues:

> Clearly, the one who receives 'cura personalis' is a person capable of willing and choosing in freedom and with generosity. . . . The whole dynamic of the Exercises leads to making the one receiving them responsible, which is to say capable of responding to what the Lord wills and desires for him.[17]

At one point, Kolvenbach insists that "'Cura personalis' is no longer a reality when the one giving the Exercises prevents the one receiving them from acting and deciding by himself." He further expands this idea by asserting, "All the authority of the spiritual director should serve to make the other the author."[18] His insistence on the retreatant's agency is why we interpret this model as dialogic.

At first glance, Kolvenbach's speech is unrelated to our project of defining *cura personalis* as an institutional practice in higher education. For one thing, most of his speech addresses spiritual direction, not higher education. Furthermore, he focuses on interpersonal dynamics and comments approvingly that Ignatius's writing "refuses all professional or institutional terminology."[19]

Basis for institutionalizing *cura personalis*

Given his emphasis on interpersonal practice, how does Kolvenbach give us a basis for institutionalizing *cura personalis*? Even though he focuses on interpersonal dynamics, Kolvenbach defines *cura personalis* as something more than caring or affective warmth. He sees *cura personalis* as one of the productive tensions that Ignatius believed can drive us to *magis*. In order to expand the definition of *cura personalis* to include institutional practice in higher education, we draw on three central elements of Kolvenbach's theory: productive tension, the importance of agency, and mutual responsibility for a shared goal.

- *Productive tension.* Kolvenbach argues that, for spiritual directors and retreatants, the central tension that governs their interaction is the need for accompaniment on a spiritual journey versus the fact that this journey is ultimately a personal one. Transferring Kolvenbach's observations from spiritual direction to higher education, we might argue that although faculty can help students to increase their knowledge and skills, students must acquire knowledge and skills for themselves. Although this statement is true, it does not strike us as a defining tension in higher education, particularly when we acknowledge that learning can happen without teaching. In our experience, the tension that is most central to teaching in higher education—meaning the tension that structures our interactions with students, that remains unresolved, and that serves a creative purpose by spurring us to do better precisely because it remains unresolved—is the tension between supporting students and challenging them. You may also know this phenomenon as the tension between compassion and accountability, or between "meeting students where they're at" and "challenging students to grow beyond their current intellectual and ethical limits."

- *Agency*. In the Spiritual Exercises, although the ultimate goal is always the same, the spiritual director and the retreatant have freedom regarding how to approach the goal. The spiritual director adapts the Exercises for the individual retreatant; the retreatant exercises agency by accepting help. The institutional practice of *cura personalis* should incorporate this dynamic of adaptability and agency. Once we recognize that the tension between support and challenge can never be resolved—there can be no best practices that solve this tension once and for all!—then the need for flexibility and individual agency within institutions becomes clear.[20] Our policies should allow students, faculty, and staff the agency they need to respond flexibly to the productive tension between support and challenge.

- *Mutual responsibility for a shared goal*. In the Spiritual Exercises, both the spiritual director and the retreatant share responsibility for a goal: drawing closer to God. In U.S. Jesuit higher education, faculty and students likewise share responsibility for a goal: learning. This goal is, admittedly, more disputed. Reflecting on the 400th anniversary of the *Ratio Studiorum*, Gray highlights disagreements about the purpose of Jesuit higher education in a pluralistic society like the United States. Although he acknowledges that some Catholic thinkers criticize the dilution of Church traditions, Gray himself supports an ecumenical approach. He argues for "translating competing values into generous, shared concerns about creating a new kind of academic community in which we can speak to one another in order to learn from one another."[21] Likewise, we believe that the broad umbrella of "learning" constitutes a shared goal uniting our academic community.

In sum, transferring Kolvenbach's insights from spiritual direction to higher education, we define institutional *cura personalis* as the practice of designing policies and procedures that allow for flexibility and agency as faculty and students balance the tension between support and challenge—a tension that remains unresolved in our shared pursuit of learning.

Putting theory into practice

Given this theoretical basis, what does institutionalizing *cura personalis* look like in practice? To help answer this question, we offer two concrete examples from our own campus. Loyola University Chicago opened Arrupe College in 2015 with the goal of increasing access to higher education. As explained in our mission statement, Arrupe continues the Jesuit tradition of offering a rigorous liberal arts education to a diverse population, many of whom are the first in their families to pursue higher education. Arrupe prepares its graduates to continue on to a bachelor's program or move into meaningful employment by using an innovative model that ensures affordability while providing care for the whole person—intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Because Arrupe College is so new, it is something of an experiment, which has given us the freedom to create and revise institutional policies that embrace *cura personalis*.[22]

In keeping with Kolvenbach's recognition that creative tensions are productive precisely because they remain unresolved, we do not intend our examples as a guide to best practices. In fact, unresolved creative tensions and the agency needed to navigate them are totally at odds with the assumptions underlying a label like "best practices." We offer our own experiences as a starting point, not as a blueprint for replication. How you institutionalize *cura personalis* will depend on your local context. You may even find that different programs or departments within your university will have different answers.

Example 1: Advising as accompanying

At Arrupe College, faculty advising includes but is not limited to traditional academic advising (assisting students in choosing their academic concentrations, understanding degree requirements, registering for classes). The advising relationship, which lasts from freshman orientation through graduation, is a partnership designed to facilitate the student's successful degree completion as well as his or her personal and professional growth. The faculty advisor accompanies the student through his or her time at Arrupe, becoming acquainted with the student, learning about the student's gifts, identifying

challenges and setting goals collaboratively, providing timely information, connecting the student to essential resources, and advocating for the student as opportunities arise. Faculty advisors are not social workers or financial aid counselors, but they do serve as the first point of contact for students identifying educational, financial, physical, and socio-emotional challenges. As such, they help students locate relevant support services.[23]

Arrupe's faculty advising model embodies *cura personalis* in at least two senses. In the first sense, faculty advisors offer individualized attention. In the second sense, which is closer to our interpretation of Kolvenbach, faculty advisors constantly manage iterations of the creative tension between compassion and accountability. We seek to be compassionate towards our advisees, to affirm and comfort them; we also want our advisees to overcome challenges, meet goals, and develop new competencies. It is not always clear how to do either of these things. To give a typical example, when your advisee does not respond to your initial email about worrisome midterm grades, what is the next step? Do you call the advisee? Text him or her? Keep an eye out and hope you run into the advisee around campus? Email a second time? Email relevant professors for more details? In short, how do you find the appropriate balance between support and challenge while respecting student agency?

Our answers to these questions will always depend partly on our own limited time and energy. But our answers should also depend on our advisees' preferences. The kind of outreach that feels caring and supportive to one young person can feel intrusive and condescending to another. Thus the creative tension between compassion and accountability that drives us to *magis* does not lead us toward a single ideal version of advising outreach. Rather, when it comes to advising, *magis* means cultivating relationships with students so that we better understand what works for each of them. What type of advising relationship do they want? Do they want to drop in once a semester before registration? To confide when they face setbacks? Or perhaps they want monthly check-ins about their academic progress? The simplest way to answer these questions is to ask students directly.

When it comes to faculty advising, *magis* also means cultivating self-awareness about how we affect our advisees, especially noting how differences in gender, race, and socioeconomic status—not to mention prior educational experiences—shape the way that our interactions feel to students. As an example, one of our methods for providing holistic care is to convene relevant faculty and staff to meet with a student who faces pressing academic and nonacademic difficulties. For instance, when a student's poor academic performance is linked to stress at home, the advisor might invite a social worker and a campus minister along with the student's instructors. For some students, this type of meeting helps them communicate, and they leave feeling as though they have a team in their corner. Other students shut down. For students whose schooling has exposed them to negative stereotypes or to disproportionate disciplinary procedures, especially, it's not surprising that a holistic support meeting might feel like being chastised in front of an audience. Consequently, universal guidelines about when to convene a holistic support meeting would not be helpful. Again, the simplest way to decide whether to convene such a meeting is just to ask the advisee: *Is this the best way to address your challenges or is there a better way?*

Asking our advisees these types of questions means that faculty members and students both exercise agency to shape their advising interactions. Students weigh in on the advising strategies that will work best for them; faculty have the freedom and flexibility to respond as they see fit. Within the advising relationship, students also exercise agency through goal-setting. Unlike in a classroom where the professor identifies the learning objectives and holds students accountable through grading, the advising relationship lacks pre-set learning outcomes and grades. In this context, advisor and advisee collaborate to articulate shared goals that range from "I want to change my major" to "I want to do my homework, but I work full-time" to "I want to get more involved in extracurriculars." As advisors, we can offer to help keep students accountable for the goals that they set themselves.

In short, faculty advising is a fundamental vehicle for *cura personalis* at Arrupe. What institutional

decisions were necessary to bring about this state of affairs? First, we explicitly defined advising as a core faculty responsibility. To this end, our annual faculty performance review includes a framework for evaluating advising. The framework evaluates three domains: academic advising, interaction with students, and advocacy and availability. We also survey advisees annually about their experience. Their responses provide advisors with formative feedback about strengths and areas for improvement. Second, we make hiring decisions with advising in mind. Since holistic mentoring is not a standard expectation for college faculty, we explicitly describe the importance of advising in our job ads and during our interview process. We look for candidates who have experience mentoring college-age young people. When candidates lack such experience, we consider their willingness to take on a mentor role.

Holistic advising places high demands on faculty. Few graduate programs prepare their alumni to practice academic advising, let alone holistic advising. As a result, professional development opportunities are critical. Drawing on partnerships with other Loyola colleges and with community organizations, Arrupe's faculty advising committee organizes professional development to address the issues that faculty advisors find most challenging. For example, the advising committee has recruited faculty from Loyola's School of Social Work to offer workshops on topics such as interpersonal communication and preventing burnout. Cultural competence is another vital area for professional development, particularly for white faculty members working as part of a multicultural faculty at a minority-serving college within a predominantly white university.

Besides professional development, time is another crucial resource. To allow for individual advising meetings, Arrupe faculty hold at least eight office hours per week, and we typically assign a maximum of twenty advisees per faculty member. Advising relationships—like relationships in general—cannot be rushed. Consequently, we have designed a series of advising interactions that give advisors and advisees time to build trust together. Upon their admission to Arrupe College, incoming students receive their advisor's contact information. Some students choose to contact the advisor before the school year begins, but most meet their advisor for the first time at freshman orientation, when they come together in a group with their advisor and their fellow advisees. These advising groups meet on three or four different days during orientation. Once the semester begins, freshmen are enrolled in a first-year seminar. Advisors visit the seminar at least four times during the semester to address topics such as course registration. They also invite students to group and individual advising meetings. Over the course of a student's time at Arrupe, these interactions become less structured. By sophomore year, there are fewer group advisory meetings and more individual advising sessions focused on questions like choosing a major and applying to a four-year university.

All of these institutional decisions—about faculty roles, hiring, and resources—have required collaboration between the faculty and the Dean. They also exemplify an institutional approach that leaves room for adaptability and agency. Although universal guidelines offer a feeling of safety and an illusion of fairness, it would be impossible and indeed counterproductive to create a policy to solve every compassion/accountability dilemma that faculty advisors face. Instead, as a college, we must create policies where they are necessary (such as Title IX violations), while protecting advisors' freedom to adapt their advising strategies to suit individual students.

Example 2: Peer Tutoring

The tension between supporting and challenging students is also apparent in our freshman writing sequence. Not only do we want to support students as they meet the challenge of college-level writing expectations, sometimes we find that we need to challenge them to take advantage of the supports that are available! After our first year of operation (2015–2016), it was clear that we could do better on both fronts. Although we offered a variety of academic supports, few students took advantage of these resources, and those who did were usually stronger students who already possessed one of the habits of successful writers: seeking and using outside feedback.

There are many reasons why students underutilize academic supports. In addition to feeling pressed for time, some students simply forget about

supports. Others are unable to find them. In our first year, although we offered many academic supports, they were all located in different places, had different schedules, and used different sign-up procedures. None of these obstacles would deter a determined student, but they constituted just enough of a barrier to dissuade students who weren't really sure whether they wanted extra help in the first place. Another problem is that using academic supports may be stigmatized. No matter how many times we tell students that using supports is normal, and that the people who get the most academic help are their more privileged peers who have access to resources ranging from tutoring to test preparation, students may still fear negative evaluation by their peers. Since faculty exhortations weren't doing the trick, we knew that we needed to create a smoother pathway from the classroom to outside academic supports.

After investigating possibilities—and inspired by Bridgewater State University's writing fellows program—we decided to pilot our own writing fellows program. Writing fellows have existed since at least the early 1980s, and the specifics vary from institution to institution. For our pilot program, which ran during the 2016-2017 academic year, we recruited four rising sophomores who had earned high grades in the freshman writing sequence. They were hired to act as peers/experts, supporting their peers through modelling, collaboration, and feedback. Because they were peers and because they had no power to grade student writing, they offered a type of support that was qualitatively different from faculty office hours. They were not experts at writing or teaching, but they were experts at being college students. It is worth noting that these were paid positions. The job responsibilities included participating in a three-day orientation and in weekly training sessions in which fellows continued to strengthen their writing and tutoring skills.

Fellows support their peers through two channels: embedded tutoring aimed at freshman writers and open office hours aimed at all Arrupe students. The embedded tutoring consists of weekly appointments that are treated as a lab or discussion section attached to freshman writing courses. We refer to sections with tutors as "enhanced" sections. Rather than placing underprepared writers in remedial classes, the enhanced writing sequence holds them to the same expectations that they would encounter in traditional college writing courses. The difference is that writing fellows, as successful college writers themselves, provide students with the extra instruction and support needed to facilitate the transition to college-level writing. By setting a consistent time and place for appointments, the embedded tutoring component removes some of the external barriers that make it hard for students to find tutoring spaces and remember appointments. Building writing fellows into the class helps normalize the habit of seeking academic support. It sends the message that working with others is a standard academic strategy for all students, not a last resort for the desperate.

Over the course of the semester, writing fellows have the chance to build a long-term, collaborative relationship with each student in service of a shared goal: improving writing habits. Such one-on-one relationships can reduce stigma and make tutoring feel more rewarding. In keeping with Kolvenbach's points about agency and adapting to the individual, these weekly meetings are individualized, with the freshman writer setting the agenda. For example, students may wish to work on any stage of the writing process from invention to drafting to revision, or they may want to work on related activities like discussing difficult readings, reviewing class material, or creating a homework schedule. They also ask questions about college norms and practical issues like how to use the online course management system or where to find printers. The program benefits students on both sides of the tutoring relationship. Writers gain individualized attention to their writing, while fellows expand their own writing knowledge and acquire professional experience.

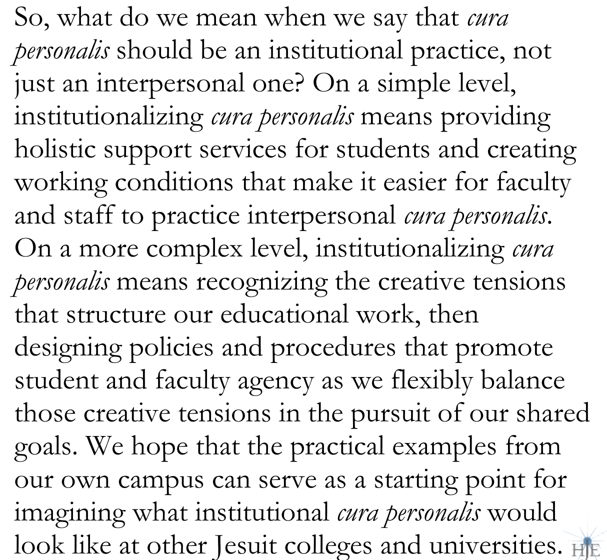
The writing fellows program has not magically solved every student's academic struggles, and there remains room for experimentation and improvement. The results have been positive enough, however, that we have expanded peer tutoring to include courses in math, economics, and accounting. We have also added peer mentors to our first-year seminar, which serves as an introduction to college life. These peer mentoring

and tutoring programs benefit diversity and equity at Arrupe. As a minority-serving institution, we must work to recognize how seemingly neutral institutional practices can inadvertently trigger stereotype threat or undermine students' sense of belonging in higher education. To put matters bluntly, when writing fellows act as peers/experts, they can help dispel the insidious assumption that academic expertise belongs to middle- or upper-class white people. Although peer tutoring is clearly not a panacea for structural racism, it is one way to communicate the message "You are a scholar." If we imagine academic support as a resource that can only come from outside the student body, then we define our students in terms of their deficits, not their strengths. Although outside tutors are a valuable resource, a peer tutoring program allows us to recognize and benefit from the strengths and resources that Arrupe students themselves bring to our academic community.

Finally, these kinds of peer tutoring and peer mentoring programs remind us that *cura personalis* does not belong to faculty alone. Students, too, should have the opportunity to care for each other.[24]

Conclusion

So, what do we mean when we say that *cura personalis* should be an institutional practice, not just an interpersonal one? On a simple level, institutionalizing *cura personalis* means providing holistic support services for students and creating working conditions that make it easier for faculty and staff to practice interpersonal *cura personalis*. On a more complex level, institutionalizing *cura personalis* means recognizing the creative tensions that structure our educational work, then designing policies and procedures that promote student and faculty agency as we flexibly balance those creative tensions in the pursuit of our shared goals. We hope that the practical examples from our own campus can serve as a starting point for imagining what institutional *cura personalis* would look like at other Jesuit colleges and universities.



Notes

[1] Lora Claywell, Karen Pennington, and Charlotte Spade, "An Exploration of the Influence of Ignatian Values on Faculty Role Expectations," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 3, no. 1 (2014): 3.

[2] Barton T. Geger, S.J., "Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 6–20.

[3] Geger, "Cura Personalis," 7.

[4] "The Characteristics of Jesuit Education" in *Ignatian Pedagogy: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Jesuit Education from St. Ignatius to Today*, ed. José Mesa, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2017), 306.

[5] Geger, "Cura Personalis," 6–8.

[6] Howard Gray, S.J., "The Experience of Ignatius Loyola: Background to Jesuit Education," in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco, S.J. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 1–21; John W. O'Malley S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[7] Geger, "Cura Personalis," 15.

[8] Gray, "The Experience of Ignatius Loyola," 5.

[9] O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 255.

[10] Landon D. Reid, "The Role of Perceived Race and Gender in the Evaluation of College Teaching on RateMyProfessors.Com," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (2010): 137–152, APA PsycNET, http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0019865; Anne Boring, et al., "Student Evaluations of Teaching (Mostly) Do Not Measure Teaching Effectiveness," *ScienceOpen Research* (2016): 1–11, https://www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=818d8ec0-5908-47d8-86b4-5dc38f04b23e.

[11] General Congregation 35, "Decree 5: Governance at the Service of Universal Mission" in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2008), 768–779. Items 161.20 and 166.25 from this decree briefly juxtapose *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica* as principles guiding Jesuits' institutional governance and decision-making (772, 774). See also Diane Dreher, "What To Do About It: *Cura Personalis* and the Challenge of Work-Life Balance," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 41 (2011): 30–33; Mary-Elaine Perry and Melissa Collins DeLeonardo, "Rising Voices: Women's Leadership in Jesuit Higher Education," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 41 (2011): 28–29; Collette Windish, "Step by Step," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 41 (2011): 12–13;

Lynne C. Elkes, "An Appendage or Vital Component? Adjunct Faculty and Jesuit Principles: The Needs of a Neglected Majority," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 41 (2011): 24–25. These authors invoke *cura personalis* as a rationale for their proposed improvements to work-life balance, women's leadership, shared governance, and adjuncts' professional development, respectively. None of them fully explore, however, what it would mean to consistently define *cura personalis* in both institutional and interpersonal terms.

[12] Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Cura Personalis," *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 38, no. 114 (2007): 9–17.

[13] Despite the fact that Kolvenbach is concerned with *cura personalis* specifically in the context of spiritual direction, the end of his speech indicates that Ignatius's one-on-one conversational model for spiritual direction also has educational applications. Kolvenbach briefly describes how *cura personalis* has been part of Jesuit education from the beginning. After emphasizing that the first Jesuits' preaching ministry centered on individual conversations rather than on traditional pulpit preaching, he writes, "Precisely to transform this scholastic manner, 'cura personalis' comes in as a characteristic of Jesuit education. The Ratio Studiorum of 1599 takes this personal solicitude to heart with respect to the vocation of each pupil, the personal history of each one" (16). He goes on to give examples of what *cura personalis* looks like in educational practice: faculty "living a respectful familiarity" with students, using "personal knowledge" to adapt schedules and methods to individual student needs, resulting in "a personalised pedagogy" (16).

[14] Kolvenbach, "Cura Personalis," 9.

[15] Ibid., 10–12, 13.

[16] Ibid., 11.

[17] Ibid., 12.

[18] Ibid., 11.

[19] Ibid., 10.

[20] The flexibility and adaptability of the *Ratio Studiorum* gives us another rationale for the importance of agency. By institutionalizing *cura personalis*, we are following the precedent of the *Ratio*, which recorded institutional practices so that they could be replicated while crucially allowing for local adaptations.

[21] Gray, "The Experience of Ignatius Loyola," 21.

[22] In our four years of operation, we have found that implementing *cura personalis* as an institutional practice involves at least two significant challenges. First, there is the well-trodden dilemma between implementing both *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica*. Although not necessarily or always in tension, in some cases, privileging an individual's wellbeing may conflict with the wellbeing of the larger community or college. A second challenge to institutionalizing *cura personalis* is that, by definition, institutionalization requires the creation of a fixed policy which may not fit every individual's need or circumstance. To what extent do we require that individuals follow established policies and meet defined benchmarks and standards? When and under what conditions can we allow exceptions to such policies? Even though these challenges cannot fully and finally be resolved, utilizing participative, consensus-based decision-making procedures and respecting the principle of subsidiarity can mitigate errors. Involving members of the Arrupe College community in decision-making, especially those persons closest to the implementation of the decisions, ensures that multiple interests and viewpoints are heard and considered. Consensus-based decisions typically emerge, probably because of our small size and shared commitment to serving students.

[23] Although Arrupe's holistic approach to advising is deeply Ignatian, it is not exclusively Ignatian. As an example of recent research on the importance of treating students holistically, see the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* (2019), accessed August 8, 2019, http://nationathope.org. The introduction to this report asserts that "Children learn best when we treat them as human beings, with social and emotional as well as academic needs" (5).

[24] See "Communal Reflection on the Jesuit Mission in Higher Education: A Way of Proceeding," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 177–188. This 2002 document does not use the term *cura personalis*, but it does list "Focused Care for Students" as the fourth of five characteristics of Jesuit higher education (184). As part of a series of questions about focused care for students, the document asks, "What opportunities do students have to care for and even to act as mentors to one another? Is there any explicit education in this and guidance in learning such skills, especially in the residence halls?" (185).