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Reflections on Running a First-Year Seminar about Feminism and Jesuit Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to explain the reasons and benefits in bringing together the topics of Feminism and Jesuit education for a First-Year Seminar, to detail the curriculum steps and considerations in designing and proposing such a course, and to suggest a final list of overall dos and don'ts for running this course after one semester's experience.

In thinking about the theme of gender and Jesuit higher education, I cannot help but think about this past Fall 2013 semester, when I conducted the first offering of a First-Year Seminar (FYS) entitled, "Feminism and Jesuit Education." This particular moment in time appeared ripe for the pairing together of these topics for a First-Year Seminar. The recent releases of the mini-series *Women, War, & Peace* (2011), the documentaries *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2012), *The Invisible War* (2012), and *Makers: Women Who Make America* (2013) all demonstrate the historic and real-time concern for women's physical and economic well-being on both the national and international fronts. Additionally, there was the news story of the imprisonment of the Feminist punk rock performance/protest art collective known as *Pussy Riot* in Russia in early 2012. In the past three years, there has been a hyper-visibility of women and their issues in news reports and cultural productions. From an educator's perspective, it seemed like a perfect time to run a class that addressed gender injustice within the framework of the social justice mission of Jesuit higher education.

I ran this course out of the Department of English & Theatre; therefore, I covered not only basic feminist theoretical texts but also several pieces of literature as the course's specific academic content. This essay addresses the rationale in coupling the topics of Feminism and Jesuit education, the curriculum steps and considerations in designing and proposing the course, and finally the dos and don'ts of running the course after one

semester's experience. As the instructor, I learned a great deal about how First-Year students critically approach issues such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ableism, and also about how they understand what it means to be college students at Jesuit institutions. Overall, I hope to convey that the experience of creating and running this course was incredibly worth-while for student and instructor alike, while imparting a few points to consider if others think they would like to attempt a similar endeavor.

History of a Course in the Making

When my institution undertook its latest attempt to revise its General Education (GE) curriculum, a major aspect of this revision was reconceptualizing the one-credit Freshman Seminar into a three-credit First-Year Seminar. This new class would address college transition issues, specific academic content, and the history and tradition of Jesuit education. Granted, this idea was hardly new; many institutions, both Jesuit and non-Jesuit, have introduced First-Year Seminars. Nevertheless, for my colleagues and myself, this move to a three credit First-Year Seminar was a daunting though exciting challenge. As a faculty body, we addressed where or how it could fit in the curriculum: as a 1) free elective, 2) major course elective, or 3) general education course. We also discussed whether or not part- and full-time faculty should be allowed to teach this course, or should it be taught by full-time faculty only; what resources are available to equip instructors in dealing with college transition issues and the history of Jesuit education; and the

question of how to assess the First-Year Seminar experience overall. In order to work with the resources that we have and give the best educational experience that we could to our students, the faculty moved to have all three options (free elective, major course elective, and general education course) exist for departments and their majors.

Because the needs of the course were so varied and the place where the course could fit in the curriculum was so fluid, I decided to wait to propose a FYS course until I had a proposal in mind that would meet all these needs well. This idea for a FYS course proposal entitled, “Feminism and Jesuit Education,” came to me when I read the review of Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino’s edited text entitled, *Jesuit & Feminist Education* (Fordham University Press, 2012) in the Fall 2012 issue of *Conversations*.

The review made it clear that the book was a product of a conference held in 2006, on the Fairfield University campus, “that sought to examine ‘the points of intersection between the traditional Ignatian pedagogical tradition and emerging feminist pedagogies.’”¹ This prospect of intersections between Ignatian and Feminist pedagogies was intriguing, so I decided to purchase a copy of the book and learn more. I already knew that Feminism and Jesuit education had a common end goal (social justice), but I was curious to see where the book would articulate further intersections. As it turned out, reading selections of *Jesuit & Feminist Education* enlightened me about the commonalities between the two practices.

Points of Convergence

The three main areas of commonality between Feminism and Jesuit education can be summarized by the following: 1) the embrace of diversity 2) the utilization of transformational education geared at the acquisition of social justice and 3) common pedagogical practices reliant on relational and subjective experiences that are action-oriented. In the “Foreword” of *Jesuit & Feminist Education*, Jeffrey P. Von Arx, S.J., explains these areas of convergence:

So, in broad terms, both Feminist and Ignatian pedagogy are interested in the search for truth that will serve the promotion of justice and the transformation of society. The aim of both is to try and identify what is unjust, broken, or unmet in the world around us and actively develop strategies to address these deficiencies. ... What feminists and Jesuits also share is a commitment to a fuller embrace of diversity within our institutions of higher education. ... Feminist pedagogy, like Ignatian pedagogy, takes as a point of departure that the work of learning is primarily a relational experience.²

It should be stressed that the last point about how both pedagogical approaches are relational also references the importance of recognizing the subjective and taking action during the learning process. Specifically, Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino describe where the two pedagogies intersect: “To develop this position, we explore how feminist pedagogy, captured in the slogan ‘The personal is political,’ converges with and diverges from five key aspects of Jesuit education—context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation—in order to understand how they can inform and even transform one another.”³ Indeed, both pedagogical approaches are based on meeting students where they are and imparting the background, tools, and steps they need in order to make responsible choices. Moreover, the commonalities between Feminism and Jesuit education lend themselves very well to an introduction of college life and its subsequent transitional issues. Topics like diversity, transformational education, and social justice get students actively thinking about what they can and should be getting out of a college education right from their first semester of study. Addressing common pedagogical practices also prompts students to be more self-aware of how they can and should be learning, both in the classroom and outside of it, and how they should be acting on that education.

To begin, Feminist pedagogy equips the student to recognize and address oppression. Carolyn Shrewsbury explains how a Feminist approach to education empowers students to become knowledgeable in the everyday reality of social injustice: “In a feminist classroom, students integrate the skills of critical thinking with respect

for and the ability to work with others. Feminist pedagogy strives to help student and teacher learn and think in new ways, especially ways that enhance the integrity and wholeness of the person and the person's connections with others (Minnich, Rutenberg). Critical thinking, then, is not abstracted analysis but a reflective process firmly grounded in the experiences of the everyday."⁴ The echoes of the Jesuit ideas of *cura personalis* - care for the whole person- and being 'men and women for others' are clear in Shrewsbury's description of the feminist classroom and highlight how students learn to think and act responsibly in relationship to themselves and others in the world. Additionally, Robbin D. Crabtree and David Alan Sapp assert, "Feminist pedagogy aims to develop not only students' skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing, but also skills associated with negotiation, assessment, and decision making in a struggle against human suffering, oppression, and exploitation (Shrewsbury 1993; see also Munro 1995)."⁵ These skills in negotiation, assessment, and decision-making in addressing social ills such as racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and ableism are no doubt a crucial part of the critical thinking skills students learn in the feminist classroom. In any case, one can easily see how Feminist pedagogy and ideas are supportive of the Jesuit education tradition in many ways. The strength of these commonalities resulted in a great ease for me in designing the course.

Designing and Proposing the "Feminism and Jesuit Education" First-Year Seminar

Designing the course (deciding on topics for coverage; selecting readings; creating assignments) was an organic experience due to the many similarities between Feminism and Jesuit education practices. In the end, I decided on the following topic areas: History of Jesuit Education; History of Feminism; Understanding Central Concepts of Feminism: Oppression, Privilege, and Patriarchy; How do literary works flesh out ideas we have been reading about in the essays for class?; Transformational Education; Embracing Diversity; and Putting to Action. We spent much of the beginning part of the semester learning the history of Jesuit education and Feminism and about concepts such as oppression, privilege, and patriarchy so that we can better understand where

the two approaches intersect and how these ideas are demonstrated in various literary pieces; the "Putting to Action" part of the semester was to be focused on an action-oriented group project done by the students. As for the readings, the following is a list of required texts: excerpts of *Jesuit & Feminist Education*, edited by Boryczka and Petrino, (Fordham University Press, 2012); excerpts of *A Jesuit Education Reader*, edited by George W. Traub, S.J., (Loyola Press, 2008); *Real Women Have Curves* by Josefina López, (The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1996); *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath (Harper Perennial, 2005); and excerpts of *The Thinking Student's Guide to College* by Andrew Roberts, (The University of Chicago Press, 2010). Some other assigned authors include Marilyn Frye, Peggy McIntosh, Allan Johnson, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, bell hooks, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. All of these authors illuminated the process of how to study and understand systems of institutional oppression and how they operate in our world. The assignments included quizzes and exams in order to test students' reading and their retention of key information about Feminism and Jesuit education. The assignments went from summary and response activities to argumentative essays, as students gained proficiency in understanding complicated texts and applying them to the analysis of other texts. There were also informational/cultural events due and an oral group project assigned so that students could practice their verbal skills and see how what they were learning about in the classroom presented itself in campus events and the outside world. As stated earlier, designing the class, realizing the connections already implicit between Feminism and Jesuit education, was an organic experience and a joy. Proposing the course to the various curriculum bodies on my campus, however, was a different experience than I expected.

First, in my department, there was some discussion about whether or not this course should be a CL (Humanities-Literature) and a D (Diversity). The general belief at the time was that we as a department had to make our seminars attractive by creating them to cover many general education designations. In terms of my class, labelling it as a D was an obvious choice in that the course's selected readings covered gender, race, class, and sexual orientation; my department

and I agreed on this issue. Where we disagreed was on whether or not the course should be listed as a CL. My department had no qualms about this prospect; I had reservations. I was only assigning one novel, one play, and four short stories. At first, I had no coverage of poems planned, nor space in my syllabus for such coverage; it seemed to me that the class was not going to be reading enough literature or spending enough time on it to warrant a CL designation. My colleagues convinced me that the course warranted a CL, and in order to feel better about that decision, I found a way to incorporate poetry into the syllabus. What I did was select groupings of thematic poems, matched them to the fiction and drama readings, and used the poetry to open up discussion of the fiction and the drama. I also used these groupings of thematic poems in an in-class activity focused on practicing thesis-statement creation; students had to read a grouping of poems, we discussed them in class, and then they had to practice writing thesis statements based on the reading and discussion. Overall, I thought the incorporation and study of the literature went well; in fact, on one course evaluation, a student noted that she especially enjoyed how the poetry was used. Many students in their course evaluations also noted the desire for the coverage of more literature (while simultaneously noting that they could do with less readings on Jesuit history and education). In my next offering of this class, I did some editing of the readings and have included another text, Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which more directly fleshes out the feminist theoretical readings on race.

After passing department review, I forwarded my syllabus to the Women Studies Program Steering Committee. The problem here was not if it should be listed as a Women Studies course; the answer to that question (yes) was obvious. The challenge here was where to place the course within the concentration and major so as to not make it a prohibitive requirement for students wanting to pick up the Women Studies Major or Concentration in their second or third year. It could serve as a foundational course for the program but was listed officially as an elective or supporting course in order to avoid making students take this course when, if they did declare in their second or third year, it would be highly

probable that they have already taken their FYS course and need not take another. Luckily here, both the Women Studies Program Steering Committee and I agreed readily on the key issues. As one can see, even when a place is created for a new course in the curriculum, there are still questions to consider about how such a course can fit into its home department and also any other programs that it can support.

Curiously, in going through the University curriculum review process, I was never asked about why these two topics of my First-Year Seminar were joined together; I thought some faculty member somewhere was going to point out and question the obvious areas where Feminism and the Jesuit tradition do not agree. Von Arx, S.J., names these areas succinctly: "The roles available to women within the church provide rich areas for disagreement, as do issues concerning reproductive rights and obligations, and other questions pertaining to the family, sexuality, and the traditional roles of both men and women."⁶ The topics of reproductive rights, women's possible roles in the church, and gay and lesbian rights are commonplace and touchstone concepts within feminism, but within the Catholic Church, these areas are regarded as anti-doctrine and therefore disregarded easily. However, despite these areas of potential disagreement, scholars such as Lisa Cahill assert that there is more than dissonance between Feminism and the Jesuit tradition:

Moreover, one cannot avoid the fact that the larger context of the Roman Catholic Church fosters exclusion of a feminist interest within the commitment to justice and service, and hinders full collaboration with women in pursuing it. It is not surprising that some view feminism and Catholicism as irreconcilable ideologies. However, I find it credible to see them both as potential expressions of Christian ideals. As Saint Paul wrote to a community of early Christians which he founded, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gals 3:28).⁷

The point here is two-fold: 1) there can be an open examination of the intersections of Feminism and Jesuit education while still

acknowledging the areas where the two approaches diverge and 2) many teachers and scholars affirm and research the connections between Feminism and Jesuit education. In hindsight, I think there are two main reasons why this course was allowed to pass with such ease. First, there was and still is a great need on my campus for full-time faculty to teach FYS courses, so perhaps, this need alone was reason enough to allow the course to pass. Second, I really do think that the existence of the text *Jesuit & Feminist Education* legitimized the possible existence of this FYS course. If this book was not in print and there was no other tangible text that I could require as the course's main textbook, then I do believe this course would have received some pushback and have been sent back for revision. Thankfully, the lack of interrogation concerning the pairing together of Feminism and Jesuit education for this course proved to be one less task for me to worry about in prepping this new course.

Lastly, in this day and age of accountability, creating the course's "Student Learning Outcomes" (SLOs) for the purpose of assessment was key. Currently, my course has five SLOs. There are the following:

- 1) Students who complete *this course* will be able to understand the history and meaning of a Jesuit education. (FYS-Based on the written and verbal assignments which address the readings of *The Jesuit Education Reader*)
- 2) Students who complete *this course* will be able to write effective literary arguments and essays that address the topics of feminism and social justice. (CL-Based on the essay writing assignments of the course)
- 3) Students who complete *this course* will be able to practice forming effective verbal responses about topics related to feminism, Jesuit education, and the intersections of the two. (Based on discussions of all the course's various texts and the final presentation)
- 4) Students who complete *this course* will be able to identify important college transition issues and strategies to handle them. (FYS-Based on the

reading and discussion of certain chapters in *The Thinking Student's Guide to College*)

- 5) Students who complete *this course* will be able to identify the ways in which various literary works expose the reality of women's lives and concerns, including their social and political views, issues of sexuality, and the relationship between the personal and the political. (WS-Based on the written and verbal assignments which address the reading of the course's various feminist texts)

Having this array of SLOs and a variety of assignments addressing these areas will allow me to assess any one of the key components in this class and as I offer this class over the next few years, there should be interesting data in the near future. But first, there is the experience of this course's first offering to consider.

The Inaugural Class

The first class of the "Feminism and Jesuit Education" First-Year Seminar consisted of seventeen students, all female. About mid-way into the semester, this fact was discussed by the class; they lamented the lack of male students not necessarily because they thought male students could learn something from the class but because, I believe, a sizable percentage of students in the class genuinely missed having male students present. To me, this sentiment was a clear reminder that I am dealing with young students who are in their first semester of their first year of college and they are still desirous of a certain personal dynamic in their classes, especially a small class where they can get to know everybody quite easily. Conversely, having a same-sex classroom did allow for honest discussions of certain topics such as double standards for men and women, sexual assault and birth control, especially when we began literary discussions of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The students in this first class received the advantage of this more open and safe space. Currently, my second offering of this class for the Fall 2014 semester has eighteen female students; the class is capped at eighteen. It will be interesting to see how these students react to the lack of male student presence if there continues to be one. Significantly, when designing the course, I anticipated a lack of male student interest and

enrollment and did deliberate on what the course should be called, “Gender and Jesuit Education” or “Women’s Studies and Jesuit Education.” On this topic, I solicited collegial feedback, which turned out to be mixed. Ultimately, I figured the best approach would be truth in advertising; if the class was going to be about Feminism and Jesuit education, then that is what it should be named.

Another notable fact about this inaugural class was that a majority of the enrolled students had declared credit-heavy majors such as Biology, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Exercise Science, Psychology, Business Administration, and Education. These students were focused on getting good grades and took their class and homework seriously; this pattern was clear throughout the semester, and it helped the class progress forward. However, it seems probable that this class will do little to support other English and Women Studies courses as the students who enroll in this FYS course will probably not have the free electives in their schedules to pursue possible burgeoning interests in Feminism and English. I think the question of who enrolls in this First-Year Seminar necessitates addressing the issue of which and how many General Education designations this course receives. I believe that by making this course a First-Year Seminar that is also listed as a CL and D, I made it especially attractive to credit-heavy majors. This is not to say that the students enrolled in my first offering of the class were not interested in the topic. Nevertheless, the level of student interest did seem to have a limit; there was only so far that they were willing to go. For example, when it came time to form groups and select topics from a larger list for presentation, they formed five groups but only chose three of six available topic areas. The students chose to do their group presentations on women and the media, women and beauty, or women and violence; they did not select any of the other topics, such as women and sports, women and art, women and the environment, or women and war/military service. I think this topical selection of group presentation subjects might be reflective of having students in the class who have a limit to how far and deep they are willing to explore feminist issues. If the class had more majors in the arts and humanities, some of the more cultural

topics would have been selected for the group project.

How the Class Ran

One of the implicit goals of this course is to get students to know what is meant by the phrase “transformational education” at a Jesuit institution. This is one practical reason why reading the life-story of St. Ignatius is so helpful in the beginning of the semester. St. Ignatius Loyola’s life-story, how he wanted to be a man of the court or a professional soldier but was thwarted by an injury to his leg that had him convalescing for a time in which he became spiritually reborn through the reading of religious texts, is very helpful in conveying the idea of transformational education to students. St. Ignatius started out in life wanting to attain a certain type of employment but then changed his plans due to the education he received from reading religious texts when he was ill. This idea of transformational education is definitely a useful concept for First-Year students, as many of them embark on their studies with a clear goal in mind but still may stray from that desired goal over their four years in college. Hopefully, a FYS instructor (or any instructor really) can get to see a transformation take place in his/her students during the semester, but as an instructor at a Jesuit institution, I see students’ whole four-year experience as the true time-span for a transformation to take place. If I can see individual students make key realizations throughout the duration of my FYS course (like what does transformational education mean and how it can happen to them and how that is okay), then I am usually content.

Another key realization that I have seen students make in the FYS course is about how their education is not about achieving a desired product (a degree for a job or a good grade for a degree for a job), it is about the acquisition of useful skills and even more useful subject matter. For instance, on one particular day when the students were working in groups to construct a summary for the reading done for class, one of my students vented clearly her frustration at the summary-exercise when she asked me point-blank, “Is this what you want?” It is interesting to note how she asked me this question about writing summaries, as if it

were an exact science and did not vary from article to article. Granted, I did distribute sheets to my class which described the steps necessary in reading critical articles for comprehension (active reading) and writing summaries, but the resultant summary will vary obviously for each text. She was attempting to approximate some formulaic structure to writing summaries, which is of course difficult. After this student voiced her question, it was clear that she was not alone; many students felt frustrated in reading these articles and writing summaries. Some stated that this was their first attempt at such a task, while others did not seemingly understand the point of such an assignment. Again, the reasons to assign such work are plentiful: to practice reading comprehension and retention skills, writing skills, and create study-guides for exams. In office visits, the students slowly came to accept the idea that through this class's various reading and writing assignments, they were working on skills that could hopefully be useful to a wide variety of classes if the skills were mastered and utilized. In short, they eventually overcame this desire to treat their education as the urge to create a desired product, and instead began to see it as the beginning steps of a long journey in the acquisition of both skills and knowledge. There is no "desired product" or "giving the instructor what she wants" in a true education.

Another memorable moment in the class occurred early in the semester when the class read the chapter "How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education" by John W. O'Malley S.J., in *The Jesuit Education Reader*. In this chapter, O'Malley goes into the history of how the Jesuits first got involved with education in Europe during the 1500s; the students appeared to be affected profoundly when they realized that they and the curriculum they are undertaking at their present Jesuit institution are part of such a long tradition. Specifically, recognizing how Jesuit institutions were unique when they started for they combined the two major approaches to higher education at the time, humanistic and university (or professional) education, gave them a new perspective on their education. For example, when the time in the semester came for students to choose their classes for the next semester, the students in my FYS class had the occasion to consider and review their Curriculum and

Program Planning (CAPP) sheets-the documents which record what classes they have taken, what requirements they have met, and what requirements are yet to be fulfilled. This class session, in which we examined students' CAPP sheets, let them have a tangible, visual realization of how humanistic education (the general education program) merges with university education (their Major program) in order to complement each other and represent the entirety of their education at a Jesuit institution. Not only did they realize how they were a part of a long tradition, they got to see how each class they have to take factors into a larger conception of what it means to receive an education. Such a realization gave them a new perspective on their education, which was beneficial in getting them to see their college years not just as job-training but as an education for life.

Another moment where students seemingly had this recognition of being a small part of a much larger whole was the discussion of the documentary, *Girl Rising* (2013), which told the story of young girls' struggle to be educated across the globe. The women's center on my campus held a screening of this film, and although it was not mandatory, many of my FYS students attended the screening on a Thursday night; we then were able to discuss it the next day in class. In our unpacking of the film, it became clear that seeing the stories of these young girls across the globe and how they had to fight the objectification and commodification of their bodies in order to maintain a chance at education was new knowledge for the students; they had never really contemplated a world where they, as women, could be so defined by their bodies that they would be viewed as nothing more than vessels for human reproduction. Body image issues and the media's role in creating them was a familiar topic to the FYS students, but this knowledge was something different. This realization was articulated by not just one student's remarks but several students' remarks about the statistics that they remembered and the patterns in the girls' stories that they detected. In realizing how valuable and not always easily accessible education acquisition is, the students again had a new perspective on their education as students and as women.

Then, there were the readings and discussions of Marilyn Frye's "Oppression" and Allan Johnson's "Patriarchy, The System: An It, Not a He, a Them or an Us" where students began to understand oppression and patriarchy, key concepts for any college student, but for students at a Jesuit institution, who want to study Feminism, these concepts are critical to understanding the roots and structures of many social injustices, of which sexism is just one. This comprehension of how Frye and Johnson defined "oppression" and "patriarchy" was evident especially when we read and discussed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper." In this short story, students could easily view the nameless narrator as the "oppressed," especially when she sees one woman and then multiple women imprisoned within the bars of the hideous wall-paper; she then identifies herself as one of these women when they escape the wall-paper's bars, reminiscent of Frye's birdcage, towards the end of the short story. Moreover, the students could also easily see the nameless narrator's struggle to be taken seriously by her husband, brother, and even sister-in-law about her illness and to assert agency over all areas of her life as hallmark attributes of Johnson's essay, which discusses patriarchy as a system we are all part of it (even women) whether we like it or not; the only choice we have in patriarchy the system is to choose how we participate. The in-class discussion of how Frye and Johnson's essays apply to "The Yellow Wall-Paper" was rich indeed. Of course, these positive, perhaps life-changing, realizations in the classroom do not always prepare an instructor for the reading of the student course evaluations.

Course Evaluations

Over the years, certain critical comments always appear on my teaching evaluations such as "course was too much work" and "instructor's grading was too strict;" however, certain positive comments have also been common as well such as "instructor was approachable and knowledgeable" and "useful feedback on writing." The evaluations for this First-Year Seminar were no different; it was the usual bag of mixed responses. Of the seventeen students enrolled in the course, sixteen completed the course evaluations. I will only focus on their written comments here as I find the statistical analysis done on these course

evaluations less than helpful in how I structure my classroom on a day-to-day basis. Some of their more significant comments have already been referenced: several students stated that the number and selection of readings done on Jesuit history and education felt unnecessary and redundant; other students asserted a desire for more time spent on the history of Feminism and contemporary topics within Feminism such as women and the workforce, media, and army (curiously, no group selected women and the army as their group project); and still other students expressed a desire for more literature to be covered. Such responses on the readings and discussion topics are helpful as I prepare my next offering of the class. I have added one text and scaled back on the Jesuit education readings, but I still do think that spending an adequate amount of time on the histories of both Jesuit education and Feminism is necessary to see their intersections, especially how both approaches take social justice as their end-point. Additionally, some students commented on the difficulty of selected readings; here again I think some challenging readings should be a part of any First-Year Seminar as the instructor preps the student for a college-career filled with engaging and thought-provoking readings. As for the writing assignments, students asserted that there were too many of them; they especially did not like the summary assignments. In fact, I did anticipate assigning too many of those and I had to revise their number during the semester as I alluded to earlier in this essay. However, on the course evaluations, a few students did note that the various writing assignments helped them understand and process the material better and improve their writing skills; both goals are key for a First-Year Seminar.

Dos and Don'ts of Running a First-Year Seminar on Feminism and Jesuit Education

So what are the take-away points here? Is it worth running a First-Year Seminar on "Feminism and Jesuit Education"? I think it is. As Hillary Clinton stated, "the role and rights of women, their freedom and equality and dignity, is the unfinished business of the twenty-first century."⁸ With news of the terrorist group Boko Haram abducting hundreds of Nigerian girls from their school breaking just this past Spring 2014 and the story of Malala Yousafzai being shot by the Taliban

because of her advocacy for girls' rights to education, the problem of gender discrimination and violence continues to be clear on a global scale, especially its tie to education. Schools on all levels need to address this problem frankly on a national and international scale in order to educate students to be just local and global citizens. Moreover, the localized issues of gender injustice that prevail on any college campus, such as sexual assault, provide further reason to keep addressing how gender issues intersect with Jesuit education. With their missions oriented to social justice, Jesuit institutions can get students thinking about these issues in their First-Year Seminar, as they begin their period of higher education. How can you make such a necessary course an easier and more productive experience for student, instructor, and the supporting programs/departments of the course? Here are some points to consider:

Do:

- 1) Ask the First-Year Seminar students why they are in this class and be prepared for a range of answers, including: established interest, curiosity, and scheduling needs. Knowing where everyone is starting off from interest-wise helps to provide a solid foundation for the course.
- 2) Find out where they are in terms of their writing. Ask them which Composition/Writing class that they are in or that they tested into (they may not be taking their Writing/Composition requirement in the Fall). Instructors may have to adjust theoretical readings accordingly.
- 3) Ask them which Feminist authors and works that they have already read. The idea here is to avoid coverage of commonly read texts, and the texts already read by students may surprise the instructor.
- 4) Assign literary or creative/demonstrative texts that evidence the theories read for class. The biggest mistake that I made the first time that I ran this course was that I assigned a reading on Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory because I thought this theory and its connection to epistemology were especially important for any course on Feminism. However, I assigned this reading without having a literary text paired with it to show the applicability of the theory. Also, I assigned Kimberlé Crenshaw and

Audre Lorde without an adequate pairing of a literary work that addresses race, which is different than assigning literature written by women of color.

- 5) Go over the basics in being an active reader: how to read and take notes on a critical work. This includes steps in how to write effective summaries and formulate productive discussion questions.

Don't:

- 1) Assign more readings than necessary; there is a clear risk of needless repetition. As mentioned earlier, after the first-time that I ran this course, students noted on their evaluations that several of the readings on Jesuit history and education seemed to be unnecessary.
- 2) Over-emphasize the past. In the first-version of this syllabus, I focused on reading and conveying a solid sense of history, the major figures, and ideas of both Jesuit education and Feminism. In their evaluations, students seemed to crave more time and energy spent on contemporary figures and issues (ideas).
- 3) Leave too little time at the end-of-the-semester if there is a desire to assign some type of group/action project. Originally, I thought that I would have time in the semester to emulate the direct action project that Jocelyn M. Boryczka employed in her "Introduction to Feminist Thought" class, which she wrote about in a chapter of *Jesuit & Feminist Education*. This assignment asked the students to "engage in a semester-long direct action project that involves working in groups to carry out an action designed to raise consciousness in their campus community about an issue pertinent to women".⁹ Two such projects that Boryczka wrote about were the student-creation of a class designed to help raise awareness of heart disease as the number one killer of American women and the creation of a communal-inspired and displayed graphic novel on campus that was televised then by a local news station. To read about these projects was inspiring and I aimed to do one in this course. However, the reality of having to cover Feminist history/theory, Feminist literature, the history and tradition of Jesuit education, and college transition issues, despite the plethora of dovetails, was that there just was not enough time for a semester long direct

action project for this course. Instead, what I did was re-conceptualize the group project to be a documentary report. Students formed groups, chose a topic area, chose a documentary from this topic area to watch, and then presented the five stages of Ignatian pedagogy as they applied in a theorized attempt to address the issue. It approximated the direct action project by being a theoretical direct action project-learning about an issue that affects women, informing others about it in some way, and postulating some type of action to be taken in response. In a first offering of this course, this take on the direct action project worked well enough and allowed students the chance to address contemporary topics that we had not been able to through the readings (but the syllabus readings assigned did prepare the students for the analysis of social problems detailed in the documentaries); they enjoyed this opportunity. In my second offering of this course, I will most likely keep the guidelines of the group project the same.


- 4) Go overboard with the GE designations. In hindsight, I probably should have listed this course just as a D (Diversity) course in that I fear listing it as a CL (Humanities-Literature) course, as well, just gave the course too many goals and objectives to fulfill strongly. Additionally, having a FYC course also listed as a CL and D might reduce enrollments in other Humanities and Diversity courses, as my institution requires only twelve credits of Humanities courses (inclusive of History, Art/Theatre, Language, Interdisciplinary, and Literature) as well as six credits of Diversity courses.
- 5) Go overboard with planned writing assignments. There were several writing assignments listed in my syllabus that I had to revise during the course. When it became clear to me that I could not give all the quizzes and summary/response assignments that I planned originally, I asked my students which of the larger final assignments did they want to change the point-value of so as to make-up for the assignments that I could not give. This discussion and analysis of this question allowed the students to reflect on how they were doing on their group project and how they felt about the prospect of their final exam. Ultimately, they opted to split the difference in points

equally between the group project and final exam as they were feeling adequately prepared for both pending assignments. Revising and discussing these assignments, their point values, and how they felt prepared for both assignments gave students a particular chance to be responsible, decisive, and own what was going on in the classroom. As Carolyn Shrewsbury states, "Feminist pedagogy focuses on the development of leadership. For example, students who take part in developing goals and objectives for a course learn planning and negotiating skills."¹⁰ Such discussion and revision proved to be an opportunity for students to see Feminism in action. However, this move did take up class-time in a course where there was little extra time available if at all. Although this restructuring of assignments allowed the exercise of Feminist pedagogy, the layout of assignments could have been better planned out from the beginning of the semester. Also, with whatever writing assignments that are given out, make sure that their purpose (both short and long term) are clear.

Conclusion

Despite the workload of new class prep and curriculum review entailed in creating a new course, I found this experience to be well worth the time and energy spent. Moreover, taking the chance of addressing Feminist issues in a Jesuit and Catholic University warranted the potential risk, especially when it is realized, as *Jesuit & Feminist Education* points out repeatedly, that the commonalities far outweigh the dissonances. I think bringing together the topics of Feminism and Jesuit education in a First-Year Seminar is especially worth-while as it compels first-year students to really think about what it means to be educated and responsible for creating a just world. The realizations that the students made about what it means to have a transformational education (to leave themselves open to this possibility and be aware of how their beliefs and goals in life may change); about how their whole education program at a Jesuit institution has a distinct and time-honored heritage of combining university and humanistic approaches to education; about the real-life limitations and dangers of viewing women's bodies as just

biological producers of children-future citizens/subjects; and finally, about how to identify and explain oppression and patriarchy when they see it; are all significant ideas learned. To what extent this knowledge gained from my FYS course has transformed these students overall is hard to state, especially since I never think of my students as experiencing my classes in a vacuum. I know that in many ways, what I am teaching in the classroom can get either reinforced or challenged by what they experience elsewhere, both inside and outside the classroom. However, I do think these realizations made in my class are significant in that they can be considered steps taken on a road that will lead to a process of self-transformation in the pursuit of social justice.

Moreover, it is topics like gender injustice (or some other form of social injustice) and what to do about it that should factor into the larger college transition issues and questions that First-Year students at a Jesuit institution will address: how do they set their schedules so as to allow for enough time to do their course work and other social/communal obligations they wish to undertake?; what classes should they take that will allow them to learn how society works both on the domestic and global scales?; and what majors should they choose that will allow them to find their vocations rather than just solid careers? These are all important topics that our students need to be thinking about as soon as they step onto their Jesuit campus, and the focus on Feminism is just one way to hone a larger and necessary conversation about social justice. As it turns out, tackling Feminism and Jesuit education in a First-Year Seminar is a productive way to guide students into college life. 

M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 76.

⁴ Carolyn M. Shrewsbury, "What is Feminist Pedagogy?," *Women Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1997): 167.

⁵ Robbin D. Crabtree and David Alan Sapp. "Theoretical, Political, and Pedagogical Challenges in the Feminist Classroom: Our Struggles to Walk the Walk," *College Teaching* 51, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 132.

⁶ Von Arx, "Foreword," xi-xiii.

⁷ Lisa Cahill, "Women and Men Working Together in Jesuit Institutions of Higher Learning," *Initiatives* 54, no. 2 (1992): 3.

⁸ *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, directed by Maro Chermayeff, docuramafilms, 2012.

⁹ Boryczka and Petrino, "'The Personal is Political': At the Intersections of Feminist and Jesuit Education," 79.

¹⁰ Shrewsbury, "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" 171.

Notes

¹ Katherine H. Adams, "A Change on Our Campuses," review of *Jesuit & Feminist Education: Intersections in Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Jocelyn Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino, *Conversations*, Fall 2012, 51.

² Jeffrey Von Arx, S.J., "Foreword," in *Jesuit & Feminist Education*, eds. Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), xiv.

³ Jocelyn M. Boryczka and Elizabeth A. Petrino, "'The Personal is Political': At the Intersections of Feminist and Jesuit Education," in *Jesuit & Feminist Education*, eds. Jocelyn