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Enhancing the Learning Experience: The Benefits of Applying Jesuit Pedagogy to Business and Economics Modules

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Abstract

This paper identifies key characteristics of Jesuit pedagogy, expounds why this form of pedagogy is relevant not only to religious students but to all learners, and explores the benefits of applying these active learning teaching methods to business and economics courses. Teaching effectiveness is reviewed before and after a Jesuit pedagogical augmentation made to a statistics module. Analysing a case study approach, the resulting evidence is strong support for the inclusion of Jesuit pedagogical foundations that are frequently absent from non-humanities based modules.

Introduction

Economics and business courses have more than their fair share of equations, models, and assumptions to boil down a complex world into something more manageable. We spend tremendous effort and hours teaching these advanced topics that often we do not devote enough class time to the larger questions of equity, fairness and even morality; nor do we necessarily utilize teaching methods to encourage this exploration. Can we say with certainty that we are teaching our learners to fully consider the ramifications of the decisions that they will make in the real world? After focusing on detailed scenarios and equations, are learners then able to extrapolate the information and see the big picture? It is not enough to teach students what to do and how to do it; the responsible instructor should explore the question of why as well.

Utilizing a case study approach, this paper advocates the inclusion of Jesuit pedagogical methods in business and economics modules in order to increase teaching effectiveness and students' classroom experience. Sections 1-3 respectively discuss what Jesuit pedagogy is, its corresponding relevance, and how it is distinct from general active teaching techniques. Section 4 reviews how a specific statistics module was previously taught, while section 5 introduces the pedagogical additions made during the case study. Section 6 expounds how these augmentations allowed the course to further embody the spirit of the Jesuit tradition, therefore enhancing the students' learning experience. Suggestions for additional

augmentations that could be incorporated into similar modules are introduced in section 7.

1. Fundamentals of Jesuit pedagogy

Jesuit pedagogy is a call to human excellence and the fullest possible development of the whole person: intellect, feelings, head, and heart. It seeks to uncover and explore relationships, insights, conclusions, problems, solutions, and implications in the lifelong quest to understand what it means to be human. The tradition is not limited to certain areas of education; rather it is ubiquitous, comprehensive, and can be applied to any discipline. Jesuits issued the *Ratio Studiorum* in 1599, providing a statement of principles and objectives for the Jesuit colleges around the world. The reason the *Ratio Studiorum* is relevant to this day is due to the fact that its lessons were meant to endure and evolve as education and learning evolved; it was created to be a living document. The methodology is flexible and evolves over time to stay current and relevant. Jesuit pedagogy incorporates techniques from a variety of sources in order to contribute to the intellectual, social, and moral formation of the whole person.¹

There are five main teaching elements in Jesuit education: context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation.² Context reminds the teacher that it is important to know a learner's environment, background, community, family life, friends, and so forth, in order to teach effectively. *Cura personalis*, meaning personal care for the individual, is a vital component of Jesuit education.

Experience involves examining the most effective, and often entertaining, way to actively engage learners in the teaching and learning process. For the Jesuits this often means dramatic performances or public debates. Whatever the precise teaching method, educators should create conditions in which the learners can realize the connections of their education to their own experiences in order to better understand the subject matter being taught.

Once learners have ascertained the information in lecture, it is an imperative part of pedagogy that they reflect upon what they have learned. Instructors need to direct learners to undertake personal reflection. Revising, studying, journal writing, blogging, meditating on what was taught allows learners to aim to achieve a deeper comprehension.

Action illustrates how teachers can compel learners to move beyond knowledge and to take action. Being able to communicate a subject to learners not only so that they will be able to comprehend the material but more importantly so that the learners will be moved to act on the information is what teachers should aim to accomplish. As “men and women for others,” Jesuits want to develop learners who will also be altruistic.

The final central characteristic of Jesuit pedagogy is evaluation. Depending on the educational discipline, there are various ways to assess learners’ progress in mind, heart, and spirit. While examinations continue to have their place, Jesuit pedagogy aims at evaluating growth of the whole person and not just academic knowledge gained.

Jesuit pedagogy makes its educational contribution by transforming instructors into better teachers. It aims to enrich the structure, effectiveness, and content of what we teach. Jesuit education personalizes learning and assists teachers in motivating learners by relating the subject to their own experiences, integrating learning experiences in school with those of the home and community. It stimulates students by involving them as active participants in the teacher-learner process and attempts to bring the two groups closer together. Jesuit pedagogy encourages a path of meaningful life, leadership, and service. It strives to give learners lifelong advancement and expansion of their

imagination, intellect, and feelings, and encourages constant growth through new experiences.

2. Is Jesuit pedagogy relevant today and applicable to all students?

Critics might wonder if Jesuit pedagogy has a place in modern, mainstream education. It is important to understand why we should still appreciate the Jesuit model in all colleges and universities. Moreover, people can also often fail to see a direct relationship between Jesuit pedagogy and business or economics courses.

A large amount of the recent literature on effective learning and teaching methods use themes and phrases similar to those presented in the *Ratio Studiorum*.³ Whether they are conscious of it or not, numerous authors have already incorporated many of the ideas presented in the centuries old text. The Jesuits’ traditions and teaching methods have been reflected upon by numerous pedagogy scholars. Given the prevalence of similar themes and ideas, it is indisputable that the origins of Jesuit pedagogy are still very relevant today.

Even if Jesuit pedagogy is germane, is it applicable to experiences outside of the Jesuit realm of learning? Why should teachers and learners from other faiths or secular backgrounds embrace a Jesuit paradigm? While the Jesuits are a religious order, their teaching practices do not have to have an explicitly holy aim. Jesuits are men of science who undertake a lifelong commitment to education and learning; while the two may overlap, Jesuits are able to separate their pursuit of education from their religion. Certainly, one can use the methodology effectively for religious studies; however, Jesuit pedagogy is first and foremost a way of learning. Unless informed, most learners would probably not realize that religious figures developed this teaching method. Jesuit pedagogy is a comprehensive and creative way of learning; secular and pious learners alike can benefit from its study.

3. What distinguishes Jesuit pedagogy from modern engaging learning techniques

The existing literature regarding the benefits of active learning, reflection and critical evaluation is extensive; it is widely accepted among lecturers that better teaching through more

engaging pedagogical techniques enhances the classroom, and therefore learning, experience.⁴ This paper maintains that a way to extend these benefits is to include a moral component, which should be central to the education of future economists and business professionals. Jesuit pedagogy reinforces the foundations and beliefs of traditional engaging learning techniques while also introducing an ethical underpinning to the approaches.

While Jesuits are a religious order, their pedagogical techniques and teachings do not have to be inherently Christian nor pious. Rather, Jesuit pedagogy has more of a spiritual and inquisitive ethos than a religious motivation; it is applicable to all subjects and can be extended to embody the belief of all faiths. It is this religious foundation that provides the morals and ethics that are imperative to a curriculum for future business leaders and decision makers. Utilizing Jesuit pedagogy allows lecturers to extend modern pedagogical techniques to include normative economic questions of equity, fairness, and value. For instance, is it “acceptable” for such a large percentage of African American citizens to serve prison sentences or should the US government review its laws to ensure that there is no inherent racial bias? Moreover, is it “acceptable” for mentally ill persons to serve time in prisons rather than mental hospitals; is society neglecting the care they need and giving them a punishment they do not deserve?

The essence of Jesuit pedagogy cannot be fully captured here, in this paper; its literature is vast, influential, and enlightening. This review of a pedagogical addition hopes to persuade more educators to study the specialist field in hopes that it will also move them to include its teachings in more lecture theatres, seminars, and tutorials. The course augmentation illustrated below is one of numerous changes that educators can bring to their subjects. Hopefully this one example of the benefits of Jesuit pedagogy will invite other lecturers to study the discipline and incorporate the teachings in their own classrooms.

4. Teaching principles prior to Jesuit pedagogy implementation

The previous teaching methods employed were of the more traditional fashion. The syllabus for this particular statistics module was

conventional: two exams, one final, and homework. Lectures were devoted to just that – lecturing. Other than the occasional question, there was no dialogue between the students and the lecturer about the information presented. The module was not as engaging as it could have been nor did it promote active learning.

Students will not be confident in their ability to solve problems on their own if they are not self-directed learners. If not actively engaged, students might feel that they were not learning as much as they should be and that their teachers did not care about them or encouraging their learning.⁵ As a result, students will not fully engage in learning something that they see no reason for studying. The pervasive phrase “when will I use this again” comes to mind.

All courses could benefit from Jesuit pedagogy; however, it is crucial for business, finance and economics courses to have an Ignatian influence. The Society of Jesus has always sought to instil students with values that transcend the goals of money, fame and success. They want our graduates to be leaders concerned about society and the world in which they live; leaders who will be charitable, altruistic and “men and women for others”. Father Kolvenbach, S.J., a Jesuit theorist, elaborates and asks the following vital questions:

Do we challenge the leaders of tomorrow to reflect critically on the assumptions and consequences of “progress?” Do we challenge them to ponder both the wonderful possibilities and the limits of science? Do we help them to see that often significant civil financial decisions are not merely political manifestos but also moral statements?⁶

These are all important questions to any student; however, they are particularly important to business and economics students. The world of business is often driven by stock prices, profit and cost structures with little or no regard for people or moral implications. Jesuit pedagogy attempts to produce inquisitive, responsible, life-long learners, ones who are able to blend the best of business with humanity and benevolence.

While there was great room for improvement to the module in question, the original teaching

approach was not entirely devoid of Jesuit influence. The fundamental teaching ideology employed was to teach students to teach themselves. We emphasized to students that a significant portion of the learning process happens on their own time. The idea of teaching to create teachers is itself a Jesuit concept. “The task of a teacher is to help each student to become an independent learner, to assume the responsibility of his or her own education.”⁷ Individual reflection also produces a greater sense of personal accomplishment than if the teacher explained concepts at great length.⁸ Professor Newman, a Jesuit theorist, wrote that learning facts is mediocre; on the contrary, learning to think and reason is divine. The end result desired was to enable the learners to be able to teach themselves in the future; learning how to learn is imperative.⁹

Jesuit pedagogy is difficult to define as its manifestation varies with every course and every instructor. “Pedagogy is the way in which teachers accompany learners in their growth and development. Pedagogy, the art and science of teaching, cannot simply be reduced to methodology.”¹⁰ While the implementation of Jesuit pedagogy is flexible, the goal of it is more defined:

The ultimate aim of Jesuit education is... that full growth of the person which leads to action... This goal of action, based on sound understanding and enlivened by contemplation, urges students to self-discipline and initiative, to integrity and accuracy. At the same time, it judges slipshod or superficial ways of thinking unworthy of the individual and, more important, dangerous to the world he or she is called to serve.¹¹

The flexibility permitted by Jesuit pedagogy allows us to aim for this end result regardless of the module or discipline studied.

5. Pedagogical additions made to the module

The first amendment made to the module was to assign a one-page response paper. The paper asked the learners to choose from four articles, all of which utilized statistics. After their selection, they were asked to discuss the “uses and abuses” that the article employed. The

assignment was worth a token 10 per cent of their final examination (the exam was 35 per cent of their overall mark).

The learners had the option to choose articles from the *New York Times*, *The Journal News*, which is a local paper, *The Economist*, and *The Ram*, which is the university newspaper. The assignment was to write a reaction to the article, discussing the statistical merits, how statistics added to what was written, as well as if statistics were used in a misleading or confusing way. Below are some of the questions the learners were asked to consider:

1. Has statistics contributed to the discussion? In what way?
2. Does the article leave you asking more questions than before you read it (is this a positive or negative outcome)?
3. Were the statistics misleading, dubious or confusing?
4. Is any important information or data missing?

After returning the papers, our lecture time was devoted to evaluation, reflection, and discussion. Edward Leamer demonstrates how a researcher’s experience can affect how he specifies a model and draws conclusions, the learners were asked searching questions to steer their discussion towards how statistics can be interpreted in a variety of ways.¹² Given our experiences and perceptions, a statistic can mean very different things to different people, as the class discovered. The probing questions asked by the lecturer, as well as other learners as the discussion progressed, assisted the group to come to a deeper understanding of the articles and the use of statistics in each. “Intellectual formation includes a growing ability to reason reflectively, logically and critically.”¹³ Jesuit education tries to instil in students an ability to understand reality and to evaluate it critically.

The lecture involved a lively discussion regarding one particular article on incarceration in the United States. The article reported the discrepancy between African American men incarceration rates compared to the rest of the male population. In the United States, one in three African American men is incarcerated at some point in his life.¹⁴ The non-African American learners admitted that they highly

doubted this statistic and thought it was a mistake in the article. They probed the internet for reliable information to refute the claim and were shocked to find it was in fact true. On the whole, the African American learners were familiar with this dismal statistic and were surprised at the disbelief of their classmates. Their response papers focused more on the causes of higher incarceration rates rather than elucidating shock and incredulity as the non-African American students expressed. It rapidly became clear to the learners that their own personal experiences affected their perception of the article and the statistics utilized. They realized that even something as objective as a statistic can be interpreted in a myriad of ways and evoke different emotions from different groups of people. Jesuit education is often described as the formation of multiplying agents and “men and women for others”.¹⁵ Our classroom discussions persuaded the students to consider other people’s point of view, realize that personal experience plays a large part in the formation of individual perception, as well as develop interest in further research and foundations.

What specifically makes assigning a response paper an example of Jesuit pedagogy? Father Duminuco elucidates that, “It is the teacher who creates the conditions, lays the foundations and provides the opportunities for the continual interplay of the student’s experience, reflection and action to occur.”¹⁶ The intention of the response paper was to engage students in these three areas of Jesuit pedagogy.

Experience is the manner in which teachers create conditions whereby students can gather and recollect the material given their own experiences. “Experience to Ignatius meant ‘to taste something internally’... This calls for knowing facts, concepts, and principles.”¹⁷ The best way to engage students as whole persons in the learning process is for the teacher to serve as a guide and to create conditions by which learners may draw on their own experiences in order to refine what they already understand about the subject matter at hand.¹⁸ Combining this cyclical method of referring to prior feelings, thoughts and experiences and the course material is how students are able to process the knowledge gleaned and form it into truth. The articles assigned enhanced the students’ experience by introducing human

interest factors, a self-study activity, cooperative learning, and small group exercises.

The second aspect of the paradigm that the response exercise explored was reflection. Personal reflection can take many forms: mentoring; student journals; Ignatian style repetition; seminars. However, the main reflective methods that the assignment elicited were contemplating case studies and participating in spontaneous debates. The purpose of reflective exercises is to more deeply understand and internalize what one has learned. By using one’s imagination and feelings one can ascertain the fundamental meaning of what is being studied and to appreciate its inferences in the continuing search for the truth.¹⁹ The article dialogue allowed the students to further understand the meaning and significance of what they are studying and how statistics relates to different aspects of their lives.

The capstone to the pedagogical exercise was the concept of action. The process involves two steps: pondering truth and then taking necessary action. Teachers provide the opportunities to challenge students and test the imagination that will allow the students to choose the best course of action given what they have learned.²⁰ Action can take many forms: projects; service experiences; career choices; and further study. Students found themselves doing additional research to familiarize themselves with the issues in their particular article. Learners who read the article regarding the United States prison system were particularly moved to action. The class was stunned and upset to learn that there are four times as many mentally ill people in prison as there are in mental hospitals.²¹ Many students decided that they would write to their congressman to express their revulsion. “The teacher’s gentle questioning may point to the need for more adequate decisions or commitments, what Ignatius Loyola called the magis.”²² The magis, or the more, means to go above and beyond what you currently know, understand and believe and achieve more in the pursuit of truth.

6. Results from course augmentation

The outcome from the augmentation was highly successful in many areas, which is particularly novel because we introduced a writing assignment to a course that, in this specific university, normally has no writing component.

Newman elucidates what the educational process should resemble:

It is not the mere addition to our knowledge that is the illumination; but the locomotion, the movement onwards, of that mental centre, to which both what we know, and what we are learning, the accumulating mass of our acquirements, gravitates. And therefore a truly great intellect... is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these one on another; without which there is no whole, and no centre. It possesses the knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations; knowledge, not merely considered as acquirement, but as philosophy.²³

Evidence of how the students responded to the Jesuit pedagogy course augmentation is provided by their submitted response papers, the discussion and debate that took place in lecture, and the increase in their interest in the module. Overwhelmingly, the response paper seems to have greatly enhanced the learning experience of the class. The quality of the reflective papers was very high and many showed deep insight and critical thought. They reported that most of the statistics allowed them to further understand and reflect upon the material presented, which extended their learning process. Evidence of home reflection was clear from the quality of their response papers. Most papers included probing, analytical questions that showed students were connecting subjects and techniques we learned in lecture to what they experienced in the media, making them more discerning and perceptive readers.

The best way to assess whether students feel they are more actively engaged and appreciate an additional assignment is to ask them. Ideally this could be measured in a survey; however, our main means for determining whether or not they felt that the assignment contributed to their learning was to ask them more informally. After the debates we discussed how the assignment contributed to the learning environment and if they felt that it enriched their experience. Students were free to speak their minds; they understood that their candour could neither be punished nor rewarded with subjective marks.

When asked if they would like the module specifications to include an extra assignment in the future they unanimously said yes. Most of the comments were that the response paper was similar to a journal entry that allowed them to reflect on what was presented and connect what we had learned in lecture, affording them the opportunity of applying statistics to real world situations. There were also a lot of comments about the benefits of the classroom discussion; students felt that the exchange of ideas and active dialogue further allowed them to appreciate how statistics can be applied to government policy debates. Importantly, most students articulated that they not only enjoyed the assignment but felt that it greatly enhanced their learning experience.

The key evidence for assessing the success of the implementation was the dramatic change in classroom atmosphere. Students were highly engaged during the discussion and debates, willingly volunteered opinions, insight, and questions. Our lecture room went from being extremely quiet with passive learners to students who expressed their thoughts, attitudes and awareness about the questions being raised. The exercise allowed the learners to take what they had learned and use their analytical and reasoning skills to apply it to a real world scenario, bringing the subject to life. The classroom discussions were topical and evocative. It was thrilling to see students eager and excited about statistics and actively engaged. "A major challenge to a teacher... is to formulate questions that will broaden students' awareness and impel them to consider viewpoints of others."²⁴ By each student sharing his perspective and what he took away from the paper, the rest of the class was able to learn from each other's experiences and different points of view.

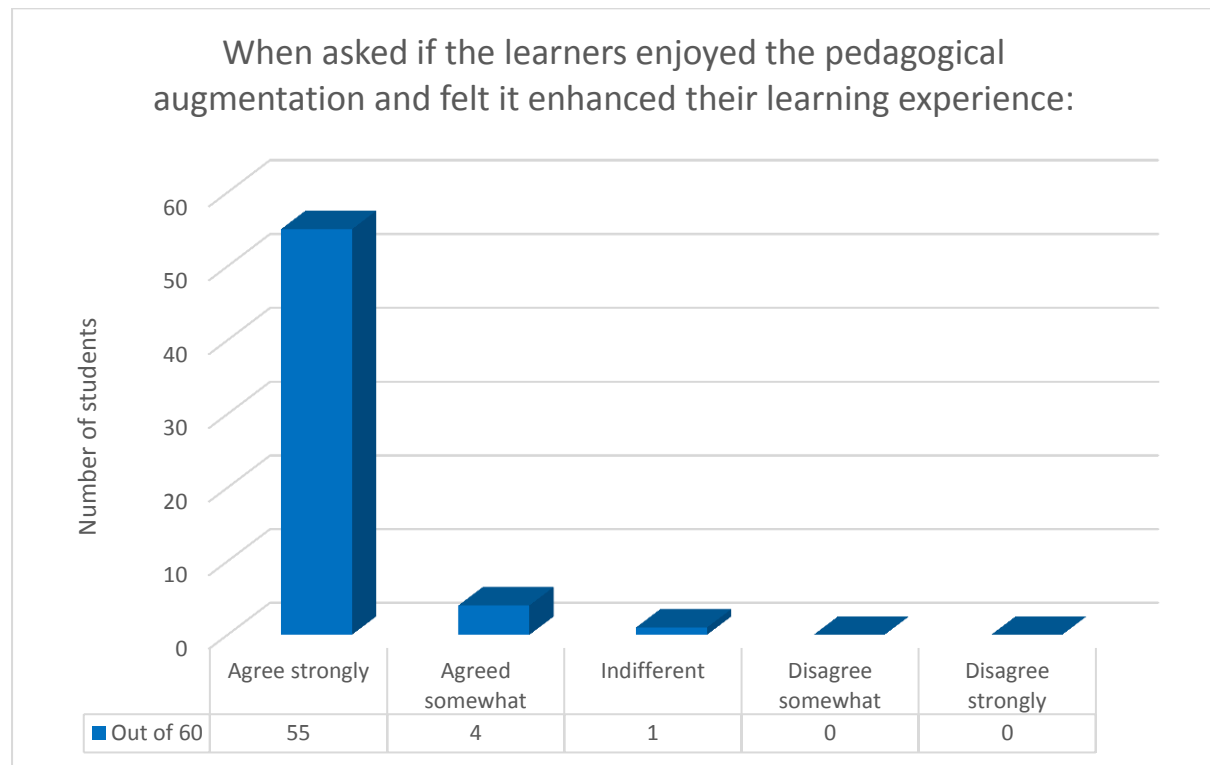
L. Fink describes some desired goals that students should attain from effective learning. The ability to retaining information, transfer knowledge gained to unique situations, develop problem solving skills, and acquire motivation for additional learning are key attributes that effective learners share. He expounds that there are necessary elements in order to develop such learners; students should be extremely engaged in their learning and participate in classes with high energy levels.²⁵ If this environment can be achieved, the impact on learners will be

significant, lasting, and will better prepare them to for the world.

Since the final aspect of the five pedagogical paradigms is evaluation, it would be imprudent to simply repeat the same assignment without an

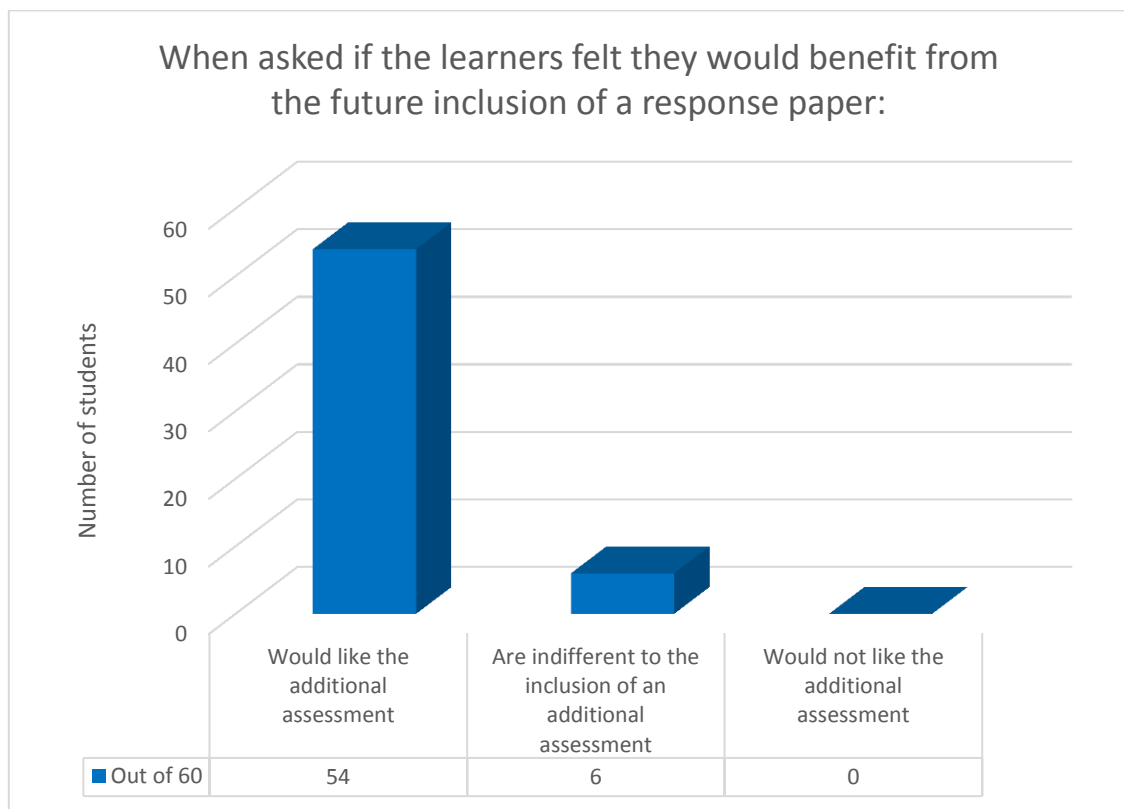
assessment process. Therefore, the students were asked to provide feedback for the assignment; reviews were extremely positive. Learners were enthusiastic about being assessed with a writing task rather than solely have examinations.

Figure 1



As this was a one-time augmentation, consisting of only sixty students, it would not be sensible to try and prove econometrically that the addition of the coursework improved student assessment results. Without suitable data to back up the exposition that the augmentation was successful, we need to base assessment on student reaction to the inclusion of the paper,

which was overwhelmingly positive. The course in which the response paper was added contained no subjective grading; their papers were already considered and exams were graded blindly. Students gained nothing from not speaking their minds or concealing the truth. The fact that they were asking for additional coursework speaks volumes.

Figure 2

The learners said that the reflection paper enhanced their learning experience and allowed them to further understand lecture material. In the end, is not students' enthusiasm for their coursework the ultimate objective for which we are aiming? Furthermore, some students do not perform well on exams; this gives us another medium of assessment. It is not traditional for business and economics courses to include reflection papers, and the case should be made for their inclusion.

7. Implications for other related courses

If one can effectively incorporate a reflection assignment into a statistics course then there is no reason why you could not also extend Jesuit pedagogy to other economics and business courses. Statistics is a very factual, positive rather than normative subject; the content of economics and business courses is often quite distance from that of humanities courses, where Jesuit pedagogy ideas are often already included. Therefore if statistics can benefit from an augmentation, we would argue that most courses that are taught in the traditional format can also gain from a Jesuit pedagogy addition. Moreover, course additions such as games, diaries, blogs, online discussion question and

answer forums, presentations, contests, debates, or employing the Socratic Method may also be quite beneficial.

The reflection paper allowed the class to further understand and apply the theories that they had learned in lecture to real-world scenarios. If pedagogical additions can promote deeper and more thorough learning, then we would do our learners a disservice if we did not include some form of these augmentations in every module. Not only are certain fields of business and economics in peril due to the recent financial crisis, but it is also much more difficult for our graduates to attain gainful employment in a constantly changing work environment. Anything we can do to assist students with the learning process, making them better prepared for life after university, is imperative and our responsibility.

Conclusion

The study of Jesuit pedagogy provides the ability to expand one's own views of teaching principles. In true Ignatian fashion, there is an infinite amount of knowledge one can acquire in the field of Jesuit pedagogy and a lifelong study of the subject should be pursued by concerted

lecturers. This paper presents a case study augmentation of Jesuit pedagogy principles to a statistics module. Based on the learners' responses, the inclusion of more active pedagogy proved to be of great benefit as they became more inquisitive, probing and interested in the subject matter.

A future research extension would be to introduce the response paper over numerous years for subgroups of the module to test the whether the positive changes felt by the learners correspond to an increase in overall student performance. Additional augmentations could also deviate from response papers to include other Jesuit pedagogy methods, such as organized formal debates, to see whether or not they have a similar beneficial effect.

Notes

¹ Fordham University Jesuit Pedagogy Seminar, New York, 2009. This was a yearlong forum exploring the history, philosophy, and benefits of Jesuit teaching practices.

² Ibid.

³ Patrick L. Courts and Kathleen H. McInerney, *Assessment in Higher Education: Politics, Pedagogy, and Portfolios* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993); L. Dee Fink, *A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, "Designing Courses for Significant Learning: Voices of Experience" in *Teaching Theology & Religion* 14, no. 2 (2011): 198-99.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Courts and McInerney, *Assessment in Higher Education*, 80.

⁶ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., *Themes of Jesuit Higher Education* (unpublished manuscript for Georgetown University, 1989), 4.

⁷ *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco, S.J. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 182.

⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁹ The National Institute for Newman Studies, *The Idea of a University*, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/idea/index.html>, 137-139.



¹⁰ *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 240.

¹¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., *Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: The Jesuit Conference, 1989), 167.

¹² Edward E. Leamer, "Let's Take the Con Out of Econometrics," *American Economic Review* 73, no. 1 (1983): 31-43.

¹³ *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 176.

¹⁴ "A Nation of Jailbirds," *The Economist* April 4, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/13415267>.

¹⁵ *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 171.

¹⁶ Ibid., 247-8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 254.

¹⁸ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., *Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy* (unpublished manuscript for Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, 2005), 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "A Nation of Jailbirds."

²² *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 262.

²³ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 6.

²⁴ *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 258.

²⁵ Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, 115-170.