

2022

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Recommended Citation

Di Trolio, Susana (2022) "IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education Program," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 11: No. 1, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53309/2164-7666.1403>

Available at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol11/iss1/9>

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IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education Program: Building a Global Community of Practice in Jesuit Mission Integration and Ignatian Management

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Abstract

This article describes the results and the lessons learned from the pilot phase of the [Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education Program](#). The Program is a joint global effort of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU) that seeks to collect, share and discuss good practices in Jesuit mission integration, formation, and management developed by the IAJU universities and colleges around the world. The essay also presents the planned goals for strengthening the initiative, and creating a community of practice and learning in mission integration in Jesuit higher education.

Introduction

According to the IAJU, there are 175 Jesuit universities and institutions of higher learning located in 50 countries. With approximately 150,000 faculty and staff members, they develop research and offer thousands of programs to almost a million students. From Tijuana in Mexico (Iberoamericana University) to Yogyakarta in Indonesia (Sanata Dharma University), Jesuit higher education is present in 147 cities around the world.

How many experiences are the 175 Jesuit universities developing in their quest to provide an integral education and quality research? How many good practices and lessons in mission integration do these universities develop as they try to ensure the hallmarks of Jesuit education and adapt to the unique demands of the local and global contexts? We do not know the answers. However, we know that in the constant effort of creative adaptability and continuous struggle for excellence, an enormous and rich diversity of good practices are constantly being developed. Some of them are systematized and disseminated. Unfortunately, these good practice stories are hardly known beyond the local university. Jesuit institutions have not made the most of this reservoir of knowledge which would be very useful for developing their mission. This is precisely the problem that the Best Practices in

Jesuit Higher Education Program seeks to help to overcome.

Objectives of the Best Practices Program

The Program seeks to provide an organized space with opportunities for collecting, exchanging, and discussing good practices in mission integration and related topics. It is also a platform for connecting and fostering networking among faculty and staff. The Best Practices Program provides insightful and practical examples of how teaching, learning, researching, and management can be improved.

The main goals of the IAJU Best Practices in Jesuit Higher Education are to:

- Systematize, collect and share best practices and know-how in strategic topics and areas for Jesuit higher education;
- Encourage discussions and reflection to facilitate the exchange of quality knowledge and academic collaboration;
- Promote a sense of belonging;
- Facilitate networking among colleagues.

Methodology and the Primary Products

The Best Practices Program's methodology produces products for the publishing and dissemination of best practices and for webinar discussions with the article authors.



Figure 1. Products of the Best Practices Program.

Best Practices Webinar Series comprises a webinar with international keynote speakers on the topic addressed by the magazine issue. Likewise, once the magazine issue is published, a series of webinars with selected authors are organized for them to discuss their practices with the audience, and to explain them further. These webinars are arranged on demand and in English or Spanish.

Best Practices Newsletter presents the summaries of the best practices published with

links to the full articles, the infographics, the online magazine, and the registration for the webinars.

Each issue focuses on the different strategic topics and areas of Jesuit higher education. The first two issues focused **on Ignatian pedagogy and pedagogical innovation** through a collection of forty-eight good practices showing innovative methodologies and the uses of Ignatian principles and pedagogy. The third issue will collect best practices in **reconciliation, peace, and mission integration**.

In their articles, faculty members and staff describe the practices developed, specifying their objectives, methodology, results, lessons learned, and opportunities for improvement. By discerning the positive and negative outcomes of the experience and highlighting the possibilities for improvement, the Best Practices Program is growing a reservoir of knowledge that helps other professionals learn and apply successful practices.

A searchable repository of resources Finally, we are developing an appealing and searchable repository where people can access the best practices, the online magazine, and the recordings of the webinars, as well as other key documents and resources for mission integration in Jesuit higher education institutions.

Goals for the Future and Some Lessons Learned

The IAJU Best Practices Program in Jesuit Higher Education is a clear example of the potential synergies and added value of academic networking. By joining the program, the faculty and staff of Jesuit universities can share their experiences and learn from others, which ultimately helps its institutions to fulfill their mission more effectively.

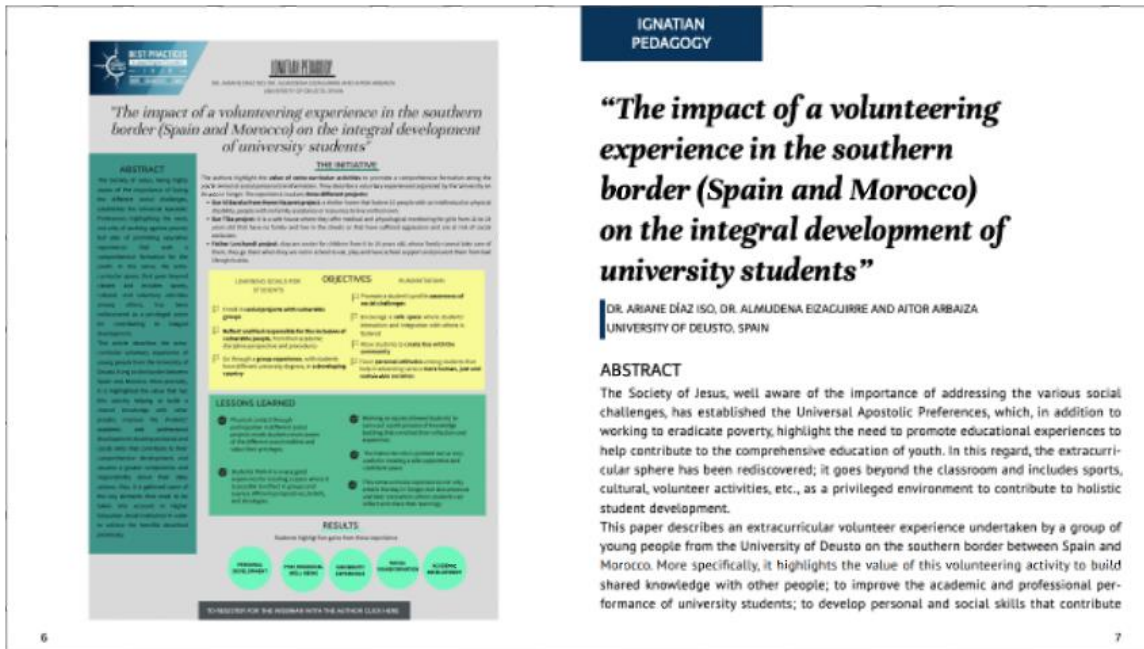


Figure 2. Example of the online magazine (infographic and article)

The pilot phase has just finished. The excellent results have clearly shown the benefits of the project and the convenience and feasibility of establishing it as a permanent IAJU program.

The pilot has shown that faculty members and staff are willing to collaborate, especially when practical and feasible opportunities for valuable collaborations enrich their academic careers. Another lesson learned is that, despite the considerable differences in time zones among the universities, the webinar series provides an excellent instrument for discussion, exchange of experiences, and networking.

Finally, the pilot results have indicated the opportunities for moving forward and expanding the Program’s objectives to create a community of practice and learning in mission integration. That an international community of practice would enrich the intangible value of Jesuit higher education embodied in our best practices.

Likewise, there is an opportunity for encouraging research in Jesuit universities that draws comparative lessons on practices and methodologies that have been successful across Jesuit higher education institutions.

We hope we can advance in that direction! 

Editor’s note: To learn more about the Best Practices project, we highlight an article that presents practices at St. Xavier’s College (Autonomous) in Kolkata, India. Written by Samuel Mitra, Peter Arockiam, S.J., Joseph Kulandai, S.J., Milton Costa, S.J., and Payal Sharma, the article provides readers with analysis of St. Xavier’s integration of Ignatian pedagogy into their recent pedagogical innovations, including teaching technologies, extracurricular experiences, ecological initiatives, and community outreach. For more, see [“Assessing the ‘Best Practices and Know-How’ of St. Xavier’s College \(Autonomous\), Kolkata: A Case Analysis with Some Empirical Viewpoints.”](#)