

Religion in Law School
Sentence Outline

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Introduction: The philosophy of Jesuit Education stresses the education and care of the whole person. Consistent with this philosophy and in the wake of some crises, at Loyola New Orleans we sought the help of a chaplain whose role we will discuss.

Notably, the chaplain was *not* brought in to force any faith beliefs nor particular religious beliefs on the law school community members. Nor was her role to pass judgment on the community members' level of faith commitment or endorse attempts to use religion to allow members of the community to exclude or condemn others.

Focus: In keeping with the Jesuit philosophy of education, we did not want to sacrifice the rigor necessary to create an environment of excellence, but are aware and recognize that students have needs that sometimes complement and sometimes conflict with their desire to obtain a legal education.

Students want to be valued and appreciated, but law school often causes them to question their value and their abilities. Professors sometimes attempt to encourage the group at the expense of an ill-prepared student, which can cause all students to doubt themselves.

Many students want to be anonymous in their law school classes, but they also long for or need attention and recognition.

Students in law school usually come from an environment where they stood out because of their intellectual abilities. In law school they are one of many stand outs.

The law school community, including professors, administrators, practitioners, judges, career services staff, and other students, often forces on students a new value system that can be one-dimensional – the need for students to be at the top of their classes. Consequently, these students may substitute their own reasons and goals for becoming lawyers with the desire for law review and moot court at all cost, giving up a piece of themselves in the process.

Focus: Communication and Community

The Jesuit philosophy values effective communication skills, consistent with what we demand of our law students. A corollary demand is that the law school community effectively communicate with students. Thus, a focus or goal is to provide multiple outlets for communication between students and the other members of the law school community, including faculty, faculty advisors, associate deans and dean, admissions staff, chaplain, counseling center, upperclass mentors, student leaders and to advertise these outlets to students and create a culture that encourages communication.

Implementation: The Role of Chaplain

Foster a sense of gratitude from the awareness that our lives and the world we inhabit are gifts from a loving God. Out of this gratitude comes a desire to live our life in service to God and to our fellow humans. Thus, we nurture a sense of community and seek ways to reduce unnecessary stress.

Assist faculty, staff, and students to integrate their beliefs, their personal lives, and their professional careers and to cope with the challenges that go along with these endeavors.

Provide students with information about law school to make the experience a bit easier to bear without changing the rigor of law school.

Provide opportunities for informal communication.

Act as a liaison between students and faculty and staff.

Provide information to faculty that can create more sensitivity to student needs and hardships, such as general information about stressors on students in society today to specific information on a student's plight, *e.g.*, student who lost possessions, including books, in an apartment fire. Chaplain provides law school with a person whose job it is to be aware of these issues so that these issues are not just sporadically addressed from time to time by a professor who happens to become aware of an issue or problem.

Encourage students to discuss issues with faculty when such interaction would be beneficial. Chaplain knows faculty personalities and can direct students to faculty when she feels such a meeting would be valuable.

Provide tangible resources for students, such as interview suits and food assistance.

Give students permission to follow their own dreams and goals in ways that perhaps faculty and administration may not be able to do because of their academic roles.

Provide encouragement for and opportunities for students of all faiths to stay in touch with their spiritual beliefs and practices.

Provide opportunities for students to connect with the wider community outside of law school that are compatible with the demanding schedule of law school.

Seek out students who are not connecting with traditional law school groups and provide outlets for them to connect with organizations within and outside of the law school.

Counsel students and/or refer them to where they might get additional assistance.

Postscript: Lessons learned following Hurricane Katrina

Students crave information and often complain needlessly when they feel left out of the loop. When information is given students are much more accepting.

A shared experience can go a long way in uniting professors and students. We have all complained about the student who we feel did not plan for the unexpected. Katrina was the unexpected, and both professors and students alike were caught in places far from the law school without having the materials they needed or not knowing exactly where the room was for that first class or not yet getting settled in a new place or not having the necessary equipment. Sometimes even the most dedicated student or professor is unable to make things go his or her way, especially when that person is in a new place or a new environment. We take for granted our comfort levels at our law schools. We have everything set up just as we like it and expect that students are the same, when in reality the students often are like we were in Houston, doing our best to settle in to a new place in a new city at a new law school.

A big part of our chaplain's role is to be sensitive to these things while the faculty focus on teaching and scholarship and providing a new batch of law students with rigorous legal training to prepare them for the "real world." The semester following Katrina has given everyone associated with Loyola Law School New Orleans a chance to see what it is like for the other side, to develop a little empathy for each other. Before this crisis, after this crisis, and when this crisis is not so fresh in our minds, our chaplain will be there to maintain the sensitivity in all of us that peaked at a dark time in our history.